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Cultivating Local: Building a Local Food System in Western North Carolina

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Cultivating Local: Building a Local Food System in Western North Carolina

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

This dissertation examines a movement in Western North Carolina to build a local food system, one grounded in the conditions and relationships of place. In 2000, Mountain Family Farms launched the Local Food Campaign to raise public awareness about the region’s farms and farming heritage, to educate consumers about the benefits of buying food grown by local farms, and, ultimately, to build markets for locally grown food to sustain the region’s farms. The campaign sparked a social movement and over a decade later local farms and locally grown food are a palpable feature of life in the mountains of Western North Carolina. This dissertation is the result of my tenure at the organization as an employee and four years of ethnographic research.

The primary objective of my research has been to understand how the Local Food Movement in Western North Carolina is interacting with and affecting the industrialized food industry at the local level. Drawing on perspectives within anthropology, sociology, political science, geography, feminist theory, and social movements theory and from the concepts of hegemony, cultural politics, place-making, and social capital, this dissertation understands the movement in Western North Carolina within a processual framework, an integral part of the hegemonic process, which struggles to define and legitimize the practices and ideas that govern way of life. To examine this process, my research has focused on the ways movement organizers create a movement culture and mediate a tension between the dual imperatives of engaging the dominant food system and
protecting the integrity of movement goals. Equally, my research has focused on understanding the impacts of movement activities on the region’s food system – on the perceptions and practices of consumers and farmers and of the businesses that serve and sell food in the region.

My dissertation reveals the significance of place-making to the strategies of movement organizers – grounding movement participants and observers in the particularities of place, developing a shared place-based consciousness, cultivating different economic subjectivities that affect different material impacts. My dissertation documents the hegemonic process – the encounter and interaction between movement meanings, ideas, and practices and those of the dominant, conventional food industry. Within this process, movement outcomes are the responses of movement organizers, participants, and observers as they mediate challenges and opportunities at the intersection of disparate ideas and practices. Within a dynamic movement, outcomes are both provisional and incremental, shifting in relation to emergent knowledge and perceptions and the actions they inform.
Chapter One:
Introduction

In 2000, Mountain Family Farms (MFF), an organization located in the mountains of Western North Carolina, launched the Local Food Campaign. The purpose of the campaign was to raise public awareness about the region’s farms and farming heritage, educate consumers about the benefits of buying food grown by local farms, and build markets for locally grown food to sustain the region’s farms. The campaign sparked a movement and over a decade later local farms and locally grown food are a defining feature of life in the mountains of Western North Carolina. Tailgate markets and CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture) abound. Restaurants and grocery stores, responding to market demand, source food from the region’s farms and promote it to their customers. Farm to Institution programs in schools and hospitals, which source locally grown food and link local food to health and wellness objectives, have emerged in response to increasing interest by their constituent bases in supporting local farms and knowing where their food is coming from. Farms and locally grown food are part of the public discourse around economy, health, and quality of life.

The launch of the Local Food Campaign marked a direct challenge to a dominant global food system that excluded the small farms of this mountainous region in the

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1 Pseudonym
2 An alternative direct market arrangement between farmers and consumers where consumers purchase a share of a farm’s seasonal harvest in advance. In the more “traditional” model, CSA subscribers receive a weekly box of produce and/or other farm goods. Subscribers can also use their labor, by working on the farm, to pay for a portion of their share.
Southern Appalachians from viable markets for their products and challenged their future viability. Anticipating the end of the federal tobacco program and the end to a market that had helped to sustain the region’s farms since the Great Depression, organizers conceptualized a strategy to sustain the region’s farms – local food.

In its inception, campaign discourse focused on educating the public about the detriments of the industrialized, global food system and the benefits gained by supporting local farms and buying locally grown food. Movement activities focused primarily on connecting the public to farms and farmers directly through alternative food markets, tailgate markets and CSAs. Campaign discourse calls to action frame the local food activist – a consumer that makes informed food purchasing decisions, a deliberate eater that chooses to buy locally grown food because it is fresher, more flavorful, and healthier and because it supports local farmers, the local economy, the local community, and the region’s environment and landscape. In 2006, with the growth of the movement and increasing interest by conventional food outlets in tapping into the market for locally grown food, movement organizers launched a regional certification and branding program for local food – Appalachian Fresh. The program marked a shift in promotional strategies from the general promotion of local food to the promotion of certified local food, with a clear definition of what does and does not constitute “local.” It also marked the implementation of a strategy designed to engage the conventional food industry in movement activities and protect the integrity of movement goals.

In 2006, I began as a volunteer at MFF; in 2007, I joined the staff as a paid employee. Over the course of my employment, I have written grants, organized workshops and events, conducted research and evaluation, and contributed to the
development of the organization’s local food regional branding and certification program. This dissertation is the result of my tenure at the organization and four years of ethnographic research focused on the strategies and actions of movement organizers and their impacts on the food system in Western North Carolina.

In studying the movement, the primary objective of my research has been to understand how the Local Food Movement in Western North Carolina is interacting with and affecting the industrialized food industry at the local level. Following this core research objective, the research has focused on the ways movement organizers create a movement “culture” – in terms of problem construction, the formation of a persuasive ideology and collective identity, and the mobilization of collective action – and how movement organizers mediate the tension between an imperative to engage the dominant food system and an imperative to protect the integrity of movement goals. Following these research questions, my dissertation charts the emergence, growth, and evolution of the Local Food Movement in Western North Carolina. It examines the origins of the movement within the context of late capitalism and in relation to the specific history and conditions of the region. It documents the scope of the strategies used by organizers at MFF to mobilize collective action in support of the region’s farms and the dialectical interplay between movement actions and the actions of the food industry.

The topic of my dissertation and the theoretical perspectives used to study it have been informed by my interest in understanding the nature of social change – how do particular ways of living and being come into existence? Why are the particular ideas and meanings and practices that define the way we live in the modern age dominant, and how can we change them? I draw on theories and concepts from a variety of perspectives –
anthropology, sociology, political science, geography, feminist theory, and social movements theory – to develop a theoretical framework that understands social movements as a central part of an ongoing, dialectical process that forms and reforms human societies. The idea that social movements are part of a process is key to studying them and evaluating their impacts.

The idea of place and of place-making is also significant to the study of the Local Food Movement. Movements emerge in places with specific geological, social, political, and economic histories. Movement organizers and participants operate from positions of groundedness, or rootedness, in the particular circumstances and conditions of the places in which they live. Movement organizers imagine and enact strategies in relationship to the specificities of place. Movement observers and participants evaluate movement messages from this grounding. Organizers utilize place-making strategies to defend place from the universalizing processes of economic globalization. Strategies strive to construct place-based modes of consciousness that instill an appreciation for and attachment to particular locations, to build collective identity and mobilize collective action.

From the situatedness of place, human practices are significant to the reproduction or modification of particular dominant ideas and meanings. The practices of everyday living – eating, sleeping, shopping, socializing, working, etc – are grounded in particular configurations of meanings and ideas. Their repeated and collective performance gives stability to particular social orders; the imagining and collective enactment of new practices, grounded in the alternative ideas of social movements, is the substance of social change.
Communicative practices are especially relevant to the study of social movements. Language practices are the means by which human beings interact, and social interaction mediates the development of social consciousness and human action. For social movements, networks of interaction are conduits for the dissemination of information, the assessment of extant conditions and the alternatives proposed by movements, the development of mutual understandings, collective identity, and action. In the context of a movement to re-embed agriculture in communities, to develop a food system grounded in the conditions and relationships of place, social networks of interaction are crucial to movement strategies and ideological and material goals.

My dissertation is presented in eight chapters. Chapters Two and Three build the theoretical and contextual framework for studying and understanding the Local Food Movement in Western North Carolina. Chapter Two presents a theoretical framework for studying social movements in late capitalism. Chapter Three situates the Local Food Movement within a global context – describing in broad strokes the ideas and practices of the global food industry and those of the counter movements arising to challenge it, and it documents the emergence of the Local Food Movement and reviews the literature that has emerged to understand it. Chapter Four outlines the research methods I used to study the movement. Chapter Five describes the setting of my research. Chapter Six focuses on the strategies and actions of movement organizers and their theoretical underpinnings. Chapter Seven documents movement outcomes on the perceptions and practices of farmers, the food industry, consumers, and movement organizers. Chapter Eight examines the totality of the data and presents the conclusions including implications for future research and for the practice of an applied and engaged anthropology.
Chapter Two:

Theorizing Social Movements in Late Capitalism

To investigate the emergence and development of the Local Food Movement, this chapter builds a theoretical framework, drawing insights and inspiration from perspectives in anthropology, sociology, geography, political economy, practice theory, feminist theory, social movements theory, and linguistic theory and from the concepts of hegemony, cultural politics, place and place-making, and social capital. Combined, the contributions from these scholarly perspectives examine the Local Food Movement within the context of late capitalism and from a framework that theorizes collective action not as a mere response to an external system of power but as a determinative force actively shaping the contours of system. Social movements are an integral part of a process – a dialectical interplay between dominant and subversive forces that struggle to define and legitimize normative practices and ways of living and particular ideas and beliefs.

This chapter begins with an examination of modern social movements within the backdrop of late capitalism. With this context, the chapter presents the framework of the hegemonic process as means to theorize the relationship between dominant social orders and the counter movements that arise to challenge them. Key to this framework is a practice perspective, which theorizes how particular hegemonic orders come into being.

A practice perspective, in focusing on the actions of individuals within the realm of everyday life, reveals the significance of discursive practices to the development of
shared meanings and ideas and to the emergence of collective action. With an understanding of the significant of human practice to the reproduction or subversion of particular social orders, the chapter moves into a discussion of human practices in place and the significance of place making strategies –instilling a sense of and appreciation for particular locations – to the goals and tactics of movements. Social networks of interaction are especially important to the place-making strategies of movements; networks of interaction are spaces of interpersonal communication – important for the dissemination and collective valuation of movement discourses, for the development of mutual understandings and shared sensibilities, for the development of relationships that challenge hegemonic ideas and practices. Finally, this chapter presents a discussion on the evaluation of movement impacts and argues for an evaluative perspective that accommodates the emergent nature of social movements.

**Modern Social Movements**

Social movements theory, specifically *new social movements* theory (NSMs), defines modern collective action in terms of its link to modernity and argues that the “social movement” is a particular type of collective action that emerged with the rise of capitalism and with an intellectual environment that began to question natural social laws (Buechler 2000b). Unlike earlier forms of collective action, participants of modern social movements view the social order as a contested and malleable domain; society is a social creation and not the product of a natural order (Buechler 2000b:9-10; Edelman

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3 New social movements theory emerged in response to the preponderance of theories of collective action focused exclusively on Marxist economic explanations. While the term implies a coherent theoretical framework, new social movements actually subsumes a diversity of theoretical approaches and assumptions. Moreover there is widespread disagreement about the actual “newness” of new social movements. Critics argue the novelty of new social movements has been overstated and obscures relationships between new social movements to earlier cycles of protest. See Buechler 2000a for a more in-depth discussion of these critiques.

In the postmodern world, social movements emerge to challenge the logic of late capitalism and its increasing imposition into private life. Late capitalism – characterized by neoliberal economics, globalized markets, economic concentration, the integration of political and economic structures, extreme alienation arising from commodity fetishism and the rationalization process (Habermas 1976; Harvey 1989) – embodies a tension between the imperatives of the market and democracy (Buechler 2000c:84). With the ascendance of neoliberalism, the economic sphere has expanded to encompass the social sphere (Lempke 2001; Munro 2006). The market dominates not just the logic of the political-economic system but the sphere of life concerned with social practices, social

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4 Late capitalism describes capitalism in the postmodern age and in the scholarly literature is often used interchangeably with advanced capitalism and neoliberalism (Harvey 1989; Ortner 2011; Sahlins 1993). Following Habermas (1976), in late capitalism the state assumes responsibility for maintaining the stability and continued growth of the market. Late capitalism is plagued by distinct forms of crises including economic – bouts of inflation and recession; rationality – the inability of the state to resolve economic crises; legitimation – loss of faith in the ability of government; dissolutionment – the questioning of political and economic meanings and structures; motivation – erosion of normative beliefs and values and practices necessary to the functioning of the system (Habermas 1976:50).

5 Neoliberalism describes the dominant discourse in economic theory and practice; it privileges market forces in economic development through the restriction of state intervention (Clark 1991:51; Edelman and Haugerud 2005b; Lewellen 2002:17). It is, according to Duménil and Lévy (2011:1), the current phase of capitalism, one in which economic and political policies and practices are deeply interconnected. Neoliberalism is “class hegemony,” which operates to benefit a privileged minority – to structure a social order that in essence entails class power (Duménil and Lévy 2011:7-10). As argued by Harvey (2007), in contrast to the “free market” principles espoused by proponents of neoliberal economics, in practice neoliberalism is characterized by the uneven application of free market principles to advance the consolidation of power of the economic elite.
relationships, cultural traditions and norms, identity and meaning (Buechler 2000c:80-85; Habermas 1984, 1987; McLuskie 1993; Melucci 1989) – Habermas’ (1984, 1987) lifeworld. Neoliberalism generalizes the logic of the market to all human action and behavior; non-economic domains are examined in terms of economic rationality and social relations and individual behaviors are interpreted using economic criteria (Munro 2006:115-117). Habermas (1984, 1987, 2000) calls this process the “colonization of the lifeworld” – where instrumental rationality eclipses communicative rationality and the means for communicative action where, through interpersonal interaction, actors develop mutual understandings and cooperatively pursue mutual goals. The logic of the market usurps a participatory democracy guided by reasoned discourse.

In late modernity, a global market reigns. Legitimized by the hegemony of the neoliberal free market paradigm, aided by the policies of supranational institutions and nations, structured by the practices of multinational corporations, the world has been ordered into specialized producing regions and patterns of trade and consumption are globally organized (Friedmann 1982, 1990; McMichael 2000c). The processes of increasing economic integration have effectively restructured national, regional, and local economies, ecologies, and ways of living. People and planet have been subsumed to the logic of the market and an imperative of economic growth and profit generation.

Nonetheless, while neoliberal capitalism may be hegemonic at the global scale (Lewellen 2002:26), people are not passive receivers of conditions of domination (Barber 1996; Escobar 1992b:398-399, 2001; Gibson-Graham 2006a, 2006b; Knox 2002:336; Lewellen 2002:26; Striffler 2002; Tsing 2000). Neoliberal processes affect specific cultural, social, and historical contexts uniquely and human agency, in turn, also effects
transformations on capitalist intrusions. Multi-stranded opposition to neoliberal global policies has emerged and galvanized around such issues as environmental destruction, unfettered free trade and consumption, human rights, poverty, intellectual property, and, in general, the lack of accountability of by supranational organizations and corporations.

The nature of advanced capitalism promotes what Polanyi (1957 [1944]) describes as a double movement – the expansion of the logic of the free market and the emergence of a counter movement to limit its growth and destructive capacity. Within this framework, Polanyi distinguishes between embedded and disembedded economic systems, between those exhibiting greater and lesser degrees of responsiveness to the social aspects of society. Before the emergence of the free market system, the market, i.e., exchange relations, was embedded more firmly in social relationships and governed by social principles. In the nineteenth century, “an intellectual revolution” legitimized the instrumental rationality of the market and economic activity began to operate more independently from the norms of social institutions (Tarrow 1994:76). Cycles of embedding, dis-embedding, and re-embedding market relations in society since the nineteenth century exhibit the forces of Polanyi’s double movement – the struggle to impose market rationality versus the struggle to impose more social control over market forces (Ruggie 1982; Tarrow 1994:76). The idea of the hegemonic process and the notion of practice provide a means to theorize this dynamic, to theorize the struggle between competing ideas, meanings, and practices and understand how particular social orders achieve dominance.
The Hegemonic Process, Cultural Politics, and Practice

The perspectives offered by hegemony, cultural politics, and practice are central to the study of contemporary social movements. Together, they theorize the substance of modern struggles, the relationship between dominant and subversive ideas and practices, and the relationship between human action and the structure of larger political-economic orders.

**Hegemony**

Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony theorizes the relations of dominance and subordination that comprise particular political-economic social orders (Dagnino 1998; Ortner 1984; Williams 1977:108-114). In his reading of Gramsci, Kurtz’s (1996:106-107) defines the concept of hegemony as “intellectual and moral leadership.” Distinct from the idea of domination, which achieves rule over the masses through direct coercion, the agents, alliances of agents, alliances of organizations that comprise hegemony achieve power through the use of “intellectual devices,” using social and symbolic means to instill their ideas, establish their legitimacy, and gain the consent of subaltern populations (Ford 2008:76; Kurtz 1996:106-108). While distinguishing hegemony from ideology, Kurtz (1996:107) notes that powerful political and economic actors or what he terms “intellectuals” construct ideological explanations to attain and/or maintain hegemonic formations (Ford 2008:84-85).

Williams (1977:108), more closely aligning hegemony and ideology, defines hegemony as “the whole social process” – the entirety of practices, meanings, and values

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6 Drawing on Bakhtin’s (Morris 1994:249) definition of ideology, Kurtz’s (1996) reading of Gramsci, and Foucault’s (1980) notion of discourse, ideology is defined here as a system or set of values, beliefs, and meanings – consciously or unconsciously held by particular social groups – that structures worldview and legitimizes and maintains a particular social order. Ideology is not static or deterministic; it arises from material circumstances and is formed socially.
that define way of life. Dominant meanings and values and practices organize the “lived social process,” and social inequalities translate into different capacities to define and shape the nature of those meanings and practices (Williams 1977:108). As noted by Gal (1998:321-322), successful hegemonies render their view of the world natural, ahistorical, and universal. Ideas and practices are not simply dominant because power-holding groups produce them; they are dominant because they are accepted and constitute the lived reality of a broad range of groups (Gal 1998:321-322). Hegemony is experienced psychologically as well as materially (Ortner 1984:153), and in this way, the ideas and practices of particular hegemonies achieve what Williams (1977:110) describes as a “saturation of the whole process of living.” This saturation limits the ability of subjects to conceive of a sense of reality outside the constituted norm (Ortner 1984:153; Williams 1977:110).

As a lived system of meanings and values embedded within relations of power, hegemony is a process (Williams 1977:112). Williams (1977:112) states: “[hegemony] is not, except analytically, a system or a structure. It is a realized complex of experiences, relationships, and activities, with specific and changing pressures and limits.” Understood as a productive process, hegemony is not static or passive; the meanings and practices of dominant groups must be defended, continually reified and renewed to maintain consent. Counter or alternative hegemonies – and their oppositional meanings and values and subversive practices – are actively present resisting and challenging the prevailing order. The dominant order responds to threatening alternatives by attempting to control, transform, or incorporate them and maintain power. In this sense, hegemony, while dominant, is never absolute (Williams 1977:112-113). The whole lived social
process is a dialectic between dominant and subversive forces, and in challenging
dominant practices and meanings, counter-hegemonies actively shape the contours of
particular hegemonic orders.

**Cultural Politics**

To subvert the logic imposed by neoliberal policies and programs of late
capitalism, counter hegemonies or movements engage in *cultural politics*; they invoke
alternative meanings of economy, development, nature, democracy, woman, gender,
sustainability, citizenship, and other contested concepts (Alvarez, et al. 1998; Dagnino
1998; Escobar 1998:64; Paley 2002). Like Touraine’s concept of historicity, within the
framework of cultural politics social conflict centers on control of the production of
cultural meanings and the practices these meanings legitimize and institutionalize
1992b; Touraine 1981). Cultural politics theorizes the relationship between culture and
politics. Culture is not a separate sphere represented by static religious texts, beliefs, and
artifacts. Politics is not confined to a set of specific activities (e.g., voting, campaigning,
lobbying) that occur in delimited institutional spaces (e.g., Congress, court systems)
(Alvarez, et al. 1998:11). Culture, following the theoretical contributions of Gramsci, is a
process constitutive of meanings that shape and are embedded in all social practices
wide range of spaces including those outside the conventional political sphere and
conceived of as private or marginal. Accordingly the meanings that arise out of cultural
processes are political, because they shape perceptions and actions, and they constitute
processes that aim to preserve or redefine power (Dagnino 1998:43; Escobar 1992b). In
Given the conceptualization of hegemony as an ongoing productive process among competing ideologies (and practices), a deeper question emerges: How does any one hegemonic order attain dominance, if only partial and temporary (Gal 1998)? How do the cultural politics enacted by counter movements affect dominant discourses and practices?

A practice perspective theorizes the relationship between human action and the structure of larger political-economic orders; it postulates that while human beings are a social product, society is a human product (Berger and Luckmann 1967:61; Ortner 1984). Practice theory, which has roots in the perspectives of sociology, anthropology, and political economy, emerged in the 1970s and 1980s in response to structure-agency debates – to overcome structurally deterministic political economic perspectives and, conversely, perspectives giving too little attention to the impacts that social structures and systems of power have on human action. A practice perspective recognizes the intersection and interaction of structure and agency; the system has a powerful effect on human action but at its core are human relationships of inequality driving the process of its construction (Ortner 1984). In other words, human subjects are simultaneously the product of historically constituted structures and the determinative force on the structures themselves (Ortner 1984). A practice perspective seeks to reveal the specificities of this process: the genesis, reproduction, and transformation of prevailing political-economic systems. Why does the system have a particular configuration? How does it exclude
alternative configurations? To understand the processes involved in the reproduction and transformation of societal structural features, practice theorists focus on the level of individual actors and actions.

The concept of hegemony in conceiving of lived meanings and practices locates the hegemonic process – ongoing and productive – in the space of everyday life. It is in this lived terrain, through the practices of everyday living, that consent is (re)produced or challenged. The practices of ordinary living – eating, cooking, sleeping, cleaning, working, driving, shopping, socializing, etc – embody meanings that order and organize the system as a whole. Significantly, the performances of these mundane activities both reify the legitimacy (and reign) of a particular hegemony and constitute actors’ senses of reality. Equally, the space of everyday life is the location of the emergence of new beliefs and rationalities and the enactment of new social practices and cultural innovations. Everyday life is the space that actors reflect on extant conditions and develop shared understandings and identities, crucial to the rise of collective action (Escobar 1992a, 1992b: 407-408; Melucci 1985:797-800, 1989).

A practice perspective is key to theorizing the hegemony of neoliberalism and the means to subvert it. Foucault, in his genealogy of the modern state, theorized the effect of the dominance of the neoliberal paradigm on peoples’ senses of reality and meaning. Foucault focuses on the emergence of neoliberalism as a rationalized form of governance (Lempke 2001; Munro 2006). In Foucault’s analysis neoliberalism is a form of governmentality. The concept of governmentality, coined by Foucault, combines two words, gouvernement and mentalité, to signify both a practice of rule and a way of thinking (Munro 2006:100). Government, for Foucault, is not limited to political
government, e.g., court systems and the rule of codified law, it means human conduct, specifically the “conduct of conduct” in all aspects of social life, e.g., the government of family, of children, of consciousness, of home, of self (Lempke 2001:2; Munro 2006:101-102). In this Foucaudian perspective, neoliberalism is not just an economic philosophy, it is technology of power that interweaves thought and action – normalizing patterns of thought, limiting the scope of thought and, accordingly, action – so that individuals govern themselves. Contrasted with top-down forms of rule, power is exercised through the constitution of neoliberal subjects through a multitude of channels and technologies (Munro 2006:102-103). Through conduct as consumers and/or entrepreneurs, neoliberal subjects internalize a market-based framework of reality and develop subjectivities defined by consumer rationality – autonomous, self-interested individuals who after calculating costs and benefits choose freely and rationally from among alternative courses of action, i.e., *Homo economicus* (Munro 2006:107).

Economically rational individuals are uni-dimensional; they conduct themselves, their lives, as consumers and entrepreneurs and in doing so contribute to the predominance of the instrumental rationality on which the global economy depends (Munro 2006:117).

The hegemony of the market, however, is not absolute. The complete enclosure of an economic rationality where actors conduct their lives solely from an economic mindset in all contexts and situations is tempered, Munro (2006:117-118) points out, by the grounding of the consumer subject in space and the responsibilities of citizenship – to communities, nations, to an imagined public collective. Economic geographers, Gibson and Graham (Gibson-Graham 2006a, 2006b) argue that most economic discourse is “capitocentric” and gives so much power to the global capitalist hegemony that it
represents capitalism as a unified and homogenous structure and prevents scholars and citizens from seeing or imagining beyond it. In this sense, they argue, the “capitalist hegemony operates not only as a constituent of, but also as a brake upon, the anticapitalist imagination” (Gibson-Graham 2006a:3).

Practice theory figures prominently into Gibson and Graham’s study of emerging alternative economies. Specifically they apply their analysis and understanding of second wave feminism, of the impacts of second wave feminism, to the potential impacts of projects of “economic experimentation.” Their understanding pivots on the idea that people and place are both sites of “becoming,” sites of linked transformation. The accomplishments of second wave feminism, they argue, lie in its focus on subjects and, by extension, places. The feminist politics of second wave feminism presented new ways of being – “new practices of the self and of intersubjective relation” that enabled alternative discourses of “woman” and gender to be enacted in everyday life (Gibson-Graham 2006b:xxiii). With the conceptualization and performance of alternative sensibilities, the places of enactment have also been transformed. Gibson and Graham (2006b:xxiv) write: “if women are everywhere, a woman is always somewhere, and those places of women are transformed as women transform themselves.”

Far from “revolutionary” upheaval, collective action in this framework is conceived of as the self-cultivation of new sensibilities, of different desires, and their performance. Following, the global reach of a feminist politics was achieved not through broad coordinated action and alliances but through a ubiquity of practice grounded in shared feminist visions and values but which developed locally and were practiced locally by individuals and collectivities of individuals (Gibson-Graham 2006b:xxiii-
xxiv). In this framework, the collectivity of individual choices is a potent form of protest and has the potential to engender profound change. Gibson’s and Graham’s ideas have significant implications for theorizing and imagining projects of economic transformation in late capitalism and, as will be explored in Chapter Three, have relevance to the study of the Local Food Movement.

**Discursive practices**

The practice perspective focuses on the daily activities that sustain or transform social systems; how society and culture produce and are produced by human action. Language, as the primary medium of human interaction, plays a significant role in the constitution and transformation of particular political-economic orders (Gal 1989:348).

The discursive nature of social practice points to the significance of language in processes that sustain or challenge dominant frames of meaning. The classic Saussurean conception of language separates it from the material world, but post-Saussurean understandings recognize the significance of language use to the constitution of the social order and material conditions (Austin 1962; Gal 1989; Irvine 1989). Language practices are not simply referential in function, language use is performative; it is a social practice with the capacity to represent the world and construct reality. To paraphrase Gibson and Graham (2008), language has the productive power of *making* – of bringing new ideas, new ways of understanding, and new realities into being.

Following the idea that communicative practices are performative and have the power to represent and create reality, language use is strongly implicated in processes that form social consciousness and mediate of human action. In the early part of the twentieth century, Russian philosopher and scholar, Mikhail Bakhtin and a group of
Russian intellectual figures known as “Bakhtin’s Circle” focused on the role of language in social life (Collins 2000:43, 47). Two of the figures within Bakhtin’s Circle, V.N. Voloshinov and L.S. Vygotsky, argued that human consciousness is an inherently relational phenomenon; it cannot exist without socially organized individuals who communicate through social-symbolic means (Collins 2000:43, 47). The formation of social consciousness requires interpersonal interaction through language use. It is through their participation in social practices that participants develop shared knowledge and beliefs and acquire particular rationalities and understandings that shape the nature and development of human activities (Collins 2000:55-56; Escobar 1992b; Melucci 1989). Accordingly, for social movements research, discursive practices are an important focal point. Language use is central to the development of collective identities and the shared social consciousness on which they are based. Collective identities are formed through interpersonal interactions, through the medium of language use, that reflect on and question accepted meanings and practices, articulate new understandings and meanings, and imagine different realities.

The capacity of language to constitute meanings, values, and practices fundamentally implicates it in relations of domination, and accordingly, language is a significant locus of struggle (Gal 1989:348). The power to control the production (i.e., the form and substance) and circulation of verbal and nonverbal messages yields control of interpretation (Friedrich 1989:304). Analogizing the relationship between language and political economy, Friedrich (1989:304) maintains that control over the circulation of information by a dominant power alienates subjects from the means of interpretation just as control over capital and technology alienates them from the means of production.
illustrate, Friedrich cites the national media coverage in the 1980s of the Midwestern farm crisis. Friedrich notes human interest stories provided touching vignettes of foreclosed farms but the media completely ignored the devastating role of agribusiness in the crisis. By the 1988 election year, the crisis was deemed over though farmers continued further into debt and farms continued to foreclose. Thus, Friedrich (1989:304) argues, a particular political economic order encompasses competition for information and for the authority to disseminate information and (mis)inform audiences. Within this framework, language is understood as an instrument of power; people use language not just to be understood but to be “believed, obeyed, respected, distinguished” (Bourdieu 1977:647).

The competition to disseminate information is captured in Leont’ev’s discussion of subjective meanings (Collins 2000:59-61). For Leont’ev, subjective or personal meanings – and how they are formed – are significant to understanding the struggle to constitute meanings in modern society (Collins 2000:59-61). Leont’ev, Vygotsky’s student, argued that subjective or personal meanings are dialogic in character and are realized through the medium of “given” meanings (Collins 2000:59-61). In capitalist society, social and mass communications are the primary sources of given meanings, which embody the motives and intentions of other people. Collins (2000:59), clarifying Leont’ev’s ideas writes: “Personal senses [of meaning] are realized only through personalizing the momentary realizations of the personal senses of others [meanings].” Subjective meanings are formed and reformed dialogically. Parallel to the hegemonic process, meanings are never absolute, never stable (Collins 2000:60-61; Escobar 1992b:406). The stability of the structure of social consciousness, defined by a particular
configuration of given meanings and subjective senses, is tentative. Meanings in consciousness can assume new connotations in relation to personal experience, to shifts in the configuration of social relations, to a serious social confrontation that undermines the assumptions and expectations on which meanings are grounded (Collins 2000:60-61; Escobar 1992b:406; Kerton and Sinclair 2010; Spinosa, et al. 1999). In other words, modes of consciousness and the meanings that constitute it can shift dramatically. In the context of real life conflicts in modern society, the dialogic character of meaning encompasses the struggle for ideological dominance and the ability to impose “externally ready meanings” on individual consciousness (Collins 2000:60).

As a focal point of analysis in social movements research, discourse provides a means to examine concretely practice and shifts in meaning in the context of struggle. Discourse is both ideational and pragmatic (Friedrich 1989; Hill 1998; Sherzer 1987). Discourse is ideational in the sense that it refers to belief systems or ways of thinking, as described above not necessarily consciously held, that structure perception and action in relation to particular areas of social life.

Inextricably connected to the ideational aspect is the pragmatic. Articulated in the discussion on the formation of social consciousness at the beginning of this section, discourse, too, refers to ideas in action. Discourse is also the enactment or the performance of dominant or dissenting ideas. Through communicative and other social practices, social actors affirm and perpetuate particular social orders or change them, developing and enacting new ideas and understandings through their participation in social practices (Friedrich 1989:301-302; Gibson-Graham 2008). In this sense, the ideational and practical aspects of discourse are mutually constituting.
In the contestation between ideologies, social actors employ specific language-based strategies, themselves grounded within a particular political-economic order, to claim or maintain legitimacy (Bakhtin 1984; Friedrich 1989; Gal 1998, 2003; Hill 1985). In the cultural politics enacted by social movements, organizers engage in framing to punctuate particular social issues, events, or phenomenon as unjust and in need of corrective action (Snow and Benford 1992:136-138). Through discursive practices, social movement organizers generate interpretative frames of meaning that define injustices and prescribe solutions and courses of action (Benford and Snow 2000:614; Klandermans 1992 388). To achieve broad consensus and mobilization, ongoing frame alignment processes strive to link the goals and ideological orientations of movements to the interests, values, and beliefs of an expanding base of individuals and organizations (Benford and Snow 2000: 624-625; Snow and Benford 1992:136-138).

Following Friedrich’s and Leont’ev’s suppositions on the contest to disseminate information and establish accepted meanings, dominant and counter hegemonies utilize claims making strategies to structure perceptions and actions, to convince others of the truth value of particular assertions (Berbrier 2000; Berger and Luckmann 1967; Klandermans 1992; Spector and Kitsuse 2001). Following Bakhtin’s theoretical contributions to linguistic theory, strategies strive to “enroll allies” – to build associations to other actors and ideas, to actors’ claims, or to actors’ interests to strengthen the validity of claims. Through diverse ways of framing the utterances of others, speakers are able to construct associations with ideas, with quoted entities or speakers or, alternatively, distance themselves from particular people and ideas (Bakhtin 1984; Gal 1998:322; Hill 1985). Language can be “chunked, disengaged from its current environment only to be
quoted, parodied, alluded to, cited, ventriloquized, or in other ways reinserted elsewhere” (Gal 2003:96). In this way individuals or groups draw on the languages, dialects, genres, ideas, and words of others as a means to achieve specific goals.

Echoing Leont’ev’s ideas on meaning creation, the truth value of a claim is not determined by objective fact but through its subjective evaluation by members of society (Berbrier 2000; Klandermans 1992). The fate of a claim – to be recognized, believed, or ignored – is the product of a dialectical and social process. Latour (1987), applying Actor Network Theory to the social construction of scientific facts, argues that if claims are repeated by the media, frequently cited, and tied to other scientific facts and bodies of work, then their truth value becomes more obdurate and harder to refute. Scientific articles are a common rhetorical device, which use the privileged and idealized role of western science (Nader 1996), to validate claims and research agendas. Scholarly works use citations to link ideas to other established bodies of work (Berbrier 2000:74-75). The stronger and more numerous the associations, the harder it is for dissenters to question the validity of claims.

In the cultural politics of modern movements, the actors and organizations variously upholding or challenging dominant hegemonic ideologies appropriate and transform nationally or transnationally circulating discourses to achieve discursive effects (Gal 2003; Johnston, et al. 2009). Through “textual practices of translation” narrative elements and images from one sociohistorical context are extricated and recontextualized or embedded in other sociohistorical contexts. The “gap” between earlier and later contexts (i.e., between an earlier text form and a newer text form) – the space of
intertextuality – can variously be highlighted, denied, maligned, or validated to present texts as new or as contiguous with other texts and traditions (Gal 2003).

Place and Place-Making

Place is significant to the strategies of modern movements and, as will be shown, to the Local Food Movement. The cultural politics enacted by social movements occur in specific locations, and social movement organizers engage in place-making strategies to galvanize disparate groups, build collective identities, and mobilize action around common meanings and understandings of place-based ecologies, economies, citizenship, etc (Escobar 2001, 2008).

Within the academic literature, globalization discourses assume the preeminence of a global power structure and privilege processes variously identified as displacement, deterritorialization, movement, and flow (Escobar 1991, 2001; Gibson-Graham 2002; Lewellen 2002:189; Massey 1991; Roseberry 1988; Tsing 2000, 2002). Place is relegated to a subordinate position and defined by its juxtaposition to the global. Escobar (1998, 2001, 2008; Escobar, et al. 2002), Nash (2005a, 2005b), Kirsch (2005), Massey (1991), and Casey (1996) argue that the focus on processes of deterritorialization has obscured the enduring importance of place and identity. The construction of a binary opposition between fluid space and decentered place has shifted the focus of social scientific research from the community to an abstract world of power where people simply respond to the forces of capital and not in accordance with their histories, beliefs, and social connections (Escobar 2001:147; Kirsch 2005:204-205). In this framework, placelessness is reified as the essential feature of the modern condition (Escobar 2001; Nash 2005a).
**What is “place” and why is it significant?**

Following Escobar (2000:165), place is the particular location or site of human experience – where people actually live their lives. It is the “engagement with and experience of a particular location with some measure of groundedness (however unstable), boundaries (however permeable), and connections to everyday life, even if its identity is constructed and never fixed” (Escobar 2008:30).

From an anthropological perspective, place making and people making are part of the same process; in other words, place and identity are mutually constitutive (Escobar 2001). People are enculturated in places through the enactment of shared social and cultural practices. In turn, place is constituted by human activities. Human beings create and enact particular economic, social, and political practices in places within the limitations and opportunities imposed by the natural world and capitalist development (Escobar 2008:31). Moreover, cultural practices and particular senses of identity converge in places; human beings collect in places and with them memories, experiences, languages, ways of thinking, histories, cultural traditions, and senses of identity (Casey 1996:24; Escobar 2001:143).

Within the dialectical framework of the hegemonic process, place is the location where actors interpret accepted frameworks of meanings. As the location of specific and changing economies, environments, and social and cultural practices, place is also the site of struggle around them (Escobar 2001:155). It is the site where actors observe and encounter disharmonies (Spinosa, et al. 1999:22-24) or disorienting dilemmas (Kerton and Sinclair 2010) – discordances between lived experiences and accepted frameworks of meaning – and form new shared understandings, imagine alternative realities, and engage
in new ways of being. Spinosa et al (1999) argue that place is significant to the processes of democracy, which can only be achieved through a rootedness or an engagement in the conditions and problems of place. The actions of individuals, groups, movement organizers and activists emerge not from a position of detachment but from the concrete experiences of place (Spinosa, et al. 1999).

In the context of neoliberal pressures on livelihoods, nature, the capacity for self-determination, in the face of global homogenizing forces that promote uniformity and conformity and destroy diverse cultures and ways of thinking (Barndt 1997; Nederveen Pieterse 2004:49; Ritzer 2004; Scholte 2000:16; Shiva 1993), groups and communities are mobilizing to assert cultural identity and defend autonomy (Escobar 2001, 2008; Kirsch 2005; Nash 2005b). The paradox of globalization, Lewellen (2002:190) observes, is that it is creating a world “that is more localized,” and in this context, indigenous and local communities and social movements engage in strategies in defense of place to challenge universal notions of economic globalization and concomitant material processes. A politics of place “asserts a logic of difference,” and it builds on activities performed at the level of everyday life (Escobar 2008:67).

Through his long term study of a movement of black riverine communities in the Pacific rainforest region of Columbia in South America, Escobar (1998, 2008) has theorized the “strategies of localization” enacted by movements in defense of territory and natural resources, culture and identity, and self determination. In response to national and international pressures on their natural resources, the local riverine communities of the Pacific rainforest region articulated an alternative conception of biodiversity, one rooted in local knowledge and in practices of nature to challenge the hegemonic
biodiversity discourses emanating from supranational institutions, G-7 countries, and northern NGOs. Strategies simultaneously rely upon and construct “place-based modes of consciousness” – a connectedness and attachment to a particular location – to forge collective identity and mobilize action (Escobar 2001:149, 2008:30). Activists enact cultural politics that link place defined by territory, landscapes, and cultural practices to alternative discourses of economy, development, culture, and sustainability. Mobilization emerges from the development of collective identities that are rooted in shared, as well as constructed, “traditional” practices and forms of knowledge and through ongoing discursive processes that articulate shared meanings and practices at the level of everyday life (Escobar 1998:66). In this way, place-based consciousness is both the means and aim of social movements to achieve ideological and material goals (Escobar 2001:153, 2008:152).

**Social Capital and Collective Action**

This chapter has theorized the significance of discursive practices, specifically discursive practices in place, to the development of collective identities and the emergence of collective action. This section examines the importance of networks of social interaction, the space for communicative practices, to the goals and strategies of social movements through the concept of *social capital*.

Social capital comes from sociological theory and across its many permutations, theorizes the significance of social networks and group participation in generating economic and non-economic benefits for individuals and communities (Astone, et al. 1999; Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988b; Diani 1997; Fukuyama 1995; Paxton 2002; Portes and Mooney 2002; Portes 1998; Woolcock and Narayan 2000). Traditional definitions of
social capital focus on outcomes – on the benefits, and less frequently, the detriments of social capital. Benefits are grounded in community ties and the trust, shared norms, and values these ties have the capacity to generate. Social capital is a source of familial and extra-familial support and social control that provides individuals and communities with an important means to cope with risk and uncertainty and address societal issues like poverty, crime, and deviant behavior (Hanifan 1916; Portes 1998; Stack 1974; Woolcock and Narayan 2000). Economic benefits might include reduced costs to access information, economic support for local businesses, and increased access to services like transportation and childcare (Fukuyama 1995; Woolcock and Narayan 2000).

Considering the application of social capital to regional and national economic development, Woolcock and Narayan (2000) argue that social capital provides an important way to bridge social and economic processes, i.e., economic growth shaped by social processes, by the nature and extent of social ties. Social ties are, in general, central to managing risk and vulnerability particularly among populations living in poverty. In terms of economic growth and emerging entrepreneurial activity, however, social capital residing in a given network can be leveraged more readily, e.g., for credit, a loan, patronage support. Social groups are a source of technology and information sharing, which can enhance profit, productivity, and market share. Non-material benefits might include reduced neighborhood crime rates (Paxton 2002) or Bourdieu’s (1986) cultural capital – the habitus of knowledge, practices, and behaviors learned through the activities and interactions of everyday life, which ultimately provide further access to economic resources. Though emphasized less, Portes (1998:15-18) points out that social capital can
also have negative effects: social controls and networks of association can isolate members from opportunities and restrict personal freedoms.

Several scholars, pointing to difficulty with outcomes-focused definitions, argue that social capital should be understood in terms of its sources (Diani 1997; Portes 1998; Woolcock 1998; Woolcock and Narayan 2000), “on what it is rather than what it does” (Woolcock 1998:160, emphasis in original). Diani (1997) has pointed out the difficulty of directly linking outcomes with causality, and in a similar vein, Woolcock (1998) argues that long term benefits – if they do occur – will be the outcome of a combination of social relations, which shift in relative importance over time. Moreover, Portes (1998:5) notes that frameworks that equate social capital with the resources acquired inevitably lead to tautological statements. A perspective that views the outcomes of social capital with indicators of the presence of social capital, he argues, will automatically find social capital in relation to those outcomes.

Making this distinction – between outcomes and sources, social capital theorizes the networks and bonds between people that facilitate social action (Woolcock 1998). Sociability is the key aspect of social capital; social capital is social and accordingly resides not in individuals but in relations between individuals (Coleman 1988b; Dekker and Uslaner 2001). Trust and norms of reciprocity develop with the formation of social bonds (Diani 1997). Trusting and reciprocal relations condition and facilitate the actions of actors and the circulation of material and non-material resources (Adler and Kwon 2002; Coleman 1988b; Diani 1997). This interaction, Putnam (1995, 2001) argues, is the social fabric, the basis of, community building and civic engagement. Conversely, communities that lack sufficient sources of social capital – where there is an absence or
erosion of a sufficient density of social ties – lack the ability to act collectively; they are marked by social disorganization and have less capacity to act cooperatively and confront societal issues (Coleman 1988b; Woolcock and Narayan 2000).

The idea that social networks have a social value tied to civic engagement is not a new one. Scholars and social thinkers have considered the importance of human interaction to social cohesion and participatory governance and decision making for centuries. French political thinker and historian Tocqueville (Tocqueville 1835[1990]) wrote that in the context of rapid societal changes in the United States in the early part of the nineteenth century – with the emergence of a market economy and the rise of individualism – participation in civil associations was necessary for the development of individuals’ senses of interdependence and social responsibility, for promoting meaningful political engagement, and for maintaining democratic processes. Early and prominent sociologists, Max Weber, Ferdinand Tönnies, George Simmel, and Emile Durkheim observed profound changes in the nature of social relationships in relation to industrialization and urbanization and the ascent of individualism and rational thought – a dissolution of traditional societal bonds and the emergence of anomie and alienation as common to the human experience. For Coleman (1988a) and Putnam (1995), modern scholars of social capital, changes in the structures of families, suburban sprawl, and the preponderance of electronic media and entertainment have increasingly alienated people from one another; leisure time has become private and people are less inclined to become involved in groups or in activities that build social capital.

In a more recent study, Paxton (2002) examines the relationship between social capital and democracy and argues that a “vibrant associational life” – strong networks of
relations – is essential for democracy. Social capital strengthens the quality of democratic participation, creating the space to engage in reasoned discussion that is grounded in and builds respect for different points of view. Analyzing data collected from emerging democracies, Paxton finds that significant levels of social capital are necessary for information dissemination and the resources to organize large scale collective action. Trusting relationships provide the space for the expression and spread of dissenting political opinions (Paxton 2002:257). In established democracies, the trust and social ties of social capital – through memberships in voluntary organizations as well as through informal ties – are important to democratic participation because of the participation these ties engender.

In his thesis on communicative action, German sociologist and philosopher Habermas discusses the rise and fall of the public sphere in relation to the logic of capitalism. Habermas’ public sphere is the space for communicative practices through which individuals deliberate about public matters and reach mutual understandings; in a democracy, the public sphere is the space for open debate and civic engagement (Habermas 1984, 1989; Randall 2008). Focusing on the rise of consumer culture, Habermas argues that consumer capitalism has shifted the focus of cultural production to consumption and away from participation. The logic of capitalism, in colonizing the lifeworld, has systematically distorted communication and legitimized unjustifiable power. Instrumental ideas, aided by media corporatism, have gained communicative power, displaced the practical rationality of communicative action, and undermined the

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7 Instrumental rationality focuses on the most cost effective means of achieving an end. In Habermas’ thesis, instrumental rationality – the logic of the capitalist system – has colonized the lifeworld – the routine patterns of everyday life. For Habermas, practical rationality locates human reason in social interactions
potential for critical debate on issues of public importance.

The demise of Habermas’ public sphere has significance for social movements, which depend upon social interaction and discursive practices to disseminate ideas, build collective identity, and mobilize collective action. Diani (1997) argues that the ability of social movements to affect change depends upon their capacity to reproduce and generate social capital. Community linkages are both a precondition and a product of collective action necessary to mobilize and sustain movement activity. To paraphrase Diani (1997:135), social movements are in essence comprised of loose networks of individuals that regardless of their heterogeneity share common ideas, exchange resources and information, and assess alternatives offered by movements. The rise of collective action is intimately tied to the distribution and expansion of social capital among movement and potential movement constituents. The relevance of Diani’s ideas for assessing movement outcomes are discussed in the next section.

Assessing Social Movement Impacts

The discussion on the assessment of movement impacts begins with the seminal work of Gamson (1990[1975]), who studied 53 social protests active in the United States between 1800 and 1945. Gamson’s study is pivotal in social movements research; it provides a foundational framework from which to assess social movement impacts and a point of departure for subsequent studies attempting to move beyond its perceived limitations.

Gamson defined impacts in terms of movement “success” – ultimate movement outcomes or the results achieved at the endpoint of a challenge. Gamson related ultimate mediated through communicative practices. Through communicative interactions individuals discuss issues of public importance and reach mutual understandings (Habermas 1984).
outcomes to two primary dimensions: the acceptance of the challenging group by its antagonists and the attainment of new advantages by the challenging group. Acceptance is signified by a shift in the relationship between challengers and antagonists from one of hostility or indifference to one of positive responsiveness, i.e., antagonists acknowledge the validity of the challenging groups’ positions (Gamson 1990[1975]:28). The attainment of new advantages is defined by the goals of challenging groups (Gamson 1990[1975]:34-36). Did the challenging group achieve the benefits it sought in terms of some material advantage or in terms of a broader institutional change or a shift in public values? Evaluation measures perceptions of degree of goal achievement by historians, the challenging group, and antagonists (Gamson 1990[1975]:36).

Critiques of Gamson’s framework cluster around the isolation of movements from larger political processes, the narrow focus on intended movement impacts, the tendency to treat movements as bounded, static entities, and the problem of demonstrating causality between movement activities and outcomes. For this dissertation, the significance of these critiques is that they point to the problem with an analysis that does not account for the emergent and recursive nature of movement activity. The treatment of movements as bounded entities, with clear beginnings and end points, is unable to accommodate process, the evolution of movement strategies and actions, and the dialectic between dominant and subversive frameworks of meaning that constitute the hegemonic framework.

The Structure of Political Opportunities

Criticisms of Gamson’s framework point to the narrow focus on internal and organizational characteristics of social movements at the expense of larger political
contexts in which movements operate and broader cycles of protest and movement coalitions (Giugni 1998). The political process model in social movements theory examines collective action in relation to the wider political system and its role in promoting or hindering opportunities for organized resistance, i.e., the structure of political opportunities (Buechler 2000a:37; McAdam 1982; Meyer 2003). Movements develop in relation to ongoing processes of interaction between movement groups and the larger social, political, and economic order. Commensurate with the ideas discussed earlier about shifts in social consciousness in relation to perceived social discordances, a shift in the structure of political opportunities can occur when any event or broad social process undermines the assumptions and legitimacy of the political establishment (Eisinger 1973; Giugni 1998; McAdam 1982:41). Shifts have the potential to shift public opinion, weaken power disparities between challengers and opponents, and afford particular segments of the population greater leverage to advance interests (Burstein 1985; Costain and Majstorovic 1994; Giugni 1998). Disruptive processes like war, widespread demographic changes, prolonged unemployment, economic recessions, shifts in international and trade relations, and food safety crises can undermine the stability of the political-economic system and open new opportunities for political activism.

Following the idea that movements need to be assessed in relationship to larger political, economic, and social processes, movement to movement interaction becomes salient as do larger ideological frames of meaning that transcend individual movements (Buechler 2000a:41-43; Snow and Benford 1992). From social constructionist theory, the notion of cycles of protest recognizes relationships between social movements in a temporal clustering of activity. Master frames, broad structures of meaning that resonate
with a diverse constituency, link movements in cycles of escalating conflict – broad geographic and sector diffusion of protest, the appearance of new social movement organizations, new frames of meaning, innovative forms of collective action (Tarrow 1994). Over time one social movement affects another as frames of meaning and tactics diffuse and produce what Meyer and Whittier (1994) call the “spillover effect.” In other words, modern social movements are not “distinct and self-contained”; they arise from and give rise to other movements. Earlier movements pave the way for the emergence of later movements that adopt the same frame; conversely, earlier movements can also restrict the options and effectiveness of later movements (Snow and Benford 1992).

In the context of late capitalism, social movements focused on human and worker rights, environmental protection, health and human safety, community autonomy, food sovereignty, “free trade” negotiations and agreements, corporate accountability, and so on are united collectively around a common frame, which objects to the neoliberal model that subsumes livelihoods, ecological diversity, human health and community, and environmental sustainability to the logic of the market. Chapter Three discusses the relationship of the Local Food Movement to a broader and historical environmental movement seeking to redress the excesses and impacts of consumer culture.

*Incremental and Unanticipated Movement Impacts*

Scholars argue that Gamson’s proxies for success, defined by the goals of movement organizers and assessed at a defined endpoint, ignore incremental impacts and impacts that fall outside the explicit goals of movements. Amenta et al (2010) and Tilly (1998) argue that success defined narrowly in terms of explicit movement goals obscures the significance of unanticipated outcomes. Unplanned consequences can be beneficial to
movement goals or movement backlashes (e.g., repression, increased policing, counteractive policy, etc.) can hinder opportunities for movement expansion (Amenta, et al. 2010:290). Giugni (1998) points out that movement “successes” are rarely uniformly perceived; movement organizers, participants, and observers often have different ideas about what counts as success, and success for some participants may be judged as movement failure by others. Furthermore “failed” movements may not achieve stated goals but nevertheless have considerable influence over political processes. Conversely, “successful” movements, while achieving stated goals, can have insignificant impacts (Amenta, et al. 2010; Clemens 1998). Gupta (2008:2) argues that the vast majority of social movements have incremental results as opposed to outright successes and failures. Nevertheless, incremental results are outcomes, which can advance or impede the overall goals of a movement but do not mark the end to mobilization efforts. In a similar vein, Clemens (1998) argues that social movement scholarship, focused too heavily on revolutionary change, has failed to account for the multiplicity of movements that do produce social change but do so without bringing a complete end to the established social order. Clemens advocates a perspective that focuses on disruptions in the distribution of interdependent and established practices that comprise an existing order. Her ideas are discussed more fully below.

**Emergent Movement Activities**

Gupta (2008) and Munck (1990:33-37) focus on the emergent nature of movement activity, offering a processual framework for studying movements commensurate with the hegemonic framework. Returning to Gupta’s (2008) assessment articulated above, social movements have incremental impacts that affect subsequent
movement activities and outcomes. Similarly, Munck (1990:33-37) argues that an “all-or-nothing” evaluation of social movements neglects the significance of ongoing processes of movement activity for movement outcomes – the formation of collective identity and emergence of collective action, processes of reflexive and recursive strategic action and assessment, choices to limit or expand political and economic engagement. In his study of Latin American movements, Munck identifies two tensions of modern collective action. One tension is the desire to maintain movement autonomy and movement integrity; the other is the need for strategic action – to engage with the larger political-economic environment in order to challenge the established order and gain recognition. The strategies and processes of movement action continually mediate between these two objectives. Social movements that engage with the larger political and economic environment risk cooptation or corruption. Movement strategies that eschew engagement and focus solely on the preservation of collective identity and group autonomy, however, forgo opportunities to engender change and risk irrelevance and ineffectuality.

**Generating Social Ties and New Structural Linkages**

Diani (1997), in his assessment of attempts to investigate the impacts of collective action, contends that a key problem for scholars of social movements is demonstrating causality – showing clear linkages between movement actions and changes related to values, beliefs, policy, and cultural practices. The tendency of movement scholars has been to focus on the assessment of macro-level changes; demonstrating the causal links between movement activities and broad changes in policy and lifestyle is difficult. For example, it is impossible Diani argues to demonstrate a clear link between collective environmental action and broad cultural changes around environmental sustainability.
Have the activities of movements led to increased environmental sensibilities and actions or is it that increased environmental sensibilities have emerged alongside larger societal patterns (e.g., the rise of neoliberal policies and practices, increased commodification, the privatization of social and environmental concerns, environmental disasters), which in turn lead to movement activity and greater environmental sensibilities?

Diani argues for an approach that focuses on the “structural preconditions” that assist or impede the ability of movements to achieve movement goals. With an understanding that social movements are comprised of networks of individuals that engage in communicative practices, which facilitate the evaluation and flow of ideas, the ability of movement organizers to affect change is dependent on the extent and solidity of the linkages within the movement (Diani 1997:130). Assessing impacts within this framework focuses on the ability of movements to reproduce and generate social capital.

The rise of collective action is intimately tied to the distribution of social capital among potential movement constituents. Decisions to participate in movement activities are mediated by identification with other participants and the presence of mutual trust. Accordingly, mobilization efforts depend and build on already established social networks, which collectively assess and act on frames of meaning offered by movements. The formation of new networks and social bonds bears on the ability of movement activists to continue to mobilize resources as well as on the ability to increase the circulation of movement ideas and practices (Diani 1997:134-135). While new networks of relations do not necessarily translate into a strong collective identity, they provide opportunities for communication and the exchange of ideas across different social milieus (Diani 1997:135). It is this ability – to reproduce and produce social capital – that Diani
argues is the key predictor of a movement’s capacity to impact political and policy processes or cultural processes represented by values and knowledge and daily practices. To paraphrase Diani (1997:130-133), the broader the range of social ties developed during a sustained period of mobilization, the more likely movements will achieve more central positions in networks of political and social influence and the greater the impact of movement activities.

In a related theoretical framework, Clemens (1998) proposes scholars examine the capacity of movements to replace dominant “webs of interdependence” – entrenched patterns of interaction – with alternative ones. As noted above, Clemens’ analytical framework emerges from her observation that theories of movement impacts have been stunted by a focus on revolutionary movements that result in a complete breakdown of the state and social order. Accordingly, conceptualizations of what constitutes social change have largely been restricted to impacts within formal political processes, which fail to notice the “less-than-catastrophic” social change produced by the majority of modern movements (Clemens 1998:110). Following this critique, Clemens (1998:110) asks the question, how do movements produce change – transform part of the social order – without “disrupting the whole?” The answer lies in the relationships – the webs of interdependence – and normative values and beliefs that give stability to a particular realm of a social order.

In any given social order, the distribution of interdependent practices comprises its structure; when reproduced, patterns of interaction are further entrenched and create social solidarity. Disruptions in these patterns – a breakdown in social relations due to wars, fiscal crises, population pressures, etc – create “openings” for alternative ideas and
meanings and for movements to challenge the existing social order. In assessing the capacity of a movement to disrupt established societal orders, research must identify critical points of interdependence, the core beliefs that legitimize them, and assess the degree to which movement activities are able to circumvent entrenched ties and substitute new webs of interdependence (Clemens 1998:116-117). Within the notion of the hegemonic process, these disruptions and the establishment of new interdependencies signal the enactment of new practices and a shift in meanings and values on which they are based.

**Summary of Theoretical Approaches**

This chapter uses multiple theories and concepts to understand the process of social change and to theorize the role social movements play in the establishment of particular political-economic orders. This section summarizes these theories and concepts and their relationships to one another.

Figure 1 offers a visual representation of the (dialectical) relationship between hegemony and counter-hegemony and the significance of discourse and practice in their constitution. Hegemony and counter-hegemony are mutually constituting. Counter-hegemonies arise from and challenge the legitimacy and power of hegemonic formations and, in doing so, actively shape their particular contours. Key to the stability of hegemony and, by implication, its impermanence is the inextricable and bi-directional relationship between discourse and practice.
Figure 1: The dialectical relationship between hegemony and counter-hegemony

Discourse – ideas and beliefs, ways of perceiving the world – and practice – those mundane activities individuals perform in the space of everyday life – are also mutually constituting. The practices of ordinary living embody shared meanings and ideas; performed consistently and collectively they organize and reproduce particular ways of living or, conversely, bring new ones into being. Significantly, shared meanings and ideas, which form the basis of social consciousness (and actors’ perceptions of reality), are developed relationally; accordingly, the social practices of everyday life are central to their reproduction or disintegration. It is through participation in practices – social and communicative – that human beings develop common understandings and acquire particular rationalities that in turn shape the nature of human activities. The relationship between discourse and practice is crucial to understanding organizer strategies and
provides insight into the significance of place-making and the importance of building social capital for the mobilization of collective action.

**Figure 2: Concepts significant to understanding the strategies of social movements**

Figure 2 shows the relationship between the strategies and mechanisms of social movements discussed in this chapter. Key to social movement strategies in the context of late capitalism and in relation to the dominance of neoliberal policies, practices, and meanings is place-making. Place-making strategies have both ideological and material goals. They are enacted to assert the autonomy of place, to facilitate the development of a place-based social consciousness and collective identity and, ultimately, to develop the capacity for collective action to affect specific material outcomes. As this dissertation will show, for organizers of the Local Food Movement in Western North Carolina, place-
making strategies strive to embed and condition economic decisions about food in a shared sense of and appreciation for the region and its farms.

Through discursive and social practices performed at the level of everyday life, movement organizers and participants invoke a cultural politics of place – alternative, place-based conceptions of contested terms like economy, citizenship, sustainability, ecology, etc. Within this framework, the salience of social networks of interaction to the goals of movement organizers becomes evident. Social networks are a key mechanism of change and are significant to the processes of place-making. They are spaces of interpersonal interaction necessary for the production (and reproduction) of social bonds, for the exchange of information, for the evaluation of extant conditions and movement frames of meaning, and for the development of shared meanings and understandings and collective action.

**Conclusions**

The theoretical perspectives and concepts presented in this chapter place social movements and the cultural politics they enact at the center of a dynamic process, a dialectic between dominant and counter hegemonies, which struggle to legitimate particular meanings and beliefs, structure normative practices, and achieve specific material outcomes. In late capitalism, the legitimacy of economic globalization is challenged by a discord between the rhetoric of neoliberal policies and practices and their material impacts. People and communities are mobilizing to challenge the instrumental rationality of advanced capitalism and its effects on ecologies, economies, and communities. Social movements engage in cultural politics and the politics of place to
assert autonomy, challenge prevailing meanings and practices, construct collective identity, and mobilize disparate groups into action.

Within the hegemonic framework, dominant and counter hegemonies are ongoing social constructions, mutually constitutive and emergent. A hegemonic order is not static or absolute, it is an ongoing productive process formed, contested, and remade by individuals and groups with different levels of power and influence. Following, the scholarship of social movements must attend to process – to the interaction between hegemonies and counter movements, the effect of this encounter on the strategies and actions of dominant institutions and on the strategies and actions of movement organizers and activists as they struggle to maintain the integrity of movement goals and engage with the system they seek to change.

Human practice – the mundane activities human beings perform on a daily basis – is the foundation of any particular hegemonic order and, recognizing the constraints of power on human action, is significant to its undoing. Eating, sleeping, driving, working, playing, socializing, shopping, cooking, and so on embody and reproduce dominant meanings and values. Collectively, their performance structure and entrench particular configurations of interaction and give stability and power to particular modes of consciousness and ways of living. At the same time, daily life is the space for the enactment of alternative practices that embody different meanings and values and challenge the status quo. The daily production and practice of alternative frameworks of meaning is what gives rise to and nourishes modern collective action. The day to day interactions of people, through communicative practices, is the space to reflect on extant conditions, develop mutual understandings, and practice cultural innovation.
This supposition has enormous significance for the study of the Local Food Movement in Western North Carolina, which at its core targets the day to day activities centered on food and eating and, following Clemens, aims to disrupt entrenched patterns of interaction that comprise the global food system. Applying Gibson and Graham’s analysis of second wave feminism, collectively, shifts in the purchasing and eating practices of consumers has relevance for the capacity of the movement to affect change in the region’s food system. This idea is explored further in Chapter Three.

The material impacts of neoliberal policies and practices – on economies, ecologies, and social structures – are observed, experienced, and interpreted in place. Accordingly, social movements emerge from the circumstances of place, from the human predicament in place. Social movement organizers and activists articulate goals and rationalities and conceptualize and enact strategic action from their rootedness in the unique circumstances of place. The cultural politics of movement organizers use place-making strategies to build collective identity and mobilize collective action around common and place-based conceptualizations of economy, culture, nature, sustainability, citizenship, development, and other contested concepts. Collective identities and action emerge from the realm of everyday life – through ongoing discursive and cultural practices that articulate and enact shared meanings and values.

As will be shown, the conditions surrounding the emergence of the Local Food Movement in Western North Carolina are unique to its cultural history and landscape and to its particular relationship to the processes of global development. The cultural politics enacted by movement organizers are inextricably tied to the region’s history and
landscape, and organizers’ place-making strategies have constructed a conceptualization of place inextricably tied to agriculture.

The decisive role of communicative practices for the development of shared meanings, understandings, and collective action points to the decisive role of social networks for the strategies and goals of social movements. Networks of human interaction are conduits of information; they are spaces of discursive practices, which share, deliberate, and evaluate ideas, meanings, and conditions and provide the means to reach common understandings, build mutual trust, and act collectively. The capacity of movements to affect change depends on their capacity to reproduce and produce social capital or social ties among potential movement participants and observers – to penetrate the discourse of social networks for the dissemination of movement discourse and to build relationships between movement constituents and new webs of interaction.

In relation to the Local Food Movement in Western North Carolina, social networks are key to organizer strategies and goals. In the effort to re-embed agriculture in communities – to (re)localize the production and consumption of food – relationship building among and between farmers, consumers, and food industry personnel is central. In essence the Local Food Movement is as much about relationship building as it is about food. Agriculture, food, and eating are at the center of movement strategies that strive to create social ties and new networks of interaction.
Chapter Three:
Theorizing the Local Food Movement

This chapter examines the Local Food Movement through the lens of the theories and concepts outlined in Chapter Two and through the discourses of movement supporters and critics. The chapter provides an overview of the global food industry – its structure and practices, the history of its emergence, its discourses and claims – and details the counter discourses that have emerged to challenge it. Within this larger backdrop, the chapter then explores the history of the emergence of the Local Food Movement, situating it in relation to a recurrent environmental movement seeking to redress the negative impacts of societal developments. It then examines the claims and practices of Local Food Movement supporters and activists and concludes with a discussion of scholarly critiques.

The Global Agri-Food System

The global agri-food system is the dominate system of food production and provision in late capitalism. This industry, grounded in neoliberal economics and the principle of comparative advantage, orders the world into specialized producing regions and constructs specific patterns of trade and consumption globally (Friedmann 1982, 1990; McMichael 2000b). Since the second half of the twentieth century, a general pattern of fewer and larger companies across each stage of production, processing, distributing, and retailing has occurred (Heffernan 2000; Hendrickson, et al. 2001).
Through a combination of vertical and horizontal integration\textsuperscript{8} and with the support of international trade and financial agreements and supra-national organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the World Bank (IBRD), companies achieve economies of scale\textsuperscript{9} and larger and larger shares of the market for particular food commodities. In 2007, Hendrickson and Heffernan, researchers from the University of Missouri who track food industry consolidation, calculated that the largest four firms controlled 84 percent of beef packing, 66 percent of pork packing, 59 percent of broiler production, 55 percent of turkey production, 80 percent of soybean processing, and 48 percent of food retailing (Hendrickson and Heffernan 2007). Howard (2009), a food industry researcher from the University of Michigan, calculate that five companies including Monsanto, Syngenta, and Dupont control 54 percent of the world’s seed supply.

This degree of concentration, which fosters and relies on the compartmentalization of the food chain into distinct sectors and processes, separates the social actors and businesses involved spatially, temporally, and socially. From the point of harvest to the point of sale, food travels significant distances, sometimes thousands of miles, changing hands multiple times along a food supply chain that connects producers to packers and shippers, to food processors, to distributors and retailers, and ultimately to consumers (Kloppenburg, et al. 1996; Perrett 2007; Rusnak 2006). This separation

\textsuperscript{8} Horizontal integration describes expansion of a company “within the same stage of the food system as their original operation” (Heffernan 2000:64). The extension of horizontal integration processes into several commodity systems enables companies to cross-subsidize, a strategy that allows a company to sustain loss in one commodity system over a period of time if it is making significant profits in other commodity sectors (Heffernan 2000:67). Vertical integration entails expansion of ownership and control into a number of stages within a single commodity system.

\textsuperscript{9} Economy of scale describes the cost advantages enterprises achieve with mass production. With cost advantages, companies are able to undercut competitors, driving commodity prices below the cost of production (Heffernan 2000).
obfuscates the processes of food production so that most consumers have limited or no knowledge of how and where their food is being produced and processed (Nestle 2002; Pirog 2004a; Striffler 2005).

The current global agri-food system is rooted in colonialism (McMichael 2004, 2007), intimately bound up with the emergence and expansion of capitalist markets (Wood 2000) and fundamentally embedded in the idea of development. In the colonial era, Enlightenment conceptions of progress – the improvement of the human condition – justified practices of dispossession and land enclosure in England and in the British colonies, practices which fueled industrialization and the rise of British Empire (McMichael 2000d). Into the post-colonial twentieth century the notion of development emerged as the dominant paradigm for economic growth and the means for newly sovereign states to overcome the colonial divide (McMichael 2000b, 2000c, 2000d). Through what McMichael labels the development project ex-colonial nations pursued nationally directed economic growth through First World financial and technological assistance (McMichael 2000b, 2000c, 2000d).

In the 1970s and 1980s, the ascendance of neoliberal economics reframed development as a global project. As national controls on the movement of capital relaxed, the ideas of economic neoliberalism gained support and development agencies like the World Bank promoting economic growth endorsed agricultural production for export. The globalization project, still the dominant development paradigm today, is a multilateral effort to liberalize national economies and compel participation in a world
economy.\textsuperscript{10} Within this paradigm, food production has been both a vehicle and target of neoliberal economic policies that privilege market forces through the restriction of state intervention (Clark 1991:51). The WTO, established in 1994 to institutionalize and enforce agricultural liberation polices to create “free” and “fair” trade, enforces a set of rules and regulations designed to “harmonize” the national and local laws of member states with international standards (Greenfield 1999). The WTO’s Agreement on Agriculture opens agricultural markets by removing perceived barriers to trade: easing import requirements, reducing tariffs and producer subsidies, and minimizing national health, social, and environmental regulations. In essence, this harmonizing process increasingly removes states’ abilities to make independent trade and investment decisions (Greenfield 1999).\textsuperscript{11}

The elimination of national policies and programs that impede free trade of agricultural products in the global market has enabled multinational corporations to structure comparative advantages\textsuperscript{12} and source their inputs from producing regions (McMichael 2000e). Allowed to operate freely across national boundaries, corporations

\textsuperscript{10}The globalization project is term used by development sociologist Philip Michael to describe the shift from nationally centered economic growth to globally managed economic growth by supranational organizations and global corporations (McMichael 2000a, 2000c, 2000e).

\textsuperscript{11} For example, the Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards (SPS) harmonizes national health and hygiene inspections of imports with international standards (Greenfield 1999). The Agreement on Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) harmonizes copyright laws and other property rights including patents, plant varieties protections, industrial designs, trademarks, geographical indication, integrated circuits, etc (Greenfield 1999; McMichael 2004).

\textsuperscript{12} Articulated by nineteenth century economist David Ricardo, the comparative advantage theorem argues that through commodity specialization and foreign trade all countries will benefit economically (Clark 1991:274; Edelman and Haugerud 2005a:79). Crops should be produced wherever they can be produced most efficiently – based on ecological and cultural endowments. Nations should specialize in those goods they are relatively more efficient at producing and trade for goods they are less efficient at producing (Pressman 1999:36). Increased efficiency of production within each country means that more commodities are available for global consumption (Clark 1991:274).
extract resources and link producing regions into global commodity chains, structuring 
production and consumption relations globally.

In this context, farming has become just one component of an agri-food industry 
 compartmentalized into discrete sectors – agricultural inputs, farm production, food 
processing, packing and distribution, wholesaling, marketing, retailing (Perrett 2007:2). 
In tightly vertically integrated markets increasing specialization and the trend toward 
fewer, larger farms is the norm. Large scale specialized agriculture is best suited to large 
scale centralized wholesaling and retailing, and vice versa. Big food companies want to 
source from big suppliers who can supply the volumes and satisfy post-harvest handling 
requirements and who have the technology to produce case-ready products for retail 
(Eastwood, et al. 2004; Perrett 2007:6). These vertically integrated supply chains shut out 
smaller-scale farms and food businesses.

The Transformation of US Agriculture

In the United States, the consolidation of the food industry has transformed 
agriculture. Noted by Gardner (2002), before the centralization of agriculture, the US was 
a nation of farmers. There were 6.5 million farms in 1920; 30 percent of the country’s 
population resided on farms (Gardner 2002:50-51). By 1991, the farm population 
comprised just 1.9 percent of the country’s population; at this point, the US Census 
Bureau ceased publishing farm resident population estimates altogether. This decision, 
Gardner (2002:51-51) observes, reflected not only the decline in the statistical 
significance of the farm population, it reflected the decline in the economic and social 
significance of farm residence in relation to the increasing dominance of an industrial 
agricultural model that separated farm owner from farm manager and farm worker.
In contrast to the decline in the number of farms and farmers, farm size, which is measured in average acres per farm, has increased three-fold from 146 acres in 1900 to 418 acres in 2007, the most recent agricultural census (USDA Census of Agriculture 2007b; USDA Census of Agriculture n.d.). Large commercial farms\textsuperscript{13} while accounting for 80 percent of production represent only about 10 percent of all US farms. In 2009, smaller family farms\textsuperscript{14} accounted for about 20 percent of production, down from 40 percent in 1989 (Economic Research Service 2011).

As one component of a long and compartmentalized food chain, farmers receive a small proportion of the price consumers pay for food at the retail level. In general, the farm share of the food dollar\textsuperscript{15} decreases with increased processing and with increasing distances between farmers and consumers (Perrett 2007:5). In the United States, the farm share of the food dollar has fallen from 31 cents in 1980 to just under 16 cents in 2008 (Canning 2011). Middlemen, i.e., processors, wholesalers, distributors, retailers, absorb the remaining 84 cents, which is the value of added costs – labor, transportation, packaging, advertising, marketing – to transform raw farm commodities into food products and meals (Davis and Stewart 2002; Elitzak 2001). This dissertation will show that in Western North Carolina this economic reality is the foundation of movement activity.

\textbf{Agri-Food Discourses and Counter Discourses}

Alongside the industrialized, corporate model of food production, a multiplicity of counter movements has emerged to challenge industry claims and practices. Distinct yet

\textsuperscript{13} Defined by the USDA as farms with annual sales over $250,000.

\textsuperscript{14} Defined by the USDA as farms with annual sales under $250,000.

\textsuperscript{15} The economic return farmers receive for the farm products they sell.
overlapping challenges to the corporate food regime include consumer movements focused on labeling, food safety, and animal welfare; the fair trade movement (Binns, et al. 2007; Shreck 2005); slow food (Leitch 2000; Wilk 2006); the organic food movement (Belasco 1989; Campbell and Liepins 2001; Goodman and Goodman 2007; Guthman 2004); farm worker movements focused on fair wages, worker safety, and health; food sovereignty movements seeking control over land and agriculture (McMichael 2004, 2007); small farmer action challenging agricultural restructuring policies and industrial farming practices (Edelman 2001:304); and emerging local food initiatives focused on alternative food markets like CSAs and farmers markets and buy local consumer campaigns. The strategies and goals of these movements vary, but collectively they unite around a common frame that objects to the lack of accountability by supranational institutions and corporations, the degree of corporate control that usurps decision making through democratic processes, and the neoliberal paradigm that legitimizes the subordination of rural livelihoods, biodiversity, human health, traditional foodways, animal welfare, community, and environmental sustainability to global market rule.

The discursive claims of the agri-food industry center on notions of food security and sustainable agriculture, i.e., increase productivity without increasing pressure on natural resources (Kloppenburg, et al. 2000; Kneen 1999; McMichael 2000e; Schneiderman and Carpenter 1990). In the framing of agri-business, food security is defined as a global project (McMichael 2004). The discourse repeated by major agribusiness companies and emerging consortiums of agribusiness, international

16 For example, the “Just Label It” initiative and California Proposition 37 both advocate mandatory labeling of genetically modified foods.
17 For example, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers is a community based organization in Florida that represents the interests of low-wage immigrant populations working primarily the agricultural sector.
18 La Via Campesina is a notable example.
environmental groups, food processors, retailers, national grower groups, and research institutions\(^{19}\) is that by 2050 the world will have a population of nine billion people. The problem is how to meet the food needs of this growing population without putting a strain on natural resources. To illustrate, the following quotes were excerpted from the websites of Syngenta, the Global Harvest Initiative, The Keystone Alliance Group, Monsanto, and Bayer CropScience.

There will be 9 billion people on our planet by 2050. Farmland is limited. How do we feed a growing population? [Syngenta n.d.]

9 billion people will inhabit our Earth in the next 40 years. How can we provide for this growth while protecting the very land and water that sustains life? [Global Harvest Initiative n.d.]

To meet the needs of 9 billion people by 2050, we must: increase efficient use of resources for profitable agricultural production, continue to increase overall productivity, maintain and improve access to nutritious and safe food, and maintain and improve environmental health. [The Keystone Alliance Group n.d.]

On October 31, the world’s populations surpassed 7 billion – on its way to 9 billion by 2050. How will we feed this growing population? [Monsanto n.d.]

In the year 2025, we are likely to be sharing our planet earth with some 8 billion other people. They all hope to have enough to eat. How can we meet this challenge while at the same time preserve nature? Can we do without modern technologies? How can we respond to climate change and famine? We need a second green revolution. [Bayer Crop Science n.d.]

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\(^{19}\) Three relatively new consortiums are the Global Harvest Initiative, The Keystone Alliance Group, and the US Farmers Ranchers Alliance. Global Harvest Initiative is a consortium of agribusinesses including Monsanto and ADM and national environmental organizations including the Nature Conservancy and the World Wildlife Fund. The Keystone Alliance Group defines itself as a collaboration of organizations and businesses representing each link in the food supply chain from “farm to fork.” Collaborating businesses and organizations include international environmental organizations like the Nature Conservancy and the Environmental Defense Fund; large food companies – General Mills, Coca-Cola, and Kellogg; national farm agencies including the Farm Bureau; national grower groups representing commodity crops including soybeans, cotton, wheat, corn, rice, alfalfa; agribusinesses – Monsanto, Cargill Syngenta, DuPont; and academic and research organizations – University of Arkansas Division of Ag, University of Wisconsin-Madison College of Ag and Life Sciences, Bayer CropScience, BASF. The US Farmers Ranchers Alliance is comprised of national agricultural associations for commodity crops (soybeans, corn, sugar, cotton), beef, milk, eggs, pork, and poultry; state farm bureaus and farmer federations, national farmer associations including the American Farm Bureau Federation and American Farmers for the Advancement and Conservation of Technology. Board and industry partners represent Monsanto, Dupont, John Deere, ADM, and BASF.
Within this framework of potential scarcity, agribusiness claims that “sustainable” agriculture, a particular notion of sustainable agriculture, provides the answer. Commensurate with the practices of agri-business, sustainable agriculture is defined by the use of science based technologies and industrial-scale production organized through comparative advantage. These practices provide the means to meet growing demand while caring for the environment (Kloppenburg, et al. 2000; Kneen 1999; McMichael 2000e; Schneiderman and Carpenter 1990). Science-based technologies, which privilege biotechnology, are necessary to develop high yielding plant varieties and plant varieties resistant to chemical inputs that protect crops from pests, weeds, and disease. Following, research is critical to the development of scientific innovation that will enhance food security, i.e., increase production yields worldwide. As cited by the Global Harvest Initiative, a consortium of agri-businesses, adequate funding for research and “a more effective and timely regulatory process” are necessary for the development, approval, and adoption of agricultural technologies that will improve food security (Global Harvest Initiative 2011a).

The Global Harvest Initiative (Global Harvest Initiative 2011b) also argues that the removal of trade barriers, which create market instability and “exacerbate” global hunger and food insecurity, is also critical. Restrictions to trade – export restrictions, high tariffs, restrictive quotas, restrictions on the importation of new agricultural technologies – “amplify” price volatility and contribute to hoarding and higher food prices. Uninhibited food trade will counter these trends and enable food surpluses to reach areas of critical need.
Counter discourses begin with the fundamental condition created by a globally organized food system – the abstraction of food production from individuals and communities. This abstraction alienates people from the experience and knowledge of food production and creates an opaque food system that hides the impacts of industry practices, impacts that belie industry claims of efficiency, food security, and sustainability.

**Counter Discourses: Disembedded Markets**

The global food system disembeds –temporally and spatially – food production and provisioning from the social contexts of communities and cultures. The abstraction from social relations and norms is basic to understanding to the social, environmental, and economic “side effects” of a system grounded economic efficiency gains.

The often cited statistic that food travels an average of 1,500 miles from farm to table contains within it the key condition of the global food system – alienation from the experience and knowledge of food production. In shifting the majority the world’s population away from direct access to food and into food markets, the global food system has removed food production from social consciousness; it has distanced food production from consumers physically, socially, and ethically (O’Hara and Stagl 2001:541). In the global food system where the processes of production, harvesting, and processing are located “elsewhere,” consumers have little or no understanding about how this food system works and do not recognize their role in its reproduction (Kloppenburg, et al. 1996; Nestle 2002; Pirog 2004a; Striffler 2005). In countries like the United States, food production is not part of the normal realm of experience and knowledge (Eden, et al. 2008:1045); food comes from a supermarket shelf without history. Berry (1992) observes
that the boundaries of the global economy are so large that its participants cannot see the impacts of their decisions to satisfy their private, household economies. Vast food supply chains hide social relations and production practices. Knowledge of how goods are produced – by whom, using what resources, extracted by what means – is absent (Berry 1992). Accordingly, people depend on an economy that they have no knowledge of and, in that ignorance, cannot take responsibility for the practices their consumption choices support. In the developed world, where people get most of what they need by buying it through the global market, this condition has far reaching material impacts.

Conversely, in depending on the labor, land, and resources of distant places, people do not depend on the communities in which they live to satisfy their needs. To paraphrase Halweil (2002:23), absent in the global economy are human connections. Agriculture, once a vital part of the economic and social fabric of communities and cultures, has been reduced to an input for a globally organized system of food manufacturing completely divorced from the social and material contexts of communities. With less connection to the people and communities in which we live, interdependencies and relationships of mutual obligation and responsibility erode, i.e., the demise social capital. The erosion of community ties leads to the erosion of networks of communication and support and to the growing dependence on the global market to satisfy material needs (O’Hara and Stagl 2001:542).

O’Hara and Stagl (2001:542-545), in their discussion of the conditions of disembedded food markets, observe that moral embeddedness, as culturally or community specific systems of values, has been replaced by a universal and utilitarian ethic. This utilitarian ethic, which underlies the rationality of the claimed self-regulating
free global market, defines the value of nature, human labor, and knowledge by the capacity to generate material goods and services – commodities with the capacity to generate profit and improve material well-being.

The physical, social, and moral disembedding of the global food system has side effects, spillovers which harm environmental and social systems and, which critics argue, belie the sustainability of the system. The spatial and temporal disconnect between source and effect contribute to what Buttel (1997) terms “the sustainability of unsustainability.” The ecological impacts of disembedded food production systems are realized only over time. The people that experience ecological problem are in one location; those that can do something about it – the consumers – are in another location. It is in this vein that Kloppenburg et al (1996:6) wrote, “if we do not know, we do not act.” Even with knowledge of the practices and harmful impacts of the agri-food industry, Kloppenburg and his colleagues argue that the social distancing created by the global food system stops people from acting. The places where action is needed are detached from our experience, and there is no sense of connection or responsibility to the land or people.

Counter Discourses: The “Free” Market

Free market economics is significant to the claims of the agri-food industry. A global economy, free of barriers to trade, is key to the construction of comparative advantages – to efficient allocation of global resources, to producing enough food to feed a growing population. Large-scale specialized agriculture and centralized and integrated processing, distribution, and retailing provide the means to produce and distribute large quantities of food cheaply and safely, and through this system, communities and nations can buy their food from the lowest cost provider. Critics contend, however, that at the
heart of this global food system is a disparity in the application of liberalization rules by
the WTO, a disparity which mirrors long established relations between developed and
developing countries and contradicts the rhetoric of free market economics.

The WTO’s Agreement on Agriculture, which governs the agricultural policies of
member states by outlawing price supports via trade restrictions and production controls,
requires developing countries of the Global “South” to open their farm sectors while
enabling the global “North” (i.e., the United States and European Union) to protect their
agriculture and subsidize exports and infrastructure (McMichael 2007). In the United
States, farm subsidies compensate gross output and promote “a get big or get out” strategy (Jones, et al. 2006; MacDonald, et al. 2006). Farmers, encouraged by farm
commodity programs, expand their operations to acquire more acres and higher
“deficiency” payments guaranteed by the government, which pay farmers the difference
between their production costs and world market prices (Roberts 2009:121). In essence,
the system rewards overproduction. Overproduction contributes to low world market
prices and establishes a cycle of overproduction and falling commodity prices –
encouraging yet more output and larger farms. This system, which decouples farms
subsidies from price and establishes artificially low world market prices for commodities,
benefits and subsidizes the profits of global food manufacturers and food marketers able
to access a continual supply of cheap farm commodities, which can be transformed into
value-added processed products (McMichael 2007; Roberts 2009). Remarking on this
system, Watkins (1996:245) observes: “In the real world, as distinct from the imaginary

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20 “Get big or get out” the now famous quote uttered by US Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson in
the 1950s signaled the beginning of US agricultural policy encouraging farms to adopt practices to
maximize productivity.

21 Commodity programs apply to primarily to five commodity crops: corn, wheat, soy, cotton, and rice.
one inhabited by free traders, survival in agricultural markets depend less on comparative advantage than upon comparative access to subsidies.” In other words, while developing countries are required to open their markets, the United States and European Union continue to dump massive amounts of subsidized and underpriced food commodities on the world market, a practice that favors global corporate traders and processors “at the expense of farmers everywhere” (Greenfield 1999; McMichael 2007:11).

In this “free” market, global corporations obtain larger and larger shares of the market, e.g., driving the competition out of business by using strategies of overproduction, reducing prices, and absorbing lower profit margins. As noted above, Hendrickson and Heffernan have documented the degree of concentration achieved by global firms. This degree of concentration enables companies with the largest market shares to exert a disproportionate amount of influence on the market: on product types, qualities, production practices, locations of production, prices, etc. Heffernan (2000:66), drawing on agricultural economics, explains that when four firms come to control 40 percent or more of the market, the degree of concentration achieved actually undermines free market competition. In this way, market share is the driving force, not competition in a free market.

In practice, consolidation in one food industry sector stimulates consolidation in other sectors (Eastwood, et al. 2004; Harris, et al. 2002:2; Perrett 2007:4). Producers, processors, wholesalers, retailers, to maintain their ability to do business with food industry sectors undergoing consolidation, increase the sizes of their operations to achieve economies of scale and lower costs. Food companies use supply chain management practices to streamline procurement and distribution. With the use of just-in-
time information technologies, which provide companies with the ability to respond to the market in “real” time, supply chain management practices formally connect producers to processors, wholesalers, and retailers, creating vertically integrated business relationships (Hendrickson, et al. 2001; Kaufman 2000:19; Perrett 2007:4). This tightly integrated market, in which a smaller and smaller number of firms and firm clusters (Heffernan 1999) control all aspects of food production, excludes smaller farms as well as smaller scale food businesses unable to compete.

Counter Discourses: Food security

The legitimacy of big agriculture pivots on the notion of global food security; to feed the growing population of the world and eradicate hunger, agriculture must adhere to practices that increase productivity through commodity specialization and technology (McMichael 2004). Despite the rhetoric, food industry detractors argue that the practices and policies of the corporate food regime are the cause of food insecurity and hunger, not the solution.22

Food insecurity and hunger are the result of underlying inequities that deprive people of economic opportunity and security and create food dependence (Kimbrell 2002:7-8; Nestle 2007). Food resources in the world are actually overabundant, so that the issue is not food availability but food accessibility (Koc and Dahlberg 1999:113; McMichael 2007; Nestle 2007; Simon 2006).23 People go hungry because they do not

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22 Food insecurity describes inadequate access to healthy, safe, and socially acceptable foods necessary to maintain a healthy, active life (Cohen 2002:3; Coleman-Jensen, et al. 2012; Quandt, et al. 2004:569). Food insecurity, measured on an individual or household level, results in hunger as well as other food-related health issues such as obesity (Cohen 2002:3; Heynen, et al. 2012:305; USDA Economic Research Service 2012).

23 Following Hamm and Bellows (2003), food availability means there is an adequate supply of food to meet consumption needs. Food accessibility describes the capacity of individuals and/or households to secure enough food through production and/or purchase.
have direct access to food. Among the populations that cannot afford to buy food are farmers themselves (Kimbrell 2002). The advances in (and costs of) industrialized agriculture, the paradigm that compels farmers to replace staple crops for local consumption with export oriented crops, the policies that artificially depress market prices, and the compartmentalized food chain that absorbs most of the profit undermine the economic viability of farming and also alienate farmers from direct access to food.

The liberalization policies of the IMF-World Bank institutional regime enacted over the past half century to develop the economies of developing nations have created food dependence, a fundamental cause of hunger. Millions of people have lost access to land and the ability to grow their own food. Cheap imports bankrupt small farmers, forcing rural migrations in search of wage labor (McMichael 2007). The neoliberal paradigm that compels farmers to replace staple crops for local consumption with export oriented crops simultaneously creates reliance on global corporations for access to markets, distribution and inputs (including seed) and on imported agricultural products for consumption. The “seed enclosure practices” of large agribusinesses like Monsanto usurp the ability of farmers and communities to engage in the seed saving practices practiced by humans for millennia (McMichael 2000e:27; Shiva 1997). This corporate model of agriculture, framed in terms of global food security, undermines the ability of communities to define their own food and agricultural systems (McMichael 2004).

Obesity in the modern world has emerged as a prominent indicator of food insecurity (Nestle 2007:27). At one time a sign of wealth, corpulence in the modern world may actually be a sign of malnourishment. The food insecurity-obesity paradox is tied to poverty and the overabundance of cheap, unhealthful food options. With physical,
economic, and social barriers, people living in poverty have diets disproportionately comprised of high fat, high calorie, highly processed foods – cheap because key ingredients of processed foods like corn and soy are subsidized by government commodity programs.

The ubiquity of convenience and processed foods in the modern food system is linked to increasing levels of overweight and obese adults and children worldwide. In the United States about half of every dollar is spent on processed, prepackaged, and ready-to-eat foods. Processed foods are calorie dense, containing significant quantities of fat, salt, and sugar or sweeteners like High Fructose Corn Syrup. The World Health Organization (World Health Organization 2013) reports that globally obesity rates have doubled since the 1980s with 1.5 billion overweight and obese adults in 2008. In the United States, about one-third of all adults and 17 percent of children ages 2 through 19 are classified as obese (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2012a). Overweight and obese individuals are more at risk for particular medical conditions including stroke, sleep disorders, certain kinds of cancers, osteoarthritis, and hypertension. Obesity is directly linked to higher rates of heart disease and strongly implicated as the cause of adult-onset diabetes. In 2008, the Centers for Disease Control estimated the direct and indirect economic costs at about $147 billion (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2012b).

Contributing to the rise in the incidence of obesity is concentration in food retail and the emergence of food deserts in the industrialized food world: geographically

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24 This statistic comes from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, which publishes the results of consumer expenditure surveys annually. The surveys collect data on a range of consumer expenditures including food for home consumption and for consumption away from home.
defined areas, urban and rural, typically in low income communities with a dearth of sources of healthy and affordable food, i.e., an abundance of convenience stores and fast food restaurants and no grocery stores.

The critiques of the food industry that coalesce around the issue of food security and hunger vary in their positions on the means to address food insecurity. The solutions of anti-hunger advocates and organizations, which focus at the level of individuals and households, center on charitable food assistance and emergency food relief (Hamm and Bellows 2003:39; Pothukuchi 2004:357). This approach provides short term, immediate relief and relies on the current agri-food system to access cheap food (Hamm and Bellows 2003:39). In contrast, proponents of a community food security approach move beyond the notion of food security to focus on the capacity of communities to meet their food needs (Alkon and Mares 2012; Cohen 2002; Hamm and Bellows 2003). Community food security argues that solutions must come from a systems approach that reveals the root causes of food insecurity – broad and systemic political, economic, social, and environmental issues (Hamm and Bellows 2003:38). 25 Within the critique offered by the community food security frame, solutions to food insecurity can be found with a focus on the level of the “community” and on “prevention” strategies – develop the capacities of communities to produce food in sustainable and equitable ways (Hamm and Bellows 2003:39; Pothukuchi 2004:357). The emphasis is on creating community self-reliance with a focus on supporting local and regional food production, developing local markets, and community-directed development.

25 Similarly food justice advocates also argue that solutions must recognize longstanding, structural class, race, and gender-based inequalities that are embedded within and are reproduced through systems of food production and distribution (Alkon and Mares 2012:348,350; Heynen, et al. 2012).
Like community food security, the food sovereignty frame also moves beyond the notion of food security. Typically applied to the global south (Alkon and Mares 2012:347-348; McMichael 2004), food sovereignty proponents engage in a direct critique of the neoliberal framework that undermines the self-determination of communities and forces a reliance on global markets for food (Alkon and Mares 2012:349). Organizations like La Via Campesina, a coalition of 150 or more organizations around the world advocating family-based agriculture, argue that at its core the commodification of food is responsible for food insecurity – the goal of food production in the global, corporate model is profit not feeding people (Alkon and Mares 2012; Heynen, et al. 2012:307). Food sovereignty principles assert the right of communities to define their own food and agricultural systems and recognize a human right to safe, nutritious, and sustainably produce food (Alkon and Mares 2012; Heynen et al 2012:307). This frame prioritizes local production for local consumption.

**Counter Discourses: Sustainability**

For the corporate firms that structure and control the global food system, sustainable agriculture is framed in terms of (bio)technology and comparative advantage – the only means to meet the growing demand for food while also caring for the environment.

Critics of the conventional food system – academics, activists, farmers, consumers – argue that the very nature of the global food system is unsustainable, pointing to the interrelated social, environmental, and economic *externalities* that provide

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26 The term food sovereignty is also increasingly being used by initiatives in the United States. For example, the citizens of Hancock County in Maine, to challenge the authority of federal and state food safety regulations, adopted “food sovereignty” measures to claim the right of local governments to self-govern and exempt small farms from federal and state regulations (Halloran 2011).

27 See (LaViaCampesina n.d.) for more information.
corporations with short term economic gains at the expense of human and ecological communities. The policies and practices enacted to comply with the dictates of efficiency and optimizing and time-saving behavior to maximize productivity and profits render invisible the environmental and social effects of this extreme rationalizing behavior.

The model of industrialized agriculture, which privileges biotechnology and large-scale monocrop production for export, has induced processes of biological and cultural simplification (Friedmann 2000; Shiva 1993). Processes of biological simplification, which substitute natural cycles with artificial industrial practices, degrade unique eco-systems and reduce the range of biological diversity. Shiva, examining the relationship between the loss of biodiversity and cultural diversity, argues that monocultural patterns of production affect not just environmental sustainability but the reservoir of diverse knowledges and cultural practices that are also crucial to making human life sustainable. “Uniformity and diversity are not just patterns of land use, they are ways of thinking and ways of living” (Shiva 1993:6). Standard production practices and the compartmentalization of the food chain into distinct processes and sectors fragment social systems, alienate agricultural and industry workers from the processes of production and fruits of their labor, and instill patterns of thinking that promote uniformity and conformity, what Shiva (1993) terms “monocultures of the mind.”

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28 Biological simplification is accompanied by the simplification of the human diet. The globalization of the food system has remade diets worldwide, displacing traditional agricultural systems and crops. On supermarket shelves, industry practices manifest as standard, uniform products offerings. The choices offered by the global food system – the seemingly endless options offered by the food industry on supermarket shelves – is illusory; the illusion of choice is created through packaging and marketing reformulations of the same few raw ingredients – corn, wheat, rice, oats, and soy (Barndt 2002; Halweil 2002:15; Kimbrell 2002:23). Pollan (2006), in his well known tome on the industrialized food industry, claims that of the 45,000 items on supermarket shelves, one third are made from corn.
Combined, these processes, which concentrate and standardize food production and provisioning, have impacted the economic and social stability of communities, human health, and the health of unique ecosystems.

In her study of the historical making of the fast food hamburger, Friedmann (2000) traces the globalization of wheat and cattle and subsequent impacts on local agricultural systems, ecologies, and unique foodways. In the wake of US food policies and programs post World War II, world regions shifted from agricultural systems based on diverse, cropping systems attuned to local ecological conditions and limitations to specialized single species production – monocultures – irrespective of local cycles. In promoting efficient harvesting, processing, and packaging, industrial corporate agriculture has standardized the production of food from farm to table and reduced the range of genetic diversity. Established patterns of species interdependencies have been replaced by the interdependence of specialized producing regions linked by markets organized by multinational corporations.

Monocrop production, while seemingly efficient at producing large quantities of food cheaply, has inherent risk. Monocultures – lacking genetic diversity – are especially susceptible to pests and disease and require the application of herbicides and pesticides. Furthermore, the intense use of soils depletes naturally occurring nutrients and requires artificial means of renewal through chemical fertilizers (Friedmann 2000; Kimbrell 2002:20). Increasingly degraded soils require increasing amounts of fertilizers to replace nutrients (Roberts 2009:221). These chemical intensive practices are linked directly to

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29 The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nation documents that since the 1990s 75 percent of plant genetic diversity has been lost as farmers have abandoned diverse local species in favor of single, high yielding varieties (FAO 2004). For example, over 50 percent of the market for apples is dominated by two varieties. Seventy-three percent of all lettuce grown in the United States is iceberg. More than half the world’s potato acreage is planted in one variety, Russet Burbank – the variety preferred by McDonalds.
environmental issues – surface water pollution from fertilizer overuse, declining water tables through large-scale irrigation, pest resistant crops, loss of soil fertility, negative impacts on wildlife from habitat loss and habitat contamination. Furthermore, as pests gain resistance to chemicals, crops require even greater use of pesticides and herbicides to produce equal amounts of food. The effect is the degradation of soil and reduced output (Roberts 2009:221).

Industrial practices directly affect human health. Exposure to pesticides, hormones, and other chemical inputs has been linked to a range of health issues: cancer, miscarriages, cardiac arrhythmia, seizures, decreased heart and lung function, etc. Decades of treating livestock with antibiotics is linked to antibiotic resistance and has led to the emergence of new strains of bacteria resistant to whole classes of antibiotic drugs. Roberts (2009:177) notes that while the incidence of food borne illnesses is actually decreasing, particular pathogens including salmonella and listeria have become more prevalent and more resistant to antibiotics. Other pathogens – those that previously existed only in mild forms – are emerging as more serious threats. Furthermore the centralized production and distribution practices of the conventional food system, which mix product from many different sources, make it difficult to trace the cause of an outbreak to one particular source. Structured to produce high volumes and distribute broadly from centralized locations rapidly, the agri-food industry has established a risky

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30 Confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs), a type of monoculture, concentrate billions of tons of animal manure annually in lagoons, posing serious risks to surrounding populations, property, and wildlife as evidenced by the breach of an eight-acre hog lagoon in North Carolina in 1995 that destroyed the crops of surrounding fields, crossed the highway, entered the New River, and killed every aquatic creature for 17 miles (Roberts 2009:77).

31 Annually more than 76,000 Americans are impacted by food-borne illnesses; 325,000 require hospitalization; between 5,000 and 9,000 individuals die (Roberts 2009).

32 For example, the salmonella outbreak linked to spinach in 2008.
system that has potentially devastating consequences, i.e., the broad and rapid distribution of contaminated product.

The Local Food Movement in the United States

Nationally interest in local, community based food systems is manifest in the growth of farmers markets, the increasing popularity of community supported agriculture programs (CSAs) and agri-tourism, and in the emergence of farm to school, hospital, and college programs, community shared kitchens, food hubs, urban gardens, and buy local consumer campaigns. These initiatives and programs and the actors organizing, engaging, and participating in them are part of an emerging and dynamic Local Food Movement in the United States focused on creating alternatives to the global agri-food system that are grounded in and responsive to the material conditions and social contexts of place.

Evidence of the movement’s increasing popularity lies in the marketplace; in government initiatives, programs, and legislation; and in popular literature and media. The March 12, 2007 cover of Time Magazine declared “Forget Organic. Eat Local.” That same year, Oxford named “locavore” the word of the year. In 2009, the cover of the August 31 issue of Time sported a photo of packaged ground beef with a warning label that stated: “This hamburger may be hazardous to your health. Why the American food system is bad for our bodies, our economy and our environment – and what some visionaries are trying to do about it.” An increasing number of popular books and documentary films have publicized the problems with industrialized agriculture. Since 2006, Michael Pollan has written two New York Times bestsellers critical of the conventional food system and extolling the benefits of eating local. That same year,
Barbara Kingsolver published her popular monograph on eating local: *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*. The 2008 documentary film *Food, Inc.*, which shows graphic footage of industrialized farming practices, was nominated for best documentary film at the 82nd Academy Awards. In March of 2010, Jamie Oliver’s *Food Revolution*, a TV show focused on reforming the school lunch program, premiered on ABC.

The growth in the market for locally grown food is evident in the rise in direct to consumer sales and in the actions of big food retailers. The 2007 Census of Agriculture documents a substantial increase in direct to consumer markets (e.g., farmers markets, CSAs, roadside stands); direct sales rose nationally from $812 million in 2002 to $1.2 billion in 2007. Big food retailers and wholesalers and fast food chains have developed ‘buy local’ programs and are using local food messaging to tap into consumer interest. In 2010 Walmart announced that its Heritage Program, launched that same year, would increase its purchases of locally grown food and sell a billion dollars of food from small and mediums size farms by 2015 (Blythe 2010f). Supervalu, the third largest grocery retailer, launched their “Win with Fresh Produce” program to promote locally grown produce in an attempt to boost the grocery store chain’s declining sales (Blythe 2010e). In 2009 McDonalds launched their “Grown Here, Picked Here, From Here” campaign in Seattle, Washington to promote their purchase of Washington grown potatoes to Washington customers (McDonalds n.d.). Drawing criticism from farmers market groups, Safeway and Albertsons erected “farmers market” signs in stores in the Pacific Northwest to designate their produce departments (Blythe 2010c). US Foods and Sysco Foods, two of the largest broadline distributors in the nation, developed programs to source local and regional products for their customers (Ennis 2006; Koliopoulos 2010). A 2010 US Foods
press release describes the addition of a special local icon and detailed information about product origin to its online ordering system so restaurant customers can determine if a product is locally sourced (US Foodservice 2010).

With regard to policy, numerous states have enacted legislation in support of the development of state food policy councils aimed at facilitating the growth of state defined local food and farm economies\textsuperscript{33} and have passed laws or taken other action to prevent the misrepresentation of “local” food.\textsuperscript{34} According to the National Farm to School Network, Farm to School legislation has been passed in 33 states to support the establishment of statewide farm to school programs focused on sourcing state-produced agricultural products and/or marketing programs that promote local food to children and integrate nutrition education (National Farm to School Network 2010).

At the federal level, recognition of local food is evident in the Farm Bill, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food” initiative, and Michelle Obama’s White House kitchen garden. The 2008 Farm Bill contains several provisions in support of local food systems: $33 million in funds for the Farmers Market Promotional Program, $56 million for the Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program, $1.2 billion to expand the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, and $5

\textsuperscript{33} South Carolina, North Carolina, Massachusetts, and Illinois, for example have recently developed state food policy councils.

\textsuperscript{34} New Jersey’s agriculture and consumer protection department warned consumers of false local labeling practices, citing one example where Yellow New Jersey corn was promoted by a retailer six weeks before corn in the state was ready to harvest. Officials stated that the practice violates consumer fraud law and that mislabeling or misrepresentation can result in a $10,000 fine for the first offense and $20,000 for subsequent offenses (Blythe 2010d). In May 2010 the Governor of Maryland, Martin O’Malley, signed a law that gave the state’s agriculture department the authority to create and adopt standards defining locally grown food and prohibiting their misrepresentation (Blythe 2010b).
million in annual funding for Community Food Projects (Eschmeyer 2008).\footnote{35} The 2008 bill also resolves a conflict in the USDA’s interpretation of the 2002 Farm Bill around the issue of geographic preference. The 2008 bill clearly states that schools receiving federal assistance for school meals can give preference to local sources of agriculture products.

In 2009, Agricultural Secretary Tom Vilsack and Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan announced Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food, a USDA initiative launched to support the development of local food systems and, according to USDA press releases, invite Americans to participate in a national dialogue around ways to support local agriculture and spur local economic activity (USDA 2009a, 2009b).\footnote{36} That same year, Vilsak jackhammered an asphalt parking lot at USDA headquarters in Washington D.C. to make room for the People’s Garden and challenged USDA facilities globally to follow suit (Layton 2010). Since the launch of the program, the USDA has commissioned a study to identify gaps in regional processing facilities for small meat and poultry producers (USDA Office of Communications 2010), published a study on the structure of local food supply chains and barriers to the expansion of markets for local food (King, et al. 2010), published a how-to-guide on installing Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) machines at farmers markets for the acceptance of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits (USDA 2010), and developed the Food Environment Atlas, a mapping tool designed to show the relationship between poverty and food access.\footnote{37}

\footnote{35} Community Food Projects are matching funds granted to community groups to build sustainable local food systems that meet hunger, nutrition, and food security goals (National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition n.d.).

\footnote{36} Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food, while acknowledging publically support for the development of local food systems, the initiative is a marketing program, which highlights existing funds geared toward developing specialty crops markets and promoting direct to consumer outlets (Blythe 2010a).

\footnote{37} See USDA Economic Research Service 2012 for more information.
In 2009 Michele Obama, in a much publicized event, broke ground with help from elementary school students on a White House kitchen garden. The first lady continues to be a spokesperson about the importance of fresh, local foods for healthy eating (Burros 2009; Lawrence 2009; Swarns 2009).

This snapshot of activity in the United States, while not meant to provide a complete account of the developments around local food over the past several years, substantiates the degree to which the conventional food system has become a mainstream political issue in the United States and local food an increasingly accepted and appealing alternative. The rest of this chapter focuses on the Local Food Movement – examining the roots of the movement in the United States, its relationship to other movements, movement discourse and the strategies and practices of buy local food campaigns, and movement critiques emerging from academia.

**Understanding the Roots of the Local Food Movement in the United States**

The movement has re-occurred. The interest in having a direct connection with your food comes from having a sense of disconnection with nature and a feeling of estrangement from something fundamental. This sentimentality has reoccurred over and over again throughout history. This movement is another occurrence; it’s a continuation of this.

This statement – made by Jeff, a key MFF organizer, to the staff during a 2009 meeting – initiated a line of research for this dissertation focused on understanding the relationship of the Local Food Movement to a lineage of land based movements that have emerged to redress and limit the direction of society. Jeff’s observation suggests that the Local Food Movement is an expression of a continuous movement, one that has occurred throughout history in relation to industrialization, urbanization, the rise of mass consumer

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38 The names of all study participants are pseudonyms.
culture and economic globalization – historical shifts that have fundamentally changed people’s relationships to each other and to nature and have had profound social and environmental consequences. From this perspective, the Local Food Movement is, as Touraine suggests, part the work that society performs upon itself to challenge and legitimize the cultural practices and beliefs that define way of life.

In the United States, land movements – palpable movements of people from urban to rural environments – extend back to the 1800s and revolve around the tradition of agrarianism and the belief that estrangement from the land, from an agriculture base, is responsible for social and environmental problems. In American culture, these ideas are linked to a tradition of agrarianism. The ideas of Thomas Jefferson are closely connected to a philosophy of agrarianism. Two hundred years ago, Jefferson extolled the qualities of farming that enabled a man to live a simple independent life, with the ability to provide for himself and his family (Jacob 1997). Scholar, poet, and farmer Wendell Berry (2002), in the same rhetorical tradition, writes about the “agrarian mind,” one rooted in the land, intimate with local plants, animals, and soils, and in its possibilities and limitations.

Writing in the 1970s, Berry (1977) directly connects a “crisis of culture” – the breakdown of community; irresponsible use of land and resources; a complicit dependency on society and government to provide; the prevalence of the discontented, insecure, and unhealthy American – to an estrangement from our agricultural base. The modern industrial eater, writes Berry (1990), completely alienated from food production, has no knowledge of the connections between eating and the land. In the same vein, Belasco (1997) identifies the rise and consolidation of urban-industrial society as the common thread throughout 150 years of food protest. This historical trend is the basis of
increasing distance from food production and is at the root of “a crisis of moral accountability” evident in movements that have challenged the imperatives and impacts of the market economy throughout US history. The crisis centers on the anonymity of food production and the concomitant lack of accountability to consumers, to land, to workers; the alienation the modern food system creates from nature and other people; and the preponderance of technology that attempts to subvert natural processes and creates negative environmental consequences.

In the midst of rapid industrialization and urbanization in the 1800s, a back to nature movement emerged amid concerns about the depletion of natural resources and a perceived growing disconnection from the natural world. Key figure Henry David Thoreau argued that in the midst of increasing social problems, people needed to reconnect with nature and indeed during the early to mid 1800s, there was a palpable migration of people out of towns and cities and into the country to embrace simpler lives (Mertig 2007).

A contiguous concern emerged again in the 1920s with increasing urbanization – the 1920 US Census showed that more than 50 percent of Americans lived in towns and cities with more than 2500 inhabitants – and a widespread belief that this trend would undermine American national character (Jacob 1997:7). As Jacob (1997:7) writes, growing up on a farm was believed to be integral to the formation of integrity and good character. Without that agrarian upbringing, citizens would be reared in environments that did not teach “responsibility, resourcefulness, and hard work” (Jacob 1997:7). This widely held perception combined with rural conditions pushing farm families off the land – i.e., due to the lack of rural public services and infrastructure – revived an agrarian
sentiment that sparked a back to the land movement that stretched to World War II (Jacob 1997:8). During that time period, discourse in America extolled the virtues of life on the farm and more and more people migrated to the country to become “gentleman” farmers or commercial agriculturalists. Publications like the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Country Life* told readers how to find property in the country and survive and prosper on small acreages (Jacob 1997:8). USDA Census of Agriculture figures documented 1.7 million people left cities and towns for farms, about 80 percent of the total migrating to cities and towns (Jacob 1997:9).

The Back to the Land Movement that emerged in the 1960s was part of a broad countercultural movement that was responding to corporatism, the excesses of consumer culture, and the environmental catastrophes of war, industry, and industrialized agriculture. The movement, shaped new ecological understandings influenced by writers like Rachel Carson, gave rise to an ecological imperative that recognized the interconnectedness of life, the fragility of the earth, and the human role in its care or destruction (Brinkerhoff and Jacob 1987; Jackson 1993; Jacob 1997; Jacob and Brinkerhoff 1986). A “radical environmentalism,” which stressed personal responsibility for the impact of daily life on the natural world, challenged the consumer ethic by concentrating efforts on the actions of individuals (Jackson 1993:30-34). Individuals embodied ecological consciousness through their choices, and collectively, individual choices provided the starting point for larger societal changes. The Back to the Land Movement was an expression of the ecological imperative and radical environmentalism.

Helen and Scott Nearing, who wrote from their homesteading experiences (Nearing and Nearing [1954]1970), were central figures of the movement; their actions
and writings inspired thousands to leave their city lives in search of simple rural lives in
tune with natural cycles. From the mid 1960s to the end of the 1970s, tens of thousands
of urban émigrés migrated from cities to the country to set up homesteads on a few acres
of land (Brinkerhoff and Jacob 1987; Jacob and Brinkerhoff 1986).\footnote{The 1970s was the first decade since the beginning of the US Census that the rural growth rate exceeded the urban (Brinkerhoff and Jacob 1987; Jacob and Brinkerhoff 1986).} The central idea
guiding movement action was the unification of theory and practice, of belief and action.
This ideological framework marked a significant divergence from the preponderance of
environmental discourse that espoused ethics but provided no means of acting on them
(Jackson 1993:28). Within radical environmentalism, the idea of a simple life – a rural
homestead on a few of acres of land – provided individuals and families with the means
to live in tune with ecological understandings and sensibilities and reject the tenets and
material effects of the consumer ethic. Describing an alternative ethic, the Nearings
(Nearing and Nearing [1954]1970:191 ) wrote: “Whatever the nature of one’s beliefs,
one’s personal conduct may either follow the belief pattern or diverge from it. In so far as
it diverges, it helps produce unwanted results. At the same time, it splits the personality
against itself. The most harmonious life is one in which theory and practice are unified.”

Organic agriculture was a significant component of the Back to the Land
Movement as well as the broader countercultural movement. In the context of the radical
politics of the 1960s and 1970s, a “countercuisine” focused on whole, organic foods
emerged to challenge the direction of dietary modernization and express opposition to
consumer culture (Belasco 2005, 1989). Organic food advocates honed their critique of
industrialized agriculture and agribusiness (Goodman and Goodman 2007:25-26). The
organic movement of this time period challenged the anonymity of industrialized food
production and embraced farmers markets, food cooperatives, and community gardens to return responsibility to the market (Belasco 1997:194). The emphasis was not only on production techniques – polycultures, cover cropping, crop rotation, biological pest control, closed loop systems of plant and animal production – but also on non-exploitative labor relations and equitable access to nutritious food (Goodman and Goodman 2007:25-26). Francis Moore Lappé’s *Diet for a Small Planet*, first published in 1971, exposed the inefficiency of the food industry – converting grains to livestock feed was both wasteful and unsustainable. The book, which became the bible of the countercuisine (Belasco 1997:193-194), framed freedom as the capacity to make choices “based upon awareness of the consequences of those choices” (Lappé 1991:52).

The current emphasis on local food systems emerged, Goodman and Goodman (2007) argue, from the conventionalization of organic agriculture. Early in the organic movement, a split emerged between advocates of a sustainable agriculture that directly critiqued industrialized agriculture and big agribusiness and agricultural scientists in the land grant university system focused on proving the scientific legitimacy of organic agriculture. University research focused on low input alternative agriculture, i.e., a reduction of chemical use. Within this sustainable agriculture strand, Buttel (1997) argues, rational conventional agriculture was replaced by an equally rational alternative agriculture, which benefitted large scale farming agribusiness and shut out smaller scale family farms. The industrialized version, in essence, reduced organic agriculture to a series of allowable inputs and monocultural production, marginalized the principles of closed farming systems, and displaced the social agenda of

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organic agriculture that focused on labor relations and food access (Goodman and Goodman 2007:24). Dissolutioned by its conventionalization and its codification in the USDA organic regulatory structure, those working in the organic movement lost faith that organic agriculture had the capacity to qualitatively transform the food system (Goodman and Goodman 2007:23-24). With this dissolutionment, there has been a shift in focus from organic to local, to the emergence of “post-organic” movements centered on local food systems.

The shift in focus to local and regional food systems also came out of the decline in the 1990s in foundation support for the development of sustainable production practices. Hesterman (2006), a former program director at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation – itself a long time funder of alternative food and agriculture projects in the United States – argues that the decline in funding essentially forced organizations with a sustainable agriculture concentration to move beyond production practices and reframe their work in terms of agricultural and economic development (Hesterman 2006:264). This shift Hesterman argues provided the framework to galvanize the interests of a diverse group of stakeholders (e.g., farmers, consumers, food businesses) around diverse food and agricultural issues (health, environment, economy), which a sole focus on sustainable agriculture excluded.

“Buy Local” Consumer Campaigns in the United States

In the United States, “buy local” food consumer campaigns have emerged as a primary strategy of food system localization efforts (Allen and Hinrichs 2007; Maye, et al. 2008:7; also see FoodRoutes n.d. for a list of regionally-based food initiatives in the
Buy Local campaigns are grounded in the strategy of political or ethical consumerism. Labeled by Hinrichs and Allen (2008) as “selective patronage” campaigns, buy local campaigns focus on the consumer as a key instrument of change and direct consumers to buy food from local farmers. With a focus on the power of consumer purchasing practices, these initiatives aim to create market demand for local food; in theory, market demand provides farmers with the incentive to grow food for local markets and increase their production capacity (Hinrichs and Allen 2008:331).

The first documented buy local food initiative in the United States is Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA). Based in Amherst, Massachusetts, CISA formed in 1993 and over a period of several years, with funding from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, developed a multi-media marketing campaign to promote locally grown food and build markets for small scale local farms (Hesterman 2006:278-279). The local food campaign CISA launched in 1999 – “Be a Local Hero, Buy Locally Grown Food” – became a model for the development and expansion of other local food campaigns in other regions through an initiative of the FoodRoutes Network.

FoodRoutes, established in 1997, is a national nonprofit organization focused on promoting regionally based food systems in the United States (Allen and Hinrichs 2007:258). In 2002, FoodRoutes, with funding from the Kellogg Foundation, began

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41 The literature in geography categorizes food localization strategies geographically. In Europe, localization efforts have been part of a broader EU strategy to improve farmer and rural livelihoods and preserve the uniqueness of European food cultures (Allen and Hinrichs 2007; Libery and Kneafsey 1998; Maye, et al. 2008). European initiatives focus on the link between product and place to add value to agricultural products. Initiatives aim to promote and protect foods with territorial or regional associations and regionally distinct foods are distributed in regional and national markets. In the United States, food system localization efforts are dominated by “buy local” consumer campaigns and activities focus on the development of alternative supply chains (e.g., farmers markets, CSAs, on farm sales, farm stores, etc) and shorter supply chains where grocery stores and other food outlets source from local farms (Allen and Hinrichs 2007; Maye, et al. 2008:7).
working with community groups around the country to develop local food campaigns using CISA’s campaign model (Hesterman 2006); MFF was one of these community groups. FoodRoutes formed a “learning community” of 10 organizations, and over a period of two years, the groups met regularly to share successes, failures, and insights into the processes of developing local food campaigns in their regions (Hesterman 2006). Informed by the results of consumer research, FoodRoutes developed the “Buy Fresh Buy Local” local food logo, and learning community participant groups had access to a suite of marketing and promotional templates that could be customized to their locations (Allen and Hinrichs 2007; Hinrichs and Allen 2008:334-335). A decade later, local food consumer campaigns abound in the United States. As an indication of their profusion, the Buy Fresh Buy Local “franchise” has 69 chapters across 23 states, each using the same template customized to reflect food products of the region (FoodRoutes n.d.).

**Local Food Movement Discourse**

The increasing diversity of disciplines contributing to the growing body of scholarly research on the Local Food Movement – anthropology, sociology, environmental studies, geography, sustainable agricultural programs, agricultural economics, political science, the health sciences, urban planning and design, etc – echoes an increasingly broad base of movement activists and advocates that are looking to the movement as a means to address environmental degradation, local or regionally directed economic development, health and wellness, social equity, and community autonomy. The claims cited by local food advocates and the scholars range from the qualities of local food (e.g., local food is more flavorful, fresher, more nutritious) to the environmental, social, and economic impacts of localizing food systems. At the heart of
claims surrounding the Local Food Movement is the idea that localizing food systems
democratizes the food system and provides participants with the means to directly impact
systems of food production. The process of embedding food production and provision in
local contexts is the path to addressing issues of equity and social justice. Advocates and
scholars articulate impacts in relation to the negative practices and effects of the
conventional food system, and local food systems are framed as a sustainable alternative.

*Local Food Systems Democratize Food Production and Provision*

Local food systems foster democratic participation in food production and
provision and provide the means to “internalize” the environmental, social, and economic
externalities\(^\text{42}\) of the conventional food system (Allen, et al. 2003:64; Kloppenburg, et al.
1996). Key to the goals and desirable impacts of localizing food systems is the “local”
aspect. Local food systems are grounded in the circumstances of particular places, and
this key quality enables them to respond to the particularities of ecology, economy, and
community. Modern geographies of food separate producers and consumers by vast
distances and the distance obscures the social relations and practices of food production.
Local food systems, characterized by close linkages between production and
consumption, challenge the atomistic market relations of the global economy and the
notion of the self-interested rational “optimizer” of neoclassical economics.

Democratic participation is a product of market transparency; market
transparency is the product of short food supply chains and the (developing)
interconnectivity between community members. In essence, local food systems

\(^{42}\) Term used to describe the consequences, the “side effects,” of industrial or commercial activity but
which are not accounted for in the price of products. In relation to the agri-food industry, externalities are
typically associated with negative consequences on things like health and the environment.
defetishize the processes and impacts of food production, and in doing so, put food production back into consumer consciousness, engaging the public in the issues surrounding food production (e.g., land use, labor) and fostering democratic participation (Allen and Hinrichs 2007; Johnston, et al. 2009; Kloppenburg, et al. 1996). Kerton and Sinclair (2010), in their research with farmers market shoppers and CSA subscribers, found that participants’ experiences in these contexts engendered a “transformational learning process” – the critical reflection of participants on food production and on the practices of the conventional food system. Meaningful and direct connections with food and with the producers of food challenged dominant normative ideologies related to food and food production and led to shifts in participants’ perspectives and behaviors.

Following Polanyi’s idea of market embeddedness, the “local” embeds food economies in webs of social relations and creates a moral economy conditioned by social norms (Allen, et al. 2003:64; Kloppenburg, et al. 1996:6). Embedded in social contexts, economic behavior is conditioned by extra-economic concerns. Efforts to (re)build local food economies build community linkages between community members around the production, provision, and consumption of food (Kloppenburg, et al. 1996:6). This community building process deepens participants’ sense of place and community. Place-based relationships imbue the food produced and exchanged with extra-economic value and meaning (Allen, et al. 2003; Hinrichs 2000:296); food embodies a sense of belonging and responsibility to a community and to the land required for sustenance (Allen, et al. 2003:62-63; Kloppenburg, et al. 1996). Communities that depend on proximate lands, neighbors, and natural resources to satisfy human needs become concerned – both practically and ethically – with their welfare and sustainability. Stronger attachments to
place lead to greater awareness of place-based limitations, possibilities, and needs; food economies organized at local scales can respond to community needs and develop local solutions related to issues of food and social justice, e.g., food access and workers rights (Allen and Hinrichs 2007:260; Halweil 2002). In practice, an informed and engaged public, through consumer agency, participate in a democratic process that directly shapes the characteristics and qualities of their food system (Allen and Hinrichs 2007; Hassanein 2003:79; Hinrichs and Allen 2008; Johnston, et al. 2009). Community members assume responsibility for the quality of food and the environmental and social impacts of its production (Grey 2000; Kloppenburg, et al. 1996:9-10).

Local Food Systems Foster Environmental Sustainability

The claim that local food systems have positive environmental impacts pivots on the idea of food miles and on the assumption that food production at local scales is practiced by small scale farms more committed to using environmentally friendly production practices (Goodman and Goodman 2007; Lockie and Halpin 2005; Norberg-Hodge, et al. 2002). Academics and activists use food miles, the distance food travels from the point where it is grown to the point where it is consumed, to illustrate fundamental differences between conventional and local food systems (Grey 2000; Halweil 2002; Kloppenburg, et al. 1996; Pirog and Benjamin 2003). As a calculation, food miles provides an indicator of the amount of energy or fuel used to transport food from farm to end consumers; lower food miles equal lower transportation fuel usage and cost (Pirog 2004b). Fifteen hundred miles is the statistic most often referenced to cite the environmental impact, the use of fossil fuels, of the conventional food system (Halweil 2002; Pirog and Benjamin 2003). In shrinking the distance between production and
consumption, localizing production and consumption reduces the number of miles food travels and carbon emissions.

The ability of local food systems to promote environmentally sound agricultural practices also revolves around normative assumptions associated with small scale farming. “Small farms,” “family farms,” “small-scale farming” appear consistently in the scholarly literature and in the discourse of local food campaigns (Allen and Hinrichs 2007; Goodman and Goodman 2007; Grey 2000; Halweil 2002; Hinrichs 2003; Kloppenburg, et al. 1996, 2000; Lockie and Halpin 2005). The normative assumption is that in contrast to industrial scale monocrop production, small scale farms are more likely to practice polyculture and grow a wide variety of crops, which preserves and contributes to biodiversity (Allen and Hinrichs 2007:261). Because of their scale, small farms are less likely to be mechanized or rely on industrial inputs and practices. Smaller-scale polycultural production requires a more intimate knowledge of the land, and farmers are able to manage pests, nutrients, soil, etc in more environmentally sound ways (Halweil 2002; Hinrichs 2003). Across the discourse of US local food campaigns, as observed within individual initiatives’ “reasons to buy local food,” 43 is the notion that local food systems foster environmental sustainability in part because local farms preserve open space and provide wildlife habitat by keeping land out of development.

43 In July 2001, Growing for Market, a publication for small scale farmers growing for local markets, published the original “10 Reasons to Buy Local Food.” This original list of reasons has been widely adopted and adapted by local food campaigns across the country. For adaptations of the original 10 reasons see, for example, Grow NYC (n.d.); the University of Vermont Extension (Grubinger 2010); the Kerr Center (n.d.); Buy Fresh Buy Local Nebraska (University of Nebraska-Lincoln 2012); and Piedmont Grown (2011).
Local Food Systems Create Local Economic Viability

A prominent element of the movement discourse revolves around the economic impacts of buying locally grown food. Primary in this discourse is the benefit to local family farms – buying locally grown food “supports family farms,” “supports your farming neighbors,” “supports local families,” “strengthens local economies.” The discourse cites the retail food dollar and the fraction of the food dollar that farmers actually receive for their products, about 16 cents. Local food supply chains are more profitable for farmers, because they eliminate supply chain middlemen and provide farmers with opportunities to sell direct to consumers (LaTrobe 2001; Tregear 2011).

Furthermore, supporting local farms has a broader economic benefit for local communities – “local food keeps taxes down,” “local food keeps your taxes in check,” “buying local keeps your food dollars close to home.” Several versions of the “reasons to buy local food,” drawing from studies conducted by American Farmland Trust on the “cost of community services” (Freedgood, et al. 2002), claim that farms contribute more in taxes than they need in services. In contrast, suburban development requires more in services than they contribute in taxes. Furthermore buying food from local farms keeps money circulating in the local economy; it has the potential to economically benefit the wider community through the multiplier effect – increased employment and income opportunities for non-agricultural sectors (Allen and Hinrichs 2007; Halweil 2002; Meter

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44 For examples see “reasons to buy local food” on the websites of Grown NYC (n.d.); the University of Vermont Extension (Grubinger 2010); The Kerr Center (n.d.); Buy Fresh Buy Local Nebraska (University of Nebraska-Lincoln 2012); and Piedmont Grown (2011).
45 As noted earlier, the farm share of the food dollar is just under 16 cents; the remaining 86 cents is absorbed by processing, packaging, transportation, retail trade, food services, energy, and insurance. See Canning 2011 for more information.
46 For examples, see the University of Vermont Extension (Grubinger 2010), Grow NYC (n.d.), Kerr Center (n.d.), and Growing for Market (2001).
2011; O'Hara 2011; Swenson 2008, 2011; Tregear 2011). The economic benefit of localizing food systems is also the focus of an increasing number of local food assessments – studies conducted to quantify the economic boon of localizing production and consumption, i.e., how much the localization process will add to the defined local economy.47

**Local Food is Fresher, Better Tasting, More Nutritious**

The freshness, taste, and nutritional value of food produced locally is another key claim of movement discourse (Allen and Hinrichs 2007). Across the discourse of local food campaigns, the qualities of freshness and taste are first among the ten reasons to buy locally grown food. In contrast to industrialized food production, local food is grown for taste, not for long distance travel. Local food is harvested at the peak of ripeness and distributed to consumers within hours of harvest, giving local food exceptional freshness, flavor, as well as nutritional content, which with produce diminishes with age. Murdoch et al (2000), writing a decade ago about the perception of “quality” in food production, argue that with consumers quality has come to be intrinsically linked with nature and with the local embeddedness of production. Quality is defined by personal knowledge of the foods produced and through relationships of trust with producers. In the context of food scares, rising ecological concerns, and greater awareness of industrialized production practices, which aim to subvert natural processes, consumers are seeking foods explicitly linked to nature. Local foods, which are strongly rooted in local ecosystems and local social structures, appeal to consumers for this reason. Indeed, the practices of food companies support the assertions of Murdoch and his colleagues.

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Johnson et al (2009), in their study of the marketing practices of the top 25 global food processors, found that companies consistently use images that connect products to particular locales and family farms. Narratives tell histories or stories to suggest a local rather than a global scale of operation and obscure centralized ownership structures and widely dispersed commodity chains.

Increasingly, the literature ties local food to health and wellness claims. Food system localization improves nutrition by increasing the availability and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, reducing the incidence of obesity and related health impacts (Alkon and Mares 2012; Allen and Guthman 2006; Bagdonis, et al. 2008; Cleveland, et al. 2011; Freedman 2009; Salois 2011). Farm to School initiatives in a particular have galvanized the interests of advocates across sustainable agriculture, public health, and anti-hunger. Activities that bring food produced by local farms to school cafeterias provide a means to increase the fresh fruit and vegetable consumption of children and improve their nutritional intake (Allen and Guthman 2006; Bagdonis, et al. 2008). Farm to school programs, because they work through the national school lunch program, have the potential to impact all school aged children and because they are accessible to all income classes a means to address poverty related food insecurity (Alkon and Mares 2012; Allen and Guthman 2006).

Movement Critiques

In the scholarly literature, food system localization strategies are discussed variously under the labels of alternative agriculture movements (AAMs), sustainable agriculture movements (SAMs), and alternative food geographies (AFGs). Each of these labels identify movements that encompass “alternative” production-consumption
relationships, alternative to those characteristic of the conventional agri-food system and include food movements and initiatives like fair trade, slow food, organic agriculture, food sovereignty, a term McMichael (2004) applies to the global South, and initiatives aimed at localizing food production and consumption. Over the past decade, local food has occupied an increasingly central role in this literature, paralleling the rise and intensity of initiatives and programs focused on developing local food systems. Exactly what is alternative about these alternatives has largely been left unproblemitized (Eden, et al. 2008:1045; Maye, et al. 2008), and critical analyses of the Local Food Movement – its goals, strategies, and impacts – question the validity of movement claims.

What is Alternative about Local Food?

Semantically, Local Food Movement scholarship is critical of the use of the term “alternative” to describe local food efforts, because it suggests a dichotomy between local food initiatives and the conventional food system, i.e., that local food initiatives are separate from and do not work through conventional food chains (Maxey 2008; Maye, et al. 2008). Nevertheless, the construction of local is connected to and mediated by global, conventional food supply chains (Johnston and Baker 2005). Farms and businesses that participate in local food supply chains are still tied to the industrialized food system so a term that implies a binary framework – conventional versus alternative – does not capture the hybridized nature of food enterprises engaged in local food supply chain practices part time (Maxey 2008; Watts, et al. 2005). Movement advocates claim that local food presents both a necessary and desirable alternative to the conventional food system – one that presents environmental, social, and economic benefits. Critics contend, however, that there is no empirical evidence to substantiate these claims (Allen and Hinrichs 2007).
Within this overarching critique, Born and Purcell (2006) caution that in assuming local food systems are inherently more environmentally sustainable and socially just, scholars and activists fall into the “local food trap.” The crux of their argument is that scale and the qualities of scale are socially produced. There is nothing inherently ‘good’ or ‘bad’ associated with any scale. Positive or negative outcomes are not produced by scale; they are produced by social actors with particular agendas. Accordingly, local food systems are not inherently more sustainable; nor are local foods necessarily fresher, healthier, and better tasting.

In line with this critique, Allen et al (2003) point out that much of the scholarship on food system localization focuses on the movement’s shared broad goals and claims but not on the “militant particularisms,” the situatedness of individual initiatives. Initiatives are particular to place; resistance is situated within particular sets of social circumstances, within particular historical contexts. Terms like environmental and agricultural sustainability, social justice, and economic viability, which are used to characterize broad movement claims, have different meanings and manifestations in different places and accordingly figure into the goals and strategies for change in unique places uniquely (Allen, et al. 2003:62). Furthermore, Allen and Hinrichs (2007:269) point out that the ambiguity of what local references – a particular place, a people, a set of values, particular production practices – means that local can represent just about anything or nothing at all. In this sense the utility and meaning of local is context dependent and scholarship must ground this food system “alternative” in empirical, theoretically informed research (Allen and Hinrichs 2007:269; Maye, et al. 2008:2).
Commensurate with the critique that Local Food Movement claims lack substantiation, a number of studies directly challenge the supposed environmental, social, and economic outcomes of localizing food systems. Several debunk the energy savings claimed by academics and organizers, pointing out the inefficiency of local food supply chains. Specific studies show that small farms use more energy per unit of food than do larger farms (Schlich and Fleissner 2005), and that the shorter distances of local food supply chains can be countered by the low loading capacity of vehicles used for food transportation to local markets (Wallgren 2006). In addition, researchers challenge the notion of food miles as a valid indicator of environmental sustainability, because it does not account for all of the energy expended from production to plate (Cleveland, et al. 2011; Saunders, et al. 2006; Weber and Matthews 2008). Food packaging and processing, consumers traveling in their cars to and from food shops, and the use of fertilizers, pesticides, and other chemical inputs in production also emit greenhouse gasses that are not accounted for in the food miles concept. In terms of total energy expended, food miles account for a relatively small proportion of all the greenhouse gasses emitted, about four percent.\footnote{While food miles account for about 40 percent of the greenhouse gasses emitted during food transport, within the total agri-food system, food miles account for a relatively small proportion of greenhouse gasses, about four percent (Cleveland, et al. 2011; Weber and Matthews 2008); the largest proportion of greenhouse gasses is emitted during production (Weber and Matthews 2008).} In an often cited study, Saunders et al (2006), calculating total energy expended growing food in the United Kingdom versus importing food produced in New Zealand to the United Kingdom, found that the latter was more energy efficient. Other studies show that dietary shifts such as eating less red meat is more effective in lowering greenhouse gas emissions than buying from local farms (Weber and Matthews 2008).
Concomitant with these analyses are a series of criticisms from academia (and the food industry) grounded in the concept of comparative advantage. The core of these arguments is that local food economies contradict the comparative advantage principle with negative economic, social, and environmental implications (Lusk and Norwood 2011; McDonald 2006; McWilliams 2009; Prevor 2011). Lusk and Norwood (2011), both professors of agricultural economics at Oklahoma State University state: “a major flaw in the case for buying local is that it is at odds with the principle of comparative advantage. This principle, which economists have understood for almost 200 years, is one of the main reasons that the vast majority of economists believe in free trade. Free trade, whether across city, state, or national boundaries, causes people to produce the goods or services for which they have a comparative advantage and, thus, makes virtually everyone wealthier.” From this perspective buying local destroys jobs in developing nations and hurts farmers in other parts of the world that depend on global markets (McDonald 2006; McWilliams 2009). Local food is isolationist and will hurt trading relationships between countries (McDonald 2006). Local food production is inefficient and, in ignoring the efficiencies that come with economies of scale, will increase food prices, exacerbate food insecurity, and produce negative environmental impacts (Desrochers and Shimizu 2012; McDonald 2006; McWilliams 2009).

The Primacy of Economic Goals

One of the key critiques that has emerged from academia revolves around the primacy accorded by movement organizers and supporters to economic goals and strategies and a concomitant tangential focus on issues of social justice. These critiques question the capacity of a movement focused on directing consumer consumption

Across the United States, local food consumer campaigns – premised on social, economic, and environmental sustainability – have emerged as the dominant strategy for building local food systems (Allen and Hinrichs 2007; Hinrichs and Allen 2008). In the market environment, consumer movements designed to motivate and direct consumer purchasing practices are grounded in the notion of “consumer as citizen” – choices to purchase or conversely boycott particular items drive changes to the market and create social change (Barnett, et al. 2005; Hinrichs and Allen 2008; Johnston 2008; Micheletti 2003). Various labeled “consumer politics,” “political consumerism,” (Micheletti 2003) “ethical consumerism,” (Barnett, et al. 2005) “selective patronage” (Hinrichs and Allen 2008), and “citizen-consumer” (Johnston 2008), this idea connects everyday consumption practices with the pursuit of “explicit moral and political values” (Barnett, et al. 2005:29). The consumer is a citizen with a sense of social, political, and environmental responsibility. Political consumers choose products on the basis of their politics – a particular set of values and ethics – and the politics of products – the natural and human resources utilized to create them (Micheletti 2003). In this sense, activities that promote political consumerism aim to defetishize the ecological and social underpinnings of food commodities and heighten consumer awareness about the need for responsible purchasing decisions (Hinrichs and Allen 2008:336; Johnston 2008). Hinrichs and Allen (2008) in their use of the term “selective patronage” make explicit the involvement of human agency and of social relations and power in consumer activism.
campaigns. Selective implies the presence of “winners” and “losers.” Consumer practices involve “processes of inclusion and exclusion” that influence the distribution and quality of material goods. Goods with certain qualities are selected over goods that lack those qualities; following, particular values or sets of values are simultaneously affirmed and denied. Patronage implies the presence of social relations and power. Customers patronize particular types of businesses that carry particular types of products. Businesses depend on sustained patronage to be economically sustainable and accordingly, consumers wield significant economic sway (Hinrichs and Allen 2008:336).

Explaining the emergence of market-based social movement tactics, King and Pierce (2010) note that historically the object of social movement action has been the state and government regulation of markets. With economic globalization, with the ascendance of neoliberalism and the waning power of states to regulate the flow of capital, labor standards, and environmental regulations, collective action is using the logic of the market to redress disparities created by it (Alkon and Mares 2012; Allen and Guthman 2006, 2008; Johnston 2008:262; King and Pearce 2010). Within this framework, movement organizers and activists work within a market-based approach to create gradual change within the food system through the construction of consumer demand and market transparency. In keeping with the assessment of Kloppenburg et al (1996), movement organizers pursue a strategy to “hollow out” the conventional food system through an incremental reorganizing of production and consumption relationships. In theory, market transparency engenders a shift in perception. Knowledge and choice are linked (Guthman 2008:1176). With more knowledge – of where food is from, how it was
produced, who produced it – individuals will make better, more informed choices, which will lead to larger political, social, and economic changes (Allen, et al. 2003:73).

Scholars studying movement activities challenge the movement’s market-based premise and question the capacity of the market to direct meaningful social change (Barnett, et al. 2005; Eden 2011; Hinrichs and Allen 2008; Johnston 2008) and address issues of social justice (Alkon and Mares 2012; Allen 2004; Allen, et al. 2003; Allen and Guthman 2006; Allen and Hinrichs 2007; DeLind 2002, 2003, 2011; Goodman and Goodman 2007; Guthman 2008). At the heart of this critique is the contention that movement goals and activities, while opposing the economic neoliberalizations related food and agriculture, actually (re)produce neoliberal forms (Guthman 2008:1172). The neoliberal ethos pervades the strategies and practices of movement organizers.

Allen and her colleagues (Allen, et al. 2003), contrasting the Local Food Movement with the alternative agriculture movements of the 1960s and 1970s in California, contend that organizers today begin from an acceptance of the structures and parameters of the current food system. The movements of the 60s and 70s directly challenged conventional agriculture and, within the context of national movements for civil rights and environmental protection, also challenged the social relations of production that characterized and supported industrial agriculture in California. Local food initiatives, rather than focusing on the right of citizens – to have access to healthy food, to safe working conditions, etc – focus on the right of consumers to be able to choose alternatives.

As argued by Guthman (2008:1176), if “neoliberal governmentality is about instilling the logic of choice” – “making citizens into consumers” – then agri-food
activism centered on consumer choice contributes to the production of neoliberal subjectivities. Consumption centered initiatives like buy local consumer campaigns further legitimate the neoliberal devolution of regulatory responsibility to individuals (Guthman 2008:1176-1177). The labeling schemes of local, as well as organic and fair trade, in providing individuals with a means to opt-out of the conventional food system, consent to and advance the neoliberal roll-back of regulations, social protections, and services. The justification of farm to school programs in terms academic achievement is a concession to the institutional performance measures of neoliberal policies, e.g., standardized testing through No Child Left Behind (Allen and Guthman 2006:411).

Movement discourse that frames children as the next generation of consumers focuses on the right of children to have choices, not their right to eat nutritious food (Allen and Guthman 2006:411-412). The reliance on the market to solve social problems, through entrepreneurialism, through individual will, sanctions the neoliberal rhetoric of individual responsibility. However, “better” individual choices do not necessarily change the political economic priorities that provoked movement action.

In reducing participants to consumers whose primary responsibility is consumption, buy local food consumer campaigns offer limited space for advancing or addressing social justice (Allen and Guthman 2006; Allen and Hinrichs 2007; DeLind 2002; Hinrichs and Allen 2008). Commensurate with the neoliberal ethic, the movement conflates consumerism with civic engagement (Allen and Guthman 2006:411-412). The focus on consumer agency promulgates the belief that individual consumption habits can change the world one meal at a time. The activist framework that centers on the notion of “voting with your dollar” does not directly challenge the hyper commodification of food,
i.e. does not challenge a neoliberal ideology and practice of putting profits before feeding hungry people, before worker health and safety (Hinrichs 2000). To quote DeLind (2002:275): “…it is assumed that ‘quality of life’ will naturally be strengthened through greater investment in economic entrepreneurship and in the application of more regionally sensitive models and technologies for production and consumption.” The focus, DeLind (2002:276, emphasis in original) argues, is on “a sense of me rather than a sense of we” – on the consumer, not the citizen, community member, or neighbor. This idea creates an illusion of fairness and obscures the inequities in the marketplace; consumers are not equally positioned to “vote” with their dollars (DeLind 2011:276). CSAs and farmers markets for example have been shown to cater to wealthier customers, largely educated, middle class customers (Goodman and Goodman 2007:34; Hinrichs 2000:301; Hinrichs and Kremer 2002). Goodman and Goodman (2007:34) note that nationwide CSA shareholders follow a particular demographic pattern: 90 percent are European-American, highly educated, and middle to upper income.

Questioning the transformative power of what amounts to voluntary consumption practices, Johnson (2008) observes an inherent contradiction between *citizenship* and *consumerism* and, in this contradiction, ask how the individual self-interest of consumerism and an engaged citizenship that prioritizes the common good can be reconciled. Consumerism is “a way of life dedicated to the possession and use of consumer goods”; consumers maximize self-interest through commodity choice (Johnston 2008:242). The consumer ethos that emerged with Fordism, which linked mass production and mass consumption, expanded commodity choice beyond the wealthy elite to the social masses. This “democratization” of commodity choice, Johnston (2008:242)
argues, is the central tenet of modern consumerism. Choice – choosing from among a myriad of products – not only describes what people do in the marketplace, consumer choice is intimately connected to a “sense of freedom” and to the way individuals – who make independent choices – build unique identities and engage with the world (Eden 2011). Citizenship, conceived of as “a system of individual rights and responsibilities to a civil and natural commons” (Johnston 2008:251), reorients economic activity away from profit maximizing and around equitable distribution and sustainable provisioning for human needs. While providing citizens with opportunities to express social and environmental concerns and more sustainable choices, ethical consumerism that puts consumer choice at the center reifies an ideology of consumerism and limits the ability for engaged citizenship (Johnston 2008). Following, Allen and Hinrichs (2007:265) argue that initiatives – using and appropriating the marketing techniques and strategies of the conventional food system to persuade consumers to buy local – are “fighting capitalism with capitalism” (Allen and Hinrichs 2007:265). Buy local slogans and visually appealing marketing materials, albeit appealing, become proxies for substantive public engagement with the complexities of the food system.

The limitations of movement strategies for addressing social justice also lie in the seemingly exclusive emphasis on supporting local farms. Local food initiatives strongly privilege economic discourses and rationales centered on the economic viability of family farms, which are represented as repositories of community values and sites of resistance to the pervasive power of corporate agri-food systems (Allen and Hinrichs 2007; Goodman and Goodman 2007; Hinrichs and Allen 2008). Framed within a social justice critique, Allen (2004) contends that the efforts and practices of alternative food systems
focus almost exclusively on securing markets for producers and the social reproduction of
the family farm. This emphasis privileges the interests one group – farmers – over the
interest of others groups that also labor in the food system. Beyond efforts to provide
support to small scale farmers – albeit also a disadvantaged group – movement strategies
rarely engage in efforts to benefit other disadvantaged groups – minorities, women, low-
income populations (Allen and Hinrichs 2007:266-267). In their content analysis of buy
local food campaigns in the United States, Allen and Hinrichs (2007:266-267) found no
evidence, for example, that campaigns worked with public food assistance programs like
Women, Infants and Children (WIC) or senior nutrition programs.

Reflecting on the potentially corrosive power of big business on movement
integrity, movement appraisals also point to the impacts of the market on the movement,
on the increasing conventionalizing or mainstreaming of local (Barnett, et al. 2005;
Walmart’s buy local food program as an indicator of the movement’s popularity, argues
that local – and the qualities and values associated with it – is becoming a commodity
attribute, just one of many attributes in the marketplace. Walmart, Lays, and other large
corporate food entities are defining the limits of local and in the process diluting local
and alienating local from the place-based ecologies and relationships engaged in
production and consumption. In a similar vein, Allen and Hinrichs (2007:268) looking at
the emergence of the buy local programs of Sodexho, Whole Foods Market, and fast food
chains, wonder how the incorporation of local food by large multi-national food
companies supports the goals of the Local Food Movement. Citing Halweil’s celebration
of the conventionalization of local food as a victory, they wonder if is it indeed a victory
and, if so, for whom? Is it a victory, for example, for the small local businesses that compete with these enterprises?

**The Moral Economy**

Scholars also question the degree to which Local Food Movement strategies are able to cultivate moral economies embedded in social relationships of mutual trust and reciprocity. Commensurate with scholarship that interrogates the “alternativeness” of local food, Goodman and Goodman (2007:28-29) argue that scholarship assumes an “ideological agrarianism,” which promotes the idea that local family farms are more benign than large conventional producers, upholding and promoting nonmarket ecological and social values even though they are embedded in capitalist markets and fully depend on capitalist markets for their reproduction. Furthermore, Goodman and Goodman (2007:28-29) argue, the assumed idea that local food systems are embedded within moral economies paints a picture of conflict-free local knowledges, values, and practices and in doing so erases local politics and inequities that also exist in local spaces.

DeLind (2003:203) writing from her experience as a CSA participant, critiques popular CSA rhetoric – shared commitment, shared responsibility, community – and contends that a CSA is in essence a business arrangement, sometimes one of several market strategies used by farmers, between farmers and members “across a more personable market divide.” In a similar vein, Hinrichs (2000) argues that scholars and activists conflate close spatial relations with social relations. The face to face interactions characteristic of CSAs and farmers markets are assumed to promote the development of relationships between consumers and farmers and exhibit socially embedded market transactions. Nevertheless, Hinrichs argues that while direct markets do exhibit market
activity conditioned by personal relationships, social ties and personnel connections do not preclude instrumental behaviors or the relevance of price. DeLind (2011: 276), pointing to the mainstreaming of local and the implications of that for an engaged citizenry, criticizes movement strategies that make local food more convenient. The mainstreaming activities of movement organizers accommodate what she calls “the lazy locavore” – “too busy to pick up their own CSA shares, to disinterested to plant or weed their own gardens, but who have sufficient enlightenment and capital (possibly the same thing) to eat local.”

Allen and Hinrichs (2007:267) also argue that at the heart of selective patronage campaigns is a process that creates “others” and runs contrary to social justice goals. Buy local initiatives, they argue, have undertones of “defensive localism,” which demonize or define “others” from whom defined communities need protection (Allen and Hinrichs 2007:267). Commensurate with this view, Goodman and Goodman (2007:32) frame local food branding programs as a means to simultaneously create entry barriers for some farmers and other local economic agents while protecting the market from other farmers and economic agents.

In their analysis of the conventionalization and corporatization of organic food, Johnston et al (2009) consider the lessons relevant for the Local Food Movement. As organics has become increasingly industrialized and mainstreamed, the marketing strategies of corporate organics have tried to mitigate the homogenization indicative of the corporate “foodscape” by using messages and images that tie products to real places and people (Johnston, et al. 2009:524). The authors write: “What the corporate-organic foodscape arguably provides is thus a simulation of place, locality, and humanized
producers…” (Johnston, et al. 2009:525, emphasis in original). This “simulation” is key and, they argue, incompatible with the goals of food democratizing efforts, which seek to lay bare the processes and relations of production. To paraphrase Johnson and her colleagues (2009:525), corporate organics, which seek to obscure the industry’s imperative to maximize profit through global commodity chains with marketing strategies that connote the ideas and values of food democratizing efforts,\(^\text{49}\) have turned “food democracy” into a product with a particular set of features – be it organic, i.e., grown without the use of a particular set of synthetic inputs, or local, i.e., produced by small scale producers in a certain location. While products exhibiting these qualities offer consumers with a more ecological and socially sustainable choice, the point for Johnston et al (2009:525) is that while these features are a proxy for food democracy, the democracy piece is “thin and static.” The robustness of food democracy – the ability for the public to meaningful participate in and shape systems of food production – depends not just on the ability of consumers to vote with their dollars but on defetishization efforts that move beyond revealing marketing hypocrisy and hidden social relations of production and opening it to political contestation. In this framework, the goal of defetishization is not to provide another “pre-given, essentialized understanding of the nature of social reality, but rather to open the constitution of that social reality up to question” (Johnston, et al. 2009:526). Localization is desirable in that the proximity provides a good starting point for civic engagement. Nevertheless, local does not intrinsically mean just; defetishization has to “go all the way down” and defetishize local as intrinsically just (Johnston, et al. 2009:527).

\(^\text{49}\) Efforts to decentralize and scale food production that are sensitive to the ecological limitations and the needs of communities (Johnston, et al. 2009:510).
Conclusions

Framed within the theories presented in Chapter Two, the Local Food Movement can be understood as a countermovement that has emerged in late capitalism to challenge the principles and practices of the global agri-food industry. Over several decades, agricultural liberalization policies – designed to reduce barriers to trade and integrate national economies into one global economy – have had a tremendous impact on agricultural practices, food traditions, and communities worldwide. Once an anchor of societies, part of the economic and social fabric of communities, in the global economy, farming is one component of a complex agri-food system. In the United States, the increasing consolidation of agriculture into fewer, larger farms has mirrored the consolidation of the food industry into fewer but larger companies – retailers, wholesalers, processors, etc.

Framed within a discourse of global food security and potential scarcity, the actors of the agri-food industry advocate the need for “sustainable agriculture” – defined by science based technology and industrial-scale production organized through comparative advantage – to feed the world’s growing population. A broad base of countermovements challenge industry claims and practices and object broadly to the neoliberal paradigm that has had negative material and social impacts on local communities and usurped the power of communities to define their own food and agricultural systems.

Commensurate with Polanyi’s notion of embedded economies, the local food initiatives that comprise the Local Food Movement aim to create food economies grounded in social milieus. These initiatives challenge the instrumental rationality of
neoliberal economics and endeavor to embed economic decisions in extra-economic concerns. Consumer campaigns, which direct the public to buy food from ‘local’ farms, have emerged as the dominant expression of the Local Food Movement in the United States. The cultural politics of local food consumer campaigns advance a different notion of agriculture, one grounded in the particularities and relationships of place. Buying food from local farms provides an alternative to the industrialized global food system. Local food has desirable qualities; it is fresher, better tasting, and more nutritious. Buying local food sustains family farms and local communities. The scale of local food systems is more environmentally sound. Small farms do not use the industrialized practices of big agriculture, and food travels shorter distances reducing fossil fuel use.

Key to these benefits is proximity and the democratization of the food system. Shorter food supply chains create the market transparency absent in the global food system. With transparency consumers have knowledge of the impacts of their consumption choices and can make better, more informed choices. The development of relationships around the processes of food production and provisioning embed food economies in webs of social relations. Applying the concepts of social capital and place making, the community building aspects of the Local Food Movement create social ties and, through this process, participants’ sense of and attachment to place. Food is imbued with the significance of these relationships, and through consumer agency, the public make economic decisions commensurate with a growing place-based sensibility.

Viewed within Touraine’s idea that social movements are the work that society performs upon itself, part of the continuous struggle to define the ideas and practices that govern way of life, the roots of the Local Food Movement lie in relationship to a
succession of movements that have emerged throughout history to challenge the material and social impacts of societal development. As will be shown in Chapter Five, the movement in Western North Carolina has roots both in the neoliberalization of US agricultural policy and in the end of the federal tobacco program, and in the ideas of the Back to Land Movement, influential in the region in the 1970s and on one of the movement’s organizers.

Movement critiques argue that the claims of movement supporters are unsubstantiated. The scale of local is not intrinsically more environmentally, socially, or economically sustainable. Different scales are not independent entities with inherent qualities; the qualities and characteristics associated with local or global are produced by social actors pursuing specific goals.

The key critique of the Local Food Movement centers on the movement’s economic grounding – the primacy given to the economic viability of farmers above other groups and the movement’s approach, which focuses on the consumer as the key mechanism of change. Scholars challenge the basis of buy local consumer campaigns – political consumerism – and the ability of this approach to engender substantive change in the food system. This strategy, which characterizes local food initiatives across the United States, reifies the very system the movement purports to challenge. In using the market to redress the disparities created by the market, the movement affirms the logic of neoliberalism. As the instrument of social change, consumer choice, albeit consumer choice made with greater knowledge of market relations, legitimizes the neoliberal ethos of individual responsibility, conflates consumption with meaningful civic engagement, and assumes the presence of equal ability to make choices. Lacking in the Local Food
Movement is a direct challenge to the structures and principles and practices at the root of the economic, social, and environmental conditions that provoked movement action.

Missing from much of the academic appraisal of movement activity is scholarship grounded in the particularities of the movement – in the strategies and actions developed and enacted in the unique geographies, ecologies, and histories of place. The remainder of this dissertation is dedicated to examining the contours, the militant particularisms, of the Local Food Movement in Western North Carolina. While providing crucial sources of reflection on the broad goals and strategies and potential limitations of the Local Food Movement, my dissertation will show that the current scholarship provides a thin assessment of organizer strategies and, in assessing the movement from an ideal endpoint, fails to recognize the emergent nature of movement activity – the dialectical interplay between movement and industry actions and the significance of this dialectic for the continuing unfolding of the movement. It is in this hegemonic process – in the encounter between movement and industry actions – that the possibility for transformation occurs. In the reign of neoliberalism, where the logic of the market dominates daily life and conditions the way subjects relate to and interact in the world, is a strategy that focuses on consumer purchasing decisions a nod to neoliberal forms and practices, an unconscious manifestation of conditioned neoliberal economic subjects, or is it the natural starting point for movement action? Despite their critiques, Allen, Guthman, and Hinrichs (Allen and Guthman 2006; Allen and Hinrichs 2007) acknowledge that agri-food movements must work within the contemporary context of neoliberalization. Given the dominance of the consumer sensibility, a strategy that begins with consumer agency could be viewed as calculated because it recognizes the need to
engage movement participants and observers from where they are so to speak – from a point of shared human experience. The question is how movement organizers use neoliberal sensibilities in place to achieve different ends, and over time how this use transforms them. If movement organizers are using neoliberal sensibilities to create food system change, then they are using it to subvert the instrumental rationality of global neoliberal subjectivity. The cultural politics and place making strategies of the movement to anchor people in place are designed to instill a sense of place, to embed economic decisions in larger social concerns.

While the critique of political consumerism deserves real reflection and pause for thought, the focus of scholars on “consumption” – arguably an assumed negative connotation of consumption, i.e., blind, conspicuous consumption – ignores the power of human practice to engender change. Hegemony is comprised of configurations of human practices (and their relations) that make material normative ideas and beliefs. It is their collective performances that reify or challenge the status quo. Returning to Gibson-Graham’s analysis and application of second wave feminism to emerging “alternative” or unconventional economies, the performance of counter ideas, those embodied in human practice(s), have enormous transformative power. Furthermore, their analysis recognizes that people and place are mutually constitutive – politics are grounded in persons, and the cultivation and enactment of new practices of the self simultaneously transform the sensibilities of individuals and the places individuals inhabit. Applied to the Local Food Movement, the suite of strategies organizers use to build human and conceptual connections around food and agriculture is actually the mechanism of change. The market is a vehicle, a means to enact new and emerging sensibilities.
Given the centrality of human practices that involve food production and eating, these ideas have enormous implications for the study of the Local Food Movement. The global agri-food industry is a lived system of meanings and values sustained by the collective practices of individuals – the food procurement practices of grocery stores, restaurants, the institutional food services in hospitals, colleges, and public schools; the shopping, cooking, and eating preferences and practices of consumers. Framed in this manner, does a strategy that seeks to create new purchasing and consumption patterns truly lack the capacity to create substantive change?
Chapter Four:
Research Methods

In 2000 Mountain Family Farms (MFF), a non-profit organization based in Asheville, North Carolina, launched the “Local Food Campaign” to raise awareness about the benefits of buying locally grown food, develop local markets for local farms, and begin a process of (re)localizing the region’s food system. The campaign spearheaded – and continues to drive – a movement in the region comprised of farmers, food buyers for grocery stores, institutions, restaurants, and wholesale distributors, teachers, parents, Child Nutrition Directors, students, community organizations, cooperative extension, funders, and consumers in general, which to varying degrees are contributing to and accessing the changes taking place in the region’s food system.

This chapter outlines the research methods I used to study the Local Food Movement, specifically to investigate how the movement is interacting with and affecting the conventional food industry at the local level. Following this core objective, my research has focused on the ways movement organizers have created a movement culture, in terms of problem construction, the formation of a persuasive ideology and collective identity and mobilization, and how movement organizers mediate the tension between two key imperatives: engaging the dominant food system and protecting the integrity of movement goals. Commensurate with the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter
Two, the hegemonic process has been the focus of my research with a goal of understanding how this process drives changes to the food system.

To investigate these research objectives, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Western North Carolina between 2009 and 2012. I engaged in participant observation and conducted semi-structured interviews and archival research. My data collection focused strongly on the production of discourse, both pragmatic and ideational. As a study of an emergent and dynamic grassroots effort to change the food system, this combination of ethnographic research methods provided me with the on-the-ground, immersed perspective needed to observe unfolding events, document the history of movement strategies and actions, study processes of reflexive strategic action and assessment by movement organizers, and assess intermediate movement outcomes.

The Local Food Campaign, with the establishment of the Appalachian Fresh local food branding and certification program, encompasses the 23 counties of Western North Carolina and the mountainous counties of adjacent states – Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia, a region encompassing 60 counties. While my research considers the larger Appalachian Fresh region, my fieldwork was confined to Western North Carolina and was centered in the central mountains surrounding Asheville, the region’s major urban center, market, and location of MFF.

**Participant Observation**

Much of my insight into the Local Food Movement in the region is a result of my participant observation with MFF and with the events and activities MFF coordinated, participated in, and/or promoted. I began working with MFF as a volunteer in 2007 and joined the staff shortly thereafter. In my position at MFF, I have conducted research on
the region’s food system, conducted program evaluation, written grants and developed reports for funders, organized workshops and events, visited farms to develop farmer profiles, presented MFF’s work in the context of public speaking engagements, represented MFF at local and regional meetings, conferences, and events, and participated in the development, implementation, and administration of the Appalachian Fresh program. Through research and evaluation, I have learned much about the region’s agriculture and food system and gained insight into the way that organizers use research and evaluation to guide their work and validate their claims. In my role as a researcher, I have participated in the formulation and implementation of research designed to increase organizers’ understanding of the region’s agricultural base, the market potential of ‘local’ for the region’s farms, the values and attributes residents in the region attribute to local farms and locally grown food, consumer and business purchasing practices, and the opportunities and challenges related to organizers’ efforts to further movement goals and mainstream locally grown food. With program evaluation, I have participated in the development and implementation of strategies designed to measure the outcomes and impacts of specific programmatic activities to further guide organizer strategies and document outcomes for funders. Writing grants has been invaluable to the development of my understanding of the way organizers theorize food system change and the way organizers frame and justify the significance of their work.

MFF’s work, while divided into distinct program areas, is interconnected and interdependent, and an open office environment – both physically and communicatively – facilitates necessary and frequent collaboration and information sharing. For my research, this open environment provided abundant opportunities to observe, incite, and engage in
impromptu discussions related to movement strategies, observed impacts, and broader issues affecting the Local Food Movement locally and nationally.

On a weekly basis I have participated in staff and Appalachian Fresh meetings. Staff meetings provide a weekly venue for staff activity updates – the work various staff members coordinate and/or are engaged with. Because of breadth of the organization’s work, it was impossible for me to observe and participate in everything and accordingly staff meetings provided the means to stay abreast of current staff activities.

Weekly Appalachian Fresh meetings revolved around the implementation and administration of the Appalachian Fresh regional branding and certification program. These weekly meetings, perhaps more than any other source of data, provided me with tremendous insight into the ways that movement organizers mediate between the imperatives of maintaining the integrity of movement goals and engaging with the conventional food system. A core of four to five staff members have comprised the Appalachian Fresh team and meetings have been the site of sometimes intense and long discussions about program definitions and participation criteria, engagement strategies, and observed program impacts.

My position in MFF also took me out of the office and into the communities of Western North Carolina for specific events and activities coordinated by MFF or Local Food Campaign participants including farm visits and tours, workshops and conferences, public events and festivals promoting local farms and locally grown food, speaking engagements for college classes and community groups, seasonal events at area tailgate markets, local food cooking demonstrations at area retailers, farmer meetings, and meetings with funders. Across these events I have observed and participated in activities
structured for or by different constituent groups – farmers, retailers, restaurants, community groups, other food and farm based organizations – and each has provided opportunities for me to engage in conversations with a diverse base of movement participants and observers.

Outside of my participant observation with MFF, I also conducted site visits of food outlets in the area – retailers and the cafeterias of hospitals and colleges – to document businesses’ purchases of locally grown food. Site locations clustered in the central mountains around Asheville and were chosen for their explicit participation in Local Food Campaign activities and/or their promotion of locally grown food through ads and flyers and point of purchase materials. I conducted site visits during the growing season when locally grown food was most abundant and most likely to be available – May through October. During these visits I documented locally grown foods available: the products, how the business was defining and labeling local food, and the prices of local foods in comparison to non-local foods. Visits to retail settings provided me with opportunities to interact with retail personnel in the produce, cheese, and meat departments – ask them questions about particular offerings and their observations of customer behaviors. Alongside these site visits, I collected materials developed by various retail entities – ads, flyers, circulars – to promote local food offerings and their support of local farms. In addition, I also visited and shopped at one of five tailgate markets (i.e., farmers markets) in the region weekly from May through November. Tailgate markets provided the means to observe shopper behaviors, talk with tailgate market shoppers and vendors, and observe and participate in customer to vendor and customer to customer interactions.
Interviews

I conducted thirty-three semi-structured interviews with farmers, agricultural professionals, and the food buyers for hospitals, colleges, public schools, grocery stores, restaurants, and wholesale distributors. Across the interviews, participants were selected based on their participation in Local Food Campaign activities. In selecting farmer participants, I aimed to approximate the heterogeneity of the farming population in terms of products produced, farmer age, gender, farming experience, market outlets sold to. Ultimately the pool of farmers interviewed was determined by willingness to participate. Sixteen farmers were interviewed and represented male and female operators (about 40 percent female); producers of fruits and vegetables, meats, eggs, honey, and processed products; new farmers, experienced farmers, and farmers from multi-generational farming families; and farmers ranging in age from early 30s to mid 60s (Table 1). Within the food industry, I solicited interview participants across wholesale, retail, and institutional market outlets that purchase at least some of their food from local farms and/or advertise that they do. I interviewed representatives from 14 markets across grocery stores, restaurants, hospitals, colleges, and public schools; again, the composition of food industry buyers interviewed was determined ultimately by their willingness to participate within the timeframe of the research (Table 2). I selected agricultural professionals based on their depth of perspective on agriculture in the region; I interviewed three, each with 20 or more years experience providing support directly to farmers in the region. All interviews, with the exception of four, were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. For the four not recorded, I took detailed written notes.
Specific interview instruments were created for farmers, agricultural professionals, and buyers. All interview participants were asked, based on their respective positions, to comment on the obstacles and opportunities to food system localization. In addition, all were asked about their personal definitions of ‘local’ and their perceptions of MFF’s Appalachian Fresh program – the program’s definition of local and the need to define and certify locally grown food.

<table>
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<th>Table 1: Farmer Characteristics</th>
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<td>Characteristics</td>
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<td><strong>Food produced</strong></td>
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<td>Meats</td>
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<td>Eggs</td>
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<td>Honey</td>
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<td>Processed products</td>
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The farmer instrument was structured specifically to elicit farming history and articulate farmers’ changes in production (acreage, crops, methods) and marketing (where and how they sell their products) practices in relation to movement activities. Farmers were asked to reflect on the difference between local and non-local markets for farms and on observed changes in food markets in the region – in demand for locally grown food, in the procurement and distribution practices of buyers – and the impact of these changes on the viability of the region’s agriculture.
Agricultural professionals were asked to reflect on their observations of changes in agriculture in the region over the past decade in relation to the combined impacts of the tobacco buyout and the Local Food Campaign. How have the perceptions and practices of farmers changed, and, concomitantly, the perceptions of and services provided by cooperative extension and other agricultural professionals?

The instrument developed for interviews with food industry representatives was structured to elicit participants’ perceptions of local food and farms and their practices in relation to the Local Food Movement. Questions asked about the advantages of sourcing food from local farms, and conversely, the challenges; the specifics of local food purchasing, procurement, and promotional practices and how these practices have changed in relation to ongoing movement activities; the definition of ‘local’ used by specific businesses and the basis for these definitions; and observations of consumer demand and changes in the value of local food relative to nonlocal food.

Originally, the research methodology included focus groups with consumers. For reasons related to resource and time constraints, the focus groups were eliminated from the research plan. Data collected through other means including participant observation at
markets, interviews with buyers, and consumer surveys conducted and commissioned by MFF since 2000 bear on questions related to consumer beliefs and practices.

**Archival Research**

Archival research was a central component of my research methodology, providing me with valuable data on the history of farming in the region, the emergence of MFF as an organization, the evolution of the framing and engagement strategies employed by organizers at MFF, the role of the media in movement activities, and the perceptions and practices of movement constituents – farmers, consumers, and food industry buyers. Key sources of archival data included: the USDA Census of Agriculture, county and regional newspapers and magazines, and within MFF, publications and databases connected to the Local Food Guide, Local Food Trade Directory, and the Appalachian Fresh program, and MFF’s media archives and other internal documents including meeting minutes, funder and research reports, and grant proposals.

I used data from the USDA’s Census of Agriculture to statistically examine changes in agriculture in the 23 counties of Western North Carolina: changes in the number farms, land in farms and land in production, crops produced, farm profitability (i.e., number of farms with net gains versus net losses), the configuration of farm sizes (by acreage and sales), the market value of agricultural crop categories, the market value of direct to consumer sales, and operator characteristics, specifically age and number of years farming. To gain an understanding of long term trends in the region’s agriculture, I analyzed census data going back to at least 1987 and for some categories of data back to
the 1950s. To examine changes in agriculture in relation to movement activities specifically, I focused on data from the 2002 and 2007 censuses.

Archives of newspaper and magazine articles going back to 2001 provided a rich source of information about changes in the region’s agriculture in relation to the 2004 tobacco buyout and emergent movement activities. This source of data also provided significant insight into the evolution of the framing strategies used by organizers to mobilize action. Key MFF publications and databases provided important sources of data on changes in movement participation. Since 2002, MFF has collected farm and non-farm business data for the production of the Local Food Guide and since 2006 for the production of the Local Food Trade Directory and administration of the Appalachian Fresh program. My position within MFF also provided me with access to relevant internal documents including meeting minutes, grant proposals and reports, articles and press releases written for and distributed to local media outlets, and the results of research conducted or commissioned by MFF with consumers, farmers, cooperative extension agents, and buyers in retail, restaurant, and institutional outlets.

**Discourse Analysis**

The discourse produced – ideational and pragmatic – by movement organizers and participants has been central to my study of the Local Food Movement in Western North Carolina. The ideational aspect of discourse is conceptual and refers to ideas that structure ways of thinking and inform action in relation to particular areas of social life. Pragmatic discourse, informing and informed by the ideational, refers to ideas in action. It is the performance or enactment of particular ideas and meanings through communicative and social practices; this aspect of discourse points to the significance of
human interaction through social and symbolic means for the formation of meanings and ideas. This dissertation has focused on the production of discourses to examine the ways in which movement organizers have framed movement goals and articulated and deployed movement strategies, to document organizer praxis – ongoing processes of reflexive and recursive strategic action to affect change in the region’s food system, and to investigate the intermediate impacts of movement activities – how the movement is affecting the perceptions and practices of farmers, the food industry, and the public.

Critical discourse analysis is not only interested in the ways in which discursive practices structure social realities and constitute subjects but how these practices sustain, legitimate, or contest particular hegemonies. In this sense discursive practices, themselves embedded in social practices, are a principal means by which ideas and meanings formed, circulated, and reproduced (Duranti 2001:47; Johnstone 2008:53-55). In keeping with a practice perspective, the analysis of discourses promotes an agent-centered perspective that privileges anthropological subjects in the production, reification, or modification of cultural meanings and practices. Bearing on the questions of the research, discourse analysis has focused on spoken dialogue and text from key informant interviews; from MFF staff interactions and meetings; from informal interviews in the context of participant observation; from archived materials including articles, meeting minutes, reports, and grant proposals; and from the promotional and marketing materials of local food retailers and institutions.

**Positionality and Research Limitations**

As mentioned above, I began as a volunteer at MFF with the specific intent of conducting my research on the Local Food Movement. My positionality in this study
closely aligns with Fine’s (1994:23) activism stance, Habermas’ model of critical theory (Madison 2012:6; Tsoukas and Knudsen 2005:321-324), Madison’s (2012) definition of critical ethnography, and Kozaitis’ (1999) definition of applied anthropology. Social life is studied, analyzed, and represented for an explicit political purpose. My purpose has been to develop an understanding of the nature of social change – how particular hegemonic ideas and practices come into being and define the way that we live and how these ideas and practices are challenged and transformed. In addition to this role as researcher, I have also assumed the role of advocate or activist to support the objectives and goals of movement organizers. Following the sentiments expressed by Checker (2004) in her fieldwork with a grassroots environmental justice group, my research choice has provided me with both an opportunity to study a movement culture and exercise my own commitment to issues of sustainability. The purpose of this section is not to defend the legitimacy and define the need for an applied, engaged anthropology, these arguments have been explored and made succinctly by others (Checker 2004; Checker and Fishman 2004; Gibson-Graham 2008; Graeber 2005; Greenhouse and Greenwood 1998; Kellett 2009; Kirsch 2002; Kozaitis 1999; Madison 2012; Stavenhagen 1971). Rather the purpose, following Madison (2012:8,14), is to examine critically the implications of my positionality – my intentions, my methods – for the structure and findings of my research.

My position in MFF as both anthropological researcher and staff member has presented both opportunities and challenges. It has provided me with an invaluable research perspective – the opportunity for immersion in movement activities, the means to examine and participate in the ongoing development of strategic action, to observe
developments as they have unfolded. Through my association with MFF, I have gained access to a diversity of movement stakeholders. At the same time, however, the central role of MFF in this study privileges the perspective of this organization and requires recognition of the bias inherent to this point of orientation for my research and findings.

The movement in Western North Carolina is comprised of a diversity of stakeholders with varying positions and perspectives and needs and desires in relation to the processes of food production and provision – food industry buyers across retail, institutional, and wholesale outlets, teachers, parents, students, agricultural support personnel, community foundations and other funders, academics within colleges and universities, city and county planners, faith-based organizations, other community based organizations focused on local agriculture and food, health departments and other service providers, consumers, etc. Diversity also exists within named stakeholder groups; they are not internally homogenous. “Farmers,” for example, includes farmers from multi-generational farming families, young, beginning farmers, “lifestyle” farmers that have abandoned the urban “grind” for rural life, farmers using different production practices (e.g., conventional, certified organic, non-certified organic, free-range, humanely-raised, etc), farmers raising livestock, farmers producing fruits and vegetables, farmers producing in greater and lesser proximity to urban markets, part-time farmers, full-time farmers, farmers variously producing for direct, retail, and wholesale outlets, etc. In relation to these characteristics as well as others, individual farmers have unique experiences and, accordingly, divergent perspectives and opinions on the nature of movement goals, the validity of strategies, and movement impacts.
Too, while MFF is arguably the central social movement organization driving the Local Food Movement in the study region, there are other community-based organizations with agricultural and food foci that also participate in, benefit from, and affect movement activities and outcomes – organizations focused on promoting urban gardening, preserving and promoting the region’s food traditions, and providing local food cooking classes to community members, county level collaborations focused on promoting farms and food within their respective counties, organizations promoting the use of organic production practices. The missions and strategies of these different organizations create both opportunities for collaboration around common goals as well conflict over funding, disparate approaches, and the associated need to demonstrate the value and legitimacy of their efforts to the communities in which they work.

As noted by Edelman (2001:310-311), social movements are seldom if ever internally homogenous and are often highly factionalized with disagreements among and between organizers and supporters. In a related vein, Hastrup and Elsass (1990) raise concerns about advocacy and issues of “representativeness” in diverse multivocal communities. In advocating a particular position, whose position are you representing, are you generalizing, are you privileging? In terms of movement heterogeneity, which faction does the researcher support and what effect does this commitment have on the research process and on research findings? Following this assessment, it is important to point out that this research begins from my position within a particular organization. This position frames the perspective of the research and biases my research in terms of the perspectives, strategies, and actions of MFF organizers.
It is also important to point out that my research privileges the strategies and actions of one particular program area within the organization – the Appalachian Fresh regional branding and certification program. The Local Food Campaign in Western North Carolina is multi-faceted and encompasses an increasing and extensive base of participants including farmers, agricultural professionals, decision-makers, food industry representatives, teachers, parents, students, Child Nutrition Directors, public health service providers, as well as the general public. Given the broad scope of movement activities and the focus of my research – understanding the dialectic between movement and industry actions, I confined the parameters of my study to processes most closely aligned with organizers’ efforts to mainstream movement activities and engage the food industry represented at the local level. Accordingly, a significant proportion of the data collected and analyzed in this dissertation derives from the Appalachian Fresh program. Appalachian Fresh provided an ideal venue from which to examine organizers’ strategies and actions for engaging the food system. The outcome of the research boundaries imposed is that this dissertation does not describe in detail the inner workings – the strategies and actions and outcomes – of MFF’s Farm to School program. The strategies and actions of Farm to School are significant to the overall movement – in Western North Carolina as well as nationally. However, my dissertation only focuses on Farm to School to the extent that this program bears on the evolution and development of overall movement strategies and that strategies and actions focused on schools’ purchasing and marketing programs overlap with scaling-up efforts.

On one final cautionary observation, while my position with MFF provided me with access to diverse movement stakeholders, I perceived this identity to also be in
conflict at times with my role as a researcher particularly in interview contexts. In some interviews, I was concerned that my identity as an MFF staff member influenced the answers provided by respondents, and on a couple of occasions left interviews wondering if respondents had told me what they thought I wanted to hear.

**Research Ethics**

Informed consent was obtained in writing from MFF staff members and from all participants formally interviewed. To protect the anonymity of research subjects, pseudonyms are used throughout my dissertation for individuals and for the names of businesses and branding programs. Furthermore, I have intentionally not cited direct quotes from articles in local publications because to do so would jeopardize informant anonymity. Toward this same end, I also do not cite the reports of surveys conducted by MFF. Throughout the research process, I abided by the rules and requirements of USF’s Institutional Review Board.

**Conclusions**

As a research endeavor focused on the grassroots efforts of movement organizers and participants to develop markets for locally grown food and build food systems grounded in local communities, ethnographic methods of research have been fundamental to my study of the Local Food Movement in Western North Carolina. Ethnography provides a ground-level perspective and the means to gather in-depth and firsthand knowledge. Ethnographically-informed research is necessary to illuminate the complexities of collective action, because it enables researchers to observe events as they unfold on the ground (Checker and Fishman 2004). The study of the local and the particular reveal the actions, motivations, structures, and settings that are the basis of
social change (Brodkin 2005) and offer critical insight into the ways political economy is experienced in real life (Friedrich 1989:299). As a methodology, human activities provide the point of departure, and as such, ethnography promotes a practice perspective – people as agents and subjects of history, not passive receivers of an abstract system. To paraphrase Thompson (1978:79), without an agent-centered perspective, history is an abstract process. My focus on discourse, in particular, promotes this agent-centered perspective and has provided the means to examine concretely the production and enactment of movement meanings and values and strategies by movement organizers and participants.
Chapter Five:

Research Setting and Context

In this chapter, I present the setting of my research and explore the historical developments that have impacted the region’s agriculture and established the conditions for the emergence of the Local Food Movement. In the first section, I describe the research location and, using USDA Census of Agriculture data, provide a snapshot of the region’s current agricultural base. The following section examines the trajectory of farming in the Southern Appalachians and Western North Carolina in relationship to the industrialization of the Appalachian South and within the development and acceleration of the global food order. The final section outlines the events that led to the formation of a community collaborative focused on the survival of the region’s agriculture and the launch of a local food campaign that initiated a movement.

Research and Movement Setting

Western North Carolina, the site of my research and location of food movement activities, encompasses the 23 counties of westernmost North Carolina. In North Carolina, the western part of the state is identified as the “Mountain Region,” and its landscape distinguishes it from the state’s two other identified regions, the Piedmont and the Coastal Plain. Western North Carolina is part of Appalachia, the region defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission that stretches from southern New York to northern Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia – generally following the contours of the Appalachian

\[50\] Western North Carolina is defined officially by the Advantage West Economic Development Group, a regional economic development commission chartered by the North Carolina General Assembly in 1994.
Mountain Range, the oldest range in North America. Within this extensive area, Western North Carolina is the location of the southern reach of the Appalachian Range and also the site of Great Smoky Mountains, the Blue Ridge Mountains, and southernmost extension of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

The region has 1.1 million residents and is primarily rural with 22 of the 23 counties classified as rural by the US Census Bureau (2010a). Asheville, the largest urban center, is centrally located and has a population of 76,636; the Asheville Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which includes Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, and Madison counties, has a population of 412,672 (US Census Bureau 2010c). The next largest urban area is Boone, with a population of 14,138; it is located in the northwest part of Western North Carolina known as the High Country. The average per capita income is just over $21,000; the poverty rate is 17 percent (US Census Bureau 2011a; US Census Bureau 2011b). The population is overwhelmingly white – 90 percent, with small percentages of black (4%), American Indian (1%), and Hispanic (5%) (US Census Bureau 2010b).

Agriculture is a visible feature of the region’s landscape and a significant contributor to the region’s economy. Of the nearly 3 million acres of private land in Western North Carolina, farmland occupies about a third, over 920,000 acres. Today, the region has close to 12,000 farms and 17,000 operators – close to one third are female (USDA Census of Agriculture 2007h). The census classifies 97 percent as family farms (USDA Census of Agriculture 2007e). Farms are small, today averaging 75 acres in size with nearly 60 percent operating on less than 50 acres (Figure 3) (USDA Census of Agriculture 2007b). This average compares with the national average of 418 acres and the state average of 160 acres (USDA Census of Agriculture 2007f; USDA Census of Agriculture 2007e).
Agriculture 2007g). Compared to agriculture in the rest of the state, farms in Western North Carolina – due to their smaller scale – also tend to be more diversified and less mechanized.\textsuperscript{51}

![Bar chart showing number of farms in Western North Carolina by acreage, 2007](image)

Figure 3: Number of Farms in Western North Carolina by Acreage, 2007 (USDA Census of Agriculture 2007b)

Farm size is also expressed by sales (Figure 4). In 2007, over 70 percent of farms in the region grossed under $10,000, 83 percent under $20,000. More than 60 percent of region’s farms reported net losses (USDA Census of Agriculture 2007d). The majority of farms rely on off-farm sources of income; 58 percent reported that farming was not their primary occupation (USDA Census of Agriculture 2007e).

\textsuperscript{51} Though not all small farms are diverse, small farms in general tend to be more diversified, i.e., they produce a wider variety of crops than larger farms, which following food industry consolidation trends, tend to produce monocultures.
Farms in the region produce a variety of crops including livestock; vegetables, fruits, and tree nuts; trout; greenhouse and nursery products; hay; and grain. Figure 5 shows the breakdown of farms by farm product in Western North Carolina using the USDA’s farm classification system – product category, number of farms, percentage of total farms. The chart shows the significance of beef cattle production followed by greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture; hay; aquaculture; and vegetables, fruits, and tree nuts. The region is known especially for its production of Christmas Trees, apples, and trout, and it contributes to North Carolina’s national ranking as number two in the production of Christmas Trees, number two in trout production, and number seven in apple production (North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services n.d.; USDA 2011). Tobacco, specifically Burley tobacco, has also been an immensely important crop to the region; the role of tobacco is discussed in greater detail later.
In 2007, cash receipts from farming in totaled nearly $740 million (USDA Census of Agriculture 2007c). More than half – about 66 percent – of that total is in livestock and poultry production (Figure 6). Poultry and Eggs is the largest category within livestock production accounting for 82 percent of sales. The majority of those sales come from Wilkes County in the northwestern part of the region where there is some large scale chicken production for one of the largest processors and marketers of poultry. The next largest category is in Cattle and Calves, accounting for 11 percent of sales. Cattle and calf production is largely dominated by “cow-calf” production where the product is
actually the calf, and as suggested by the comparison of cash receipts to number of farms, these operations are small-scale.\footnote{In cow-calf production, the product is the calf. Producers breed animals and raise them on open pasture land before they are sold through livestock auction markets to feedlot operations usually located in the Midwest, Southwest, or Pacific Northwest.}

Figure 6: Cash Receipts of Livestock and Poultry in Western North Carolina, 2007 (USDA Census of Agriculture 2007c)

In the category of crops (Figure 7), nursery products are the largest category accounting for 42 percent of sales followed by cut Christmas trees at 37 percent, and vegetables, fruits, nuts, and berries at 14 percent of total sales.\footnote{14 percent combines the percentages of two categories: Vegetables, Sweet Corn, and Melons and Fruits, Nuts, and Berries.} The High Country region
of Western North Carolina is known for its production of Frasier Firs and has been the source for many of the White House Christmas trees.

Figure 7: Cash Receipts of Crops in Western North Carolina, 2007 (USDA Census of Agriculture 2007c)

**Agriculture in the Southern Appalachians**

Agriculture is a core element of Appalachian history and culture (Best and Wood 2006; Eller 1982). In the early part of the nineteenth century, small farms and scattered settlements defined the region. The small self-sufficient family farm was the “backbone” of the region’s economy and the family the basic economic unit (Eller 1982:6-28). Mountain communities separated by mountain ridges had largely autonomous social systems (Eller 1982:3-6). From the latter part of the 1800s to the 1930s, the region’s agricultural base was significantly impacted by the modernizing trends of
industrialization. Industrial expansion transformed the region physically and socially and undermined the self-sufficiency of the family farm. With the emergence of the global economy post World War II, farmers in the Southern Appalachians have been increasingly left out of developing global food chains. As Eller (2008) notes in his introduction, while not substantially connected to this emerging global economy, the region and the region’s agriculture has nevertheless been significantly impacted by it.

**Pre-World War II**

In the pre-industrial Appalachian South, the family farm was at the center of economic, political, and social life (Eller 1982). Mountain homesteads operated as relatively self-sufficient units – the labor of a single family, utilizing the land and natural resources, provided the necessities of life (Eller 1982:16). The temperate climate, the abundant rainfall, the networks of streams, rivers, and creeks provided mountain farms with good growing conditions. In the late 1700s, after the Revolutionary War, the first European settlers came to Western North Carolina, settling into the valleys and coves near the French Broad River. The Scotch-Irish were the largest group to immigrate but other immigrants came from Germany, France, and England (Blethen and Jr 1998; Dykeman 1955; Western Carolina University 2001). Settlers’ agricultural practices combined Native American crops and land clearing practices (i.e., slash and burn techniques) with old world crops and the herd and field management patterns from the Celtic regions of the British Isles and the upper Rhine areas of Germany (Blethen and Jr 1998:44-45; Gray and Amberg 2001). One of the distinctive practices of the Scotch-Irish was to fence crops and allow livestock to roam freely to graze and forage in open fields and woods.
Due to the ruggedness of the terrain and concomitant transportation difficulties, the vast majority of production was for direct use, but farmers also traded or sold surplus crops and animals to nearby towns. The agriculture of the Southern Appalachians in particular emerged as a source of hogs for eastern cities and towns, and the completion of the Buncombe Turnpike in 1827, a 75 mile route between the Tennessee and South Carolina borders, opened the region to markets in the eastern and southern United States. Farmers, responding to the accessibility of larger market outlets, walked their livestock to markets in “great drives” (Dykeman 1955:137-151). “Drovers,” on foot or horseback, transported thousands of cattle, hogs, turkeys, mules, etc annually along the French Broad river road to coastal markets.\textsuperscript{54} In these drives farmers not only sold their livestock to the markets of the south, along their route they also sold corn, meal, and other products to the taverns and inns that developed along the well traveled turnpike (Best and Wood 2006:397).

Farming declined with the Civil War and with the coming of the railroad. The Civil War in particular was devastating to the southern mountains; practices of military conscription, tax-in-kind, and impressment brought economic hardship, social disruption, and violent resistance (Best and Wood 2006:398).\textsuperscript{55} The railroad opened southern markets to Midwestern livestock producers and by the late 1800s the great livestock drives had ended (Dykeman 1955:150-151).

The railroad also brought extractive industries – in Western North Carolina primarily timber and mining. The railroads linked the natural and human resources of

\textsuperscript{54} At the height of the stock-drive era, Gray cites that as many as a quarter million animals were driven down the Buncombe Turnpike annually (Gray and Amberg 2001:297).

\textsuperscript{55} Conscription drafted men into the war. Tax-in-kind required families to give a percentage of their crops to Confederate or Union governments/armies. With impressment, armies appropriated horses, wagons, and other goods for a price established by authorities.
Appalachian rural areas to the industrializing core (Eller 1982). The natural and human resources of the region provided the material basis for processes of industrialization and urbanization taking place in the urban centers of the Northeast, South, and Midwest. After 1880 outside corporations purchased or acquired the mineral and timber rights of large tracks of land, a practice that increased land values and property taxes (Shannon 2006:70-73). In Western North Carolina, thirteen corporations came to control over 75 percent of the land – land that would later become the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (Eller 1982:xxi). Massive timber-cutting operations decimated forests, and outside industrialists looked to the Appalachians as a source of cheap labor and the place to locate factories to produce textiles, fiber, clothing, and chemicals (Shannon 2006:72). Large scale coal mining operations established coal towns across a belt of counties in West Virginia, East Tennessee, southwestern Virginia, and eastern Kentucky.

Agriculture declined. Farmers, persuaded by high land prices and burdened by escalating taxes, sold portions of their land to timber and mining interests. Land sales combined with inheritance practices, which subdivided land between multiple inheritors, decreased average farm sizes and parcels became too small to sustain families. The average size farm declined from 187 acres in the 1880s to 76 acres by 1930 (Eller 1982:xix). To supplement farm income, more and more farmers shifted to off farm sources of income – wage jobs in timber, mining, railroads, textiles (Best and Wood 2006:429; Eller 1982:xix; Western Carolina University 2001). In 1880, agriculture was the primary and often the sole source of income but by 1930, for those that remained on the land, the majority of mountain farms were part-time units of production; non-agricultural employment had emerged as the principal source of income. As shown by
Eller (1982:xxiii), by 1930, the Appalachian South had become integrated with and dependent upon a growing industrial system and not on their own terms. Modernization – industrialization, the rise of corporate capitalism, the formation of a national market economy – in the Appalachian South provided little to no benefit to the peoples of the region – these processes extracted natural resources, exploited the labor of the people, and undermined cooperative social and family structures, self-determination, and sufficiency (Eller 1982:xxiv-xxv).

In 1930, while the family and the farm still anchored social and economic life in many places, for other parts of the Southern Appalachians the industrial economy replaced the family farm and many lived in mill and mining company towns (Eller 1982:237). When the collapse of the industrialized order reached the region, many mountain families returned to the land to restore abandoned homesteads and live off federal relief during the 1930s. During the 1920s, 25 percent of the population migrated from mountain farms to timber towns and mining camps; during the 1930s with the failure of the region’s industrial base, “untold thousands” left industrial centers and villages to try and eke out a living on much degraded land (Best and Wood 2006:398; Eller 1982:239).

In the midst of the Great Depression, the federal relief programs of the New Deal provided some relief to Southern Appalachian mountain farms. In particular, the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 established a series of federal price supports for specific commodities including tobacco, which improved conditions on many mountain farms (Eller 1982:239-240). From the 1920s, Burley tobacco production had a strong influence on the region’s economy, and Asheville had several auction houses for tobacco
producers. The Agricultural Adjustment Act created an allotment system, which in essence paid tobacco farmers to limit their production. This system made tobacco a stable and profitable cash crop and because it required little in the way of technology and capital investment, many farmers turned to Burley tobacco production as their primary source of income. Tobacco remained a key income source for farmers until the end of the twentieth century (Eller 1982:239-240).

Post World War II

The decline of mountain agriculture that began with the processes of industrialization continued with the rise of consumer society, the emergence of national and global market chains, and with the mass emigration from the region in search of “better” opportunities (Eller 2008:30). The industrialization and consolidation of agriculture that accelerated with the end of World War II excluded the farms of the region. Constrained by small farm acreage, the mountainous topography, and the lack of capital, farmers in the region were seldom able to effectively mechanize and increase productivity. In the 1950s, Eller (2008:28) notes that more than a million residents left the Southern Appalachians in search of economic opportunities in the urban centers of the north. Half the farmers and farm workers stopped farming between 1950 and 1960 either leaving the region altogether or for wage work off the farm; only six percent of the population farmed fulltime by the end of the decade (Eller 2008:29). Over the course of the last half of the twentieth century as, nationally, farms have consolidated into larger,
more capital intensive operations to serve the growth and expansion of the global food order, farming in the Southern Appalachians has continued to decline.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value of Farm Sales</th>
<th>Number of Farms 1987</th>
<th>Number of Farms 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$500,000 or more</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$250,000 to $499,999</td>
<td>1,222</td>
<td>1,222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 to $249,999</td>
<td>3,494</td>
<td>3,494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 to $99,999</td>
<td>6,496</td>
<td>6,496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000 to $49,999</td>
<td>1,673</td>
<td>1,673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000 to $39,999</td>
<td>2,948</td>
<td>2,948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000 to $24,999</td>
<td>3,647</td>
<td>3,647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000 to $19,999</td>
<td>1,011</td>
<td>1,011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5,000 to $9,999</td>
<td>1,960</td>
<td>1,960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2,500 to $4,999</td>
<td>2,496</td>
<td>2,496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,000 to $2,499</td>
<td>1,539</td>
<td>1,539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $1,000</td>
<td>1,187</td>
<td>1,187</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8: Number of Farms by Value of Farm Sales, 1987 and 2007 (USDA Census of Agriculture 2007b; USDA Census of Agriculture n.d.)

In Western North Carolina, the increasing dominance of global food supply chains combined with the loss of regional processing infrastructure, development pressure, increasing land values, higher taxes, the end of the federal tobacco program (discussed below), and the downward pressure on farm profits have had a significant impact on farming and rural life. Since the 1950s, the region has lost over 70 percent of its farmland and at least 80 percent of farms. From 1970 to 2007, the number of farmers decreased from over 76,000 to under 17,000 (USDA Census of Agriculture 2007e; USDA Census of Agriculture n.d.). Over the past twenty years, average farm size has

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57 These figures come from 1950 Census of Agriculture; these documents are scanned and difficult in places to read. 80 percent is a close estimate.
decreased from 108 acres in 1987 to 75 acres in 2007 (USDA Census of Agriculture 2007b; USDA Census of Agriculture n.d.).

Echoing national trends in agriculture, the number of farms in the highest and lowest sales categories have increased in Western North Carolina over the last 20 years while farms of the “middle” have declined (Figure 8). Farms with sales of less than $1,000 have nearly doubled since 1987 from 1,960 in 1987 to 3,647 in 2007; farms with sales of $500,000 or more have increased by more than threefold from 85 in 1987 to 304 in 2007 (USDA Census of Agriculture 2007c; USDA Census of Agriculture n.d.).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farm Acreage</th>
<th>1987</th>
<th>2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to 9 acres</td>
<td>1,529</td>
<td>1,484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 49 acres</td>
<td>1,509</td>
<td>1,190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 69 acres</td>
<td>1,335</td>
<td>1,089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 to 99 acres</td>
<td>1,070</td>
<td>894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 to 139 acres</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140 to 179 acres</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180 to 219 acres</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>220 to 259 acres</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>375</td>
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<tr>
<td>260 to 499 acres</td>
<td>1,861</td>
<td>544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500 to 999 acres</td>
<td>4,602</td>
<td>1,070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000 to 1,999 acres</td>
<td>5,267</td>
<td>1,529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,000 acres or more</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9: Number of Farms by Farm Acreage, 1987 and 2007 (USDA Census of Agriculture 2007b; USDA Census of Agriculture n.d.)

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58 “Agriculture of the Middle” refers to farms and ranches that are typically too big to sell to direct markets and too small to compete in global commodity markets (Agriculture of the Middle 2010). In terms of scale, farms of the middle typically fall between the gross sales categories of $50,000 and $500,000.
Looking at the size of farms by farm acreage shows a slight increase in the number of farms in the 1,000 to 1,999 acres category and a modest increase in the number of farms in the 10 to 49 acres category (Figure 9).

Following trends in food industry consolidation, the region has lost infrastructure around food processing and distribution. This trend is particularly visible in the apple industry. Apples emerged as an important crop in Henderson County by the 1930s and by 1960 the county led the state in apple production. Not surprisingly, Henderson County was the site of several major juice processors including Gerber and Seneca. In the late 1990s, however, apple processors left the region for other areas of the world like China where cheaply produced fruit could be turned into cheap apple concentrate (Jackson 2003; Rabey 2003). Gerber closed its plant 1998 after 40 years in operation. Seneca sold to Northland, a cooperative of cranberry farmers out of New York, also in 1998. With about 50 percent of the apple crop going to juice processors, the loss of regional fruit processors took a significant proportion of the market for local apples. The loss of apple processing, competition from cheap fruit, increasing land prices, and dwindling profits for producers combined to pressure apple producers to sell farmland. In 1987 there were 291 farms producing apples on 10,662 acres (USDA Census of Agriculture 1987). In 2002, four years after the processors left the region, there were 133 farms and 6,618 acres in production. In 2007 in Henderson County there were 117 farms producing apples and 5,660 acres. Too the number of packing houses, which pool the production of multiple farms and have the infrastructure to cool, grade, package, and distribute, have also

59 The county still leads the state in apple production, which is ranked seventh in the nation in total production of apples.
declined. One agricultural extension agent told me that when he came to the region in the 1980s there 12 to 14 packing houses for apples, today there are five.

The recreational and second home industries have also impacted land use patterns and contributed to the decline of agriculture (Beaver 1986:32). Since the 1970s especially, land prices and land values have increased substantially, providing existing farmers with an incentive to sell their land (Beaver 1986:32, 38). High land prices have also been a barrier to the expansion of existing farms and to those aspiring to farm unable to access land. A study released by the Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force in the 1980s showed the relationship between the expansion of the tourism and recreation industry and increasing land prices, higher property taxes, changes in land ownership, and the decline of agriculture (Beaver 1986:32). Beaver (1986:32) cites that in Watauga County, located in the High Country of Western North Carolina, over a 12 year period, from 1963 to 1975, land prices in undeveloped agricultural areas increased an average of 225 percent. Nearly 30 years later in 2003, an official with the North Carolina Department of Agriculture, commenting on the effect of the combination of high land prices and marginal profits in an article, noted: “It's difficult to justify growing apples, or whatever you have, on an acre of land – or 20 or 100 acres – just to break even, when you can sell that land for probably an astronomical value” (Rabey 2003). Concurring with this sentiment, in an interview, one extension agent noted: “… for a while when the housing boom was in full swing, a lot of orchards were sold for $25,000 to $30,000 an acre and you can’t turn that down; that was their retirement for a lot of these [farmers] that didn’t have family that was coming on.”
While the financial crisis that began in 2007 has somewhat slowed development in the region, the loss of farmland to development has continued as exemplified by *Asheville Citizen Times* headlines like “Ex-farm has New Crop—Houses” and “More Upscale Growth in Works: Once a Dairy Farm, Property will Hold 300 Homes.” Developments such as these adopt farm names, like Azalea Farms and Orchard Vistas, presumably to evoke the imagined qualities of farm life. The website description for one of these developments states: “a neighborhood inspired by the America of yesteryear, a time when family and friends were the most important things in life.”

Too, in Western North Carolina, the average of age of farmers has been increasing over the last 20 years. Nationally, the average age of farmers has been rising since 1978 and in 2007 was 57 years of age (National Agricultural Statistics Service 2007). The Western North Carolina average matches the national average (USDA Census of Agriculture 2007e), a trend that reflects a steady decline in the number of young operators entering farming as an occupation. Agriculture – until more recently – has not attracted new farmers, and the children of multi-generational farming families have the left the farm for other more profitable careers in many cases, noted one extension agent, persuaded by their parents “to do something else.”

**Tobacco**

Within the past decade, the end of the federal tobacco program has perhaps been the single greatest influence on agriculture in Western North Carolina. For the farmers of the Southern Appalachians, tobacco has been an immensely important crop. The 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act, which guaranteed producers of tobacco a fixed price for their crop in exchange for adhering to a quota or allotment system, made tobacco one of
the most reliable and profitable crops for nearly 70 years (Craig 2005:1). With growing public concerns over the health hazards of tobacco use and pressure to reduce price supports for tobacco, the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) compelled tobacco companies to pay out $206 billion over 25 years to 46 states to reimburse costs connected to the treatment of smoking related health problems. With the passing of the MSA and lower projected purchases by tobacco companies, the USDA cut tobacco quotas by more than 60 percent between 1999 and 2001 (Craig 2005:1). In 2004 the Fair and Equitable Tobacco Reform Act ended the tobacco program and mandated compensation for quota holders and tobacco growers (Craig 2005:33).

What is commonly referred to as the tobacco buyout essentially opened tobacco production to a free market, removing all production controls, price supports, and government protections in place since the Great Depression (Craig 2005:36-37). For producers of Burley tobacco in particular the buyout was predicted by agricultural economists to have a disproportionate impact (Craig 2005:11). The 1997 Census of Agriculture showed that producers of Burley tobacco generated 97 percent of their gross farm income from tobacco (Gale, et al. 2000:18). No other crop came close to generating an equivalent income; in 1996 and 1997, tobacco generated about $2,000 per acre (Craig 2005:11-12; Gale, et al. 2000:18-19). In Western North Carolina, the number of farms producing tobacco dropped over 90 percent from 3031 farms in 1997 to 251 in 2007 with more dramatic declines in counties with the highest tobacco production figures. Concomitantly sales dropped from nearly $29 million in 1997 to about $3.5 million in

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60 Craig (2005:12) notes that cotton, which was the closest competitor to tobacco, earned on average $267 per acre.
2007. Chapter Severn discusses the relationship between the tobacco buyout and the Local Food Movement.

**Tourism**

In Western North Carolina, tourism is a $2.4 billion industry (US Travel Association 2010), and it is made up of outdoor outfitters, bed and breakfasts and resorts, restaurants, farms, chambers of commerce and visitor bureaus, and other businesses and community organization seeking to serve and drive the tourist industry. The natural resources of Western North Carolina draw millions of visitors to the region annually. Western North Carolina is home to the Blue Ridge Mountains and is the location of the oldest river in the United States (the New River); it is also home to Mount Mitchell, Linville Gorge, and Whitewater Falls, respectively the highest mountain, the deepest gorge, and the highest waterfall in the eastern part of the United States (Blue Ridge National Heritage Area 2011b). The Blue Ridge Parkway and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which also traverse the region, are the two most visited national parks in the United States. Tourism also includes heritage tourism, a category of tourism premised on the preservation of natural and cultural resources (Eller 2008:256-257). In 2003, in recognition of the region’s unique landscape and cultural history, Congress designated Western North Carolina the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area (Blue Ridge National Heritage Area 2011a). This designation recognizes and promotes – both directly and through the financial support of other organizations – the region’s agricultural history, music and craft traditions, the traditions and history of the Cherokee, as well as the region’s natural resources. As will be shown in subsequent chapters,
movement organizers and participants link tourism to the region’s agricultural resources and to the increasing visibility of the region’s farms and popularity of locally grown food.

**The Roots of the Local Food Movement**

Following the ideas outlined in Chapter Three, the Local Food Movement is at least in part a land movement, the latest in a lineage of land movements that have emerged consistently to challenge the detrimental impacts of societal development and “progress.” In Western North Carolina, the Back to the Land Movement of the 1960s and 70s was influential. In contrast the mass emigrations of the region’s population in the 1950s and 60s, there was a counter immigration into the region – during the 1960s and 70s, thousands of Americans in search of simple agrarian lives abandoned their metropolitan lifestyles and immigrated to the Appalachians (Turman-Deal 2010:1). These “back to the landers,” lured to the region for its natural resources, climate, remoteness, and culture, bought inexpensive hillside farms (Kirk and Stuchul 2006; Turman-Deal 2010). Mostly white, middle class, educated, and environmentally conscious (Beaver 1986:121; Mother Earth News 1977), back to the landers were especially attracted to a shared perception of the qualities of Appalachian people that they wanted to cultivate in themselves in their rejection of the excesses of consumer culture – independence, industriousness, and self-reliance (Turman-Deal 2010:12). Across Appalachia back to the landers established homesteads in southeastern Ohio, western and central Pennsylvania, eastern Kentucky, West Virginia, and Western North Carolina (Turman-Deal 2010:7).

Magazines like *Mother Earth News* and the *Green Revolution* regularly highlighted the suitability of the Appalachian region for people looking to homestead
In November of 1970, Mother Earth News published in Western North Carolina, wrote to would-be homesteaders about the suitability of the region’s land:

Don’t pass up rolling countryside or hillside acreage. Those Appalachian farmsteads are not only beautifully scenic and remote...the land is generally excellent for gardening. Most of this soil has been avoided by commercial and large farming operations, is quite rich and — as long as there is any heavy wild annual growth to prevent erosion — you can garden in strips across the slope. Hillside farms have other advantages: They often sell for as little as $20 an acre; excess water never gets a chance to stand around long enough to rot crops; frost problems are less serious because currents flowing down the slopes on cold nights prevent the development of pockets of stable cold air. Besides, who ever found a hillside to be an obstacle for goats?

Estimates claim that a million or more people migrated from urban to rural areas in the midst of the movement during the 1970s (Agnew 2004; Jacob and Brinkerhoff 1986). Beaver, who conducted ethnographic research on the Back to the Land Movement in communities of Western North Carolina – Ashe, Watauga, and Yancey counties in particular – noted that due to the population influx by 1977 land had become scarce and property values had increased (Beaver 1986:125). Turman-Deal (2010:25-26) observes that the impacts of the back to the landers on the regions in which they settled is evident in the presence of alternative economic outlets – farmers markets, crafts shops, folk and music festivals, etc – and in their actions to preserve natural and cultural resources.

Responding to a question about the elements that have contributed to the resonance of the Local Food Movement in Western North Carolina in particular, one of MFF’s founders, Jeff, noted, among other attributes, the role of the Back to Land Movement, which has affected settlement patterns in the region and contributed to an atmosphere of support for a movement trying to wrest some independence from the global economy and build food systems controlled by local communities. Jeff, influenced by the ideas of the Back to the
Land Movement and the writings of Helen and Scott Nearing, pivotal figures in the Back to the Land movement, has further extended the movement’s influence. As will be shown in Chapter Six, the underlying philosophy of the Back to the Land Movement, the unification of belief and action, permeate the discourse of movement organizers in Western North Carolina.

The roots of the Local Food Movement are linked most directly to the processes of global economic expansion, in the neoliberalizations of agriculture, that have not only excluded the relatively small farms of the region from the global economy, they have increasingly closed off alternatives with ever increasing industry consolidation and centralization. Anticipation of the end of the federal tobacco program, which arguably (partially) insulated the farms in the region from the negative impacts of the globalizing food economy, provided the impetus for the formation of a community effort to mitigate the perceived impacts the buyout would have on farming in the region. In 1995, with support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, a group of citizens, farmers, and agricultural support personnel formed Mountain Agriculture Collaborative (MAC) to find ways to sustain the region’s farms and rural way of life in the face of increasing development pressure on farmland, rising taxes, and what by then seemed to be a uncertain future for the economic viability of Burley tobacco production for the region’s farms. MAC conducted a Listening Project – citizen to citizen interviews with farmers and community residents between 1995 and 1996 to identify community-based strategies. From the interviews and from community meetings convened in 1996 and 1997, participants prioritized the need to develop a farmland protection program, help farmers identify alternative crops, develop alternative markets for farms, and increase farm profitability.
These priorities became the focus of Mountain Family Farms (MFF), an initiative started by MAC in 1999.

MFF, originally conceived as a three year initiative, focused on developing farmland preservation strategies – estate planning, tax incentives, preservation ordinances and easements – and, through a transition program, helping farmers shift from Burley tobacco production to the production of organic vegetables, fruits, and herbs. Eventually, however, MFF’s work evolved to focus more on the development of local markets for locally grown food and, accordingly, on local food marketing and promotion. As one of the early organizers of MAC and MFF put it:

The buyout was going to have environmental, economic, social, and culture impacts. The [MAC] project was about transitioning from tobacco. The question was, “What can farmers grow that can use the same equipment and techniques?” In looking at what would come after tobacco, organizers in [Mountain Agriculture], which included farmers, focused on farmland preservation in the traditional sense and alternative crops to grow. The evolution of MFF’s approach was the realization that farmers can grow, but they need help finding markets, and we needed to promote local as higher value.

In 2000, MAC/MFF, with the results of local consumer research, launched the Get Fresh – Buy Appalachian Local Food Campaign at a public event at a historic inn featuring dishes prepared by local chefs with locally grown ingredients and an indoor farmers market. By 2001, the Buy Appalachian marketing campaign had secured the participation of several tailgate markets and restaurants, farm CSAs, and three local grocery stores. In 2002, MFF still under the direction of MAC, was one of 10

Here the organizer is referring to farmland preservation programs that rely on the creation of land trusts and the purchase of development rights as opposed to a market-based farmland preservation strategy – helping farms become economically viable.
organizations in the country chosen to participate in the Fires of Hope\textsuperscript{62} two year Buy Local Learning Community Initiative. The goal of the initiative was to build the capacity of the 10 participating organizations to plan, implement, and evaluate buy local food campaigns that promoted local consumption of locally and regionally grown foods. As one MFF organizer explained:

The purpose of the project was to bring these groups together that were engaged or exploring ways to build local food economies and figure out how to do local. It was, I believe, the single most influential event in the Local Food Movement. You can trace everything back to that.

Over the course of the two years – March 2002 to April 2004 – the Buy Local Learning Community participants gathered twice annually to compare experiences, strategies, successes, obstacles, and challenges in the conceptualization, planning, and implementation of their campaigns. Partners developed and implemented campaign plans, shared communications strategies and marketing materials, and evaluation data collected to measure the impact of campaign activities on the consumption of locally grown food and on farm businesses.

In the first year of the Learning Community initiative, MFF separated from MAC and incorporated as a nonprofit organization. That same year, MFF produced and distributed 15,000 copies of their first edition of the Local Food Guide, formed a tailgate marketing association – a marketing cooperative of tailgate markets, and launched their Farm to School program.

Today, MFF continues to produce the Local Food Guide; 2011 marked 10 years of its publication. MFF also produces a version of the Local Food Guide for children, a farm to business trade directory, the Local Food – Thousands of Miles Fresher bumper

\textsuperscript{62}Fires of Hope became the FoodRoutes Network.
sticker, and a suite of promotional materials for food retailers, restaurants, and institutions centered on MFF’s Appalachian Fresh regional branding and certification program. Organizers’ public outreach activities coordinate with local media outlets to produce stories that feature seasonal foods and local farms and publicize local food and farm activities and events – tailgate markets, farm tours, local food meals, workshops, CSA fairs, etc. MFF also has a significant internet presence with three websites that coordinate campaign public engagement efforts, house online editions of the Local Food Guide, the farm to business trade directory, and a local food and farm trip planner, an online tool visitors and residents can use to map excursions to local food and farm destinations in the region.

Across these more publicly visible material elements of MFF’s campaign are activities designed to facilitate the development of local food supply chains (i.e., connecting the food industry with sources of locally grown food), build the capacity of farmers to meet the desires and market requirements of specific local market outlets and of food buyers in these outlets to accommodate local food within their systems of food procurement and preparation. Community organizing activities aim to foster the development of trusting relationships and partnerships between and among different stakeholders across the region’s developing local food system. Research and evaluation activities are designed to deepen organizers’ understanding of the region’s food system and the impacts of campaign activities.

Conclusions

In 2000, MFF launched the Local Food Campaign, a consumer campaign designed to challenge the hegemony of global food markets and build local markets for
locally grown food. As will be shown in Chapters 6 and 7, movement organizers are not challenging the “market”, i.e., capitalism, they are challenging the imposition of a global market structure that is destroying the viability of the region’s agriculture, an impersonal market economy alienated from the conditions and social concerns of communities in Western North Carolina. This imposition is manifest in tightly integrated chains of commerce that exclude the region’s relatively small farms unable to produce at the scale required to access and compete in large scale, national and global markets. At the local level, the food procurement and distribution practices of the region’s food industry are deeply embedded in and dependent on the global economy and are reproduced by the actions of food industry buyers conditioned by these food system relationships and accustomed to sourcing desired quantities of year round product from a small pool of suppliers. The hegemony of the global market is also manifest in the global, “rational” consumer who, estranged from the experience and knowledge of food production, makes decisions about food outside of meaningful connections to food (to biological processes of food production, to the human and natural resources used to produce food) and does not recognize the relationship between consumption choices and the nature of food production systems and their impacts on diverse economies, ecologies, and social systems.

Today, evidence of the Local Food Campaign in the region is ample. In the region served by MFF, there are 91 tailgate markets, 100 CSAs, and 124 farm to table restaurants and bakeries. Residents and visitors can pick their own berries, apples, or other fruits and vegetables at one of more than 165 farms with u-pick operations. They can shop for locally grown foods in food co-ops and major retail outlets and during their
shopping experience will encounter large farmer profile posters hanging in produce, meat, and cheese departments and/or point of purchase materials distinguishing displays of local produce, eggs, cheeses, meats, and other items. The students and teachers of several county school districts and colleges in the region eat locally grown food seasonally in their cafeterias, and some of the region’s hospitals serve locally grown food to patients and staff. Local Food Guides are available at more than 400 locations in the region – at specific food retailers, restaurants, chambers of commerce and visitor’s centers, libraries, college and hospital cafeterias, coffee shops, bookstores, bakeries, churches, the region’s main airport, etc. With a million local food bumper stickers given away, MFF’s Thousands of Miles Fresher bumper sticker is a common site on the bumpers of cars. Chapter Six outlines in detail the strategies and actions – and their theoretical underpinnings – movement organizers have used to build a movement culture.
Chapter Six:

Building the Movement

Chapter Six details the strategies movement organizers have devised and implemented to build a movement in support of the region’s farms. The chapter begins with the theoretical underpinnings of MFF’s strategies and actions and presents the organization’s theory of change. The next section focuses on strategies organizers have used to mobilize collective action through purchases of locally grown food. Subsections examine the way organizers have framed the problems of the conventional food system in relation to Western North Carolina and the solution in terms of consumer activism and constructed a shared sense of place and sentiment of support for the region’s farms through place-making strategies. The final section focuses on the efforts of organizers to mainstream or scale-up movement activities through the Appalachian Fresh regional branding and certification program. Subsections examine the structure of the program and the strategies organizers have used to build brand identity and program participation. The chapter’s conclusion frames the data presented within the theories outlined in Chapters Two and Three.

MFF’s Theory of Change

[MFF’s] work is grounded in the conviction that when the distance between consumer and producer decreases, transparency in the food system increases and drives changes to the way food is produced. In the words of [writer, scholar, and farmer] Wendell Berry, “eating is an agricultural act.” In a local food system, consumers are active participants in agriculture. Consumers are close to the source of food production; they have firsthand knowledge of agriculture, production practices, the impacts of agricultural production…[w]ith this close
connection, consumers are able to make informed decisions about what they purchase and eat and directly impact the qualities of their food system.

As articulated in this opening passage, a grant proposal excerpt written by MFF to a potential funder, the strategies and actions of movement organizers are guided by a conscious theory of change: the process of localizing food systems has positive economic, environmental, and social impacts in the communities these systems serve. Localizing food production and consumption will improve the economic viability of farms, strengthen the economy, increase the use of environmentally sound production practices, and improve the health and well-being of individuals and, by extension, communities. Explained in the above passage, the key to these changes is food system transparency and the knowledge gains created by closely connecting food production and consumption practices. The transparency created with smaller economic boundaries yields firsthand knowledge about food production and its social and environmental impacts. Consumer knowledge translates into consumer choice. With knowledge of what their economic decisions are supporting or not supporting, consumers are able to make informed purchasing decisions; these decisions give consumers the power to directly impact the qualities of the food system.

In this way market forces – consumer demand and the recognition of this demand by the food industry – are used to create change in the food system. Organizers strive to use the principles of capitalism – supply and demand – to wrest control over the food market and create space for locally grown foods in a tightly integrated and highly centralized global food market. Within this framework, localizing food production and consumption provides the means to “democratize the food system” as articulated here by MFF organizer, Jeff:
[Neoliberal] institutions and businesses have removed the process of food production from our consciousness. Our approach is based on the Jeffersonian theory of democracy, the democracy of the marketplace…the Adam Smith kind of marketplace. If the consumer has knowledge, then they will make different choices. The [Local Food] Movement is about getting people engaged. People make decisions based on knowledge.

**Working within a Market-Based Economy**

We accept that we are working within this system [a market-based economy] rather than trying to overthrow it…we know that it is deeply flawed – but it’s what we have, we have accepted it and work within it.

Organizers’ change theory is itself grounded in a particular set of assumptions about the means of creating change in the food system. As articulated by Jeff’s statement above, for MFF, these assumptions start with capitalism – movement strategies begin from the market-based economy and efforts are grounded in the belief that the use of market forces is a viable means to change the way the food system operates. This belief is the basis of an overall strategy connected to the idea of creating a climate and spirit of entrepreneurialism – developing the conditions in the region, the market demand for locally grown food, that provides farmers with the incentive to innovate to satisfy demand and food businesses with the incentive to alter their business practices – procurement, marketing, distribution – to accommodate locally grown food to satisfy demand. In a conversation leading up to a two day conference hosted by MFF in 2009 to teach organizations and entities outside the region MFF’s approach to building local food systems, one organizer, Jeff, articulated this approach. This excerpt is from my field notes.

Jeff, Greg, and I met today briefly to talk about Greg’s workshops on direct and intermediate markets at the [conference]. In planning his workshops, Greg wanted to know how he should be framing the content of the workshops and how much he should be going into the logistics and details of selling at farmers
markets, restaurants, groceries, etc. Jeff responded by saying, “We’re not showing them how to start a farmers market or a farm to chef program, we’re teaching an approach.” He talked about the “climate of entrepreneurship” that MFF has been working to create in the region – creating the awareness about local farms, creating the demand for local food. In creating this condition in a place, it creates the incentive for farms and businesses to innovate and change what they are doing. “Most think if you create the infrastructure, then that creates everything else and that’s what most people want to do,” he continued.

Jeff’s final comment is based on the observation that as the Local Food Movement has gained momentum, organizations and entities wanting to develop local food initiatives in their respective regions conceptualize plans and seek funding to build aggregation and distribution facilities or farmers market shelters or shared use kitchens and other food processing facilities – “bricks and mortar projects.” These projects, while seemingly sensible given the real lack of infrastructure (i.e., for distribution, for processing, etc) to support developing local food economies, are problematic because they develop not from the innovation and investment of entrepreneurs that see opportunities in the marketplace for local food, but from the ideas of movement organizers and participants seeking to effect change in their food systems by working outside of the system. In other words, these types of projects emerge outside of market forces; they survive on grant funding and in doing so actually reify a market that favors big, corporate agriculture and food businesses. In the same conversation, Jeff explained this point referring to an article that had recently appeared online in the Washington Post. The article featured the opening of a new “local food hub” in the southeast. Local food hub is a label liberally applied to any entity – for profit or nonprofit – that aggregates and distributes locally grown foods. The nonprofit food hub model is one that has emerged in different parts of the country and has been touted as “the missing link” between the supply and demand for locally grown foods (Black 2009). From my field notes:
Jeff said that the problem with this kind of model is that it can’t compete in price with large national distributors. Despite the advantage of knowing the source of every item — food safety and traceability — it’s hard for them to turn a profit. The [nonprofit] food hub model hurts the Local Food Movement because it harbors hidden subsidies. When you buy lettuce or eggs or some other local farm product, you don’t know that the production, marketing, and distribution are propped up by grant funding. Jeff stated, “They’re subsidized, that’s how they compete. Some people….argue that these types of initiatives level the playing field for small farms but how? If you are hiding these subsidies and are reliant on them, how are you changing the market really? They create downward pressure on farm prices…no farmer needs that. The article makes it sound like a great model, that it’s the answer for local food, then you find out that it can’t turn a profit.” Greg responded, “Right, so they’re continuously dependent on outside funding to compete with large-scale production. They undercut the price of other small farmers and in effect do nothing to change the system.”

In other words, local food aggregation and distribution models and other types of infrastructure that depend on grant funding to compete in the market with big agriculture are also undergirded by a system of subsidies that keeps food prices artificially low and undercuts producers and food companies not using subsidies. From a perspective that starts from market forces, these local food models, rather than challenging the prevailing paradigm, validate the practices of the dominant food and agricultural system that exclude small scale production. They are, according to Jeff, “creating downward pressure, we are trying to create value.”

**Embedding the Local Food Economy in Place**

Ella, one of MFF’s Farm to School coordinators, stated:

When you go the grocery store and you buy food — a head of lettuce that’s from California or an avocado from Mexico, or just as likely a box of food — there’s no relationship to it. Where does it come from?...You know it’s sad when you ask a kid, “Where does your food come from?” And they answer, “The grocery store.” But a lot of them do. They’ve never seen food growing, that tomatoes come from a vine that grows out of the earth. But how would they know? There’s no association to the person that grew it. There’s no relationship to the land it was planted in. It has no connection to anything other than the shelf it came from, the shopping bag it was pulled out of. We are just so completely cut-off from our food supply. So why would you care about the land, the farmer, the community –
why would it even occur to you to think to care about those things? They’re not even in your head.

Movement organizers are not directly challenging capitalism as an economic system; they are challenging the neoliberal and global economic paradigm that has consolidated food production and in the process alienated food production and provision from the social relations and conditions in local contexts. Movement organizers are not trying to create food systems that operate outside capitalist relations – the market is the key mechanism and the consumer the key agent of change. Commensurate with Polanyi’s embedded economy, organizers are trying to embed the economy of food in place and in the social relations of place. Key to organizers strategies is an understanding that the creation of meaningful connections to local farms and food is crucial to changing the food system. The quote above, spoken by Ella, speaks to this guiding principle. The industrialized global food system – consolidated and centralized, focused on processed and convenience foods – has removed from the consciousness of many people the biological workings of food production – cycles of planting and harvesting – and the connection between eating to the human and natural resources required to produce food.

In the context of an anonymous system of food production and provision, Ella observes that it does not even occur to the eater to think about the relationship of what they are eating to a person, to a place, to a landscape. This understanding is the basis of organizers’ decision to include the following Charles Jordan\(^63\) quote in the introduction to a publication for teachers – designed to help them integrate farm field trips into their teaching curricula – to frame the importance of farm field trips for children: “What

\(^63\) Charles Jordan is the former director of the Conservation Fund and the retired director of Portland Parks and Recreation.
people do not understand, they do not value; what they do not value, they will not protect, and what they do not protect, they will lose.”

Within this framework of understanding, the work to relocalize production and consumption is not simply a matter of food miles, i.e., shortening food supply chains, it is about addressing the estrangement from food and food production in the global system that is at once geographical, social, and emotional. As stated by Ella in the introductory passage, there is no relationship to food produced in the industrialized global food system. Accordingly, organizer strategies aim to counter the anomy of this system – to cultivate relationships to people and place that condition decisions about food purchases, to create, as articulated by another organizer, “deliberate eaters.” Food is connected to and represents a relationship to a particular farmer and an appreciation for the region’s farming landscape. Responding to a question in a staff meeting about the purpose of taking chefs and other food service personnel out to farms Ella stated, “We are trying to create advocates [for local food and farms] and you won’t be an advocate unless you have an emotional connection. Local food and farm “advocates” value the region’s agriculture, and they act on a sentiment of support through their economic decisions.

This perceptual foundation underlies movement actions that strive to connect the public in meaningful ways to the region’s agriculture and link local food and farms to a particular set of values and meanings. This idea is the foundation for a marketing campaign that educates the public about significance of the region’s agriculture and supports and promotes activities and events that bring farmers and consumers face to face – tailgate markets, CSAs, MFF’s Farm Tour, the whole of the Farm to School program that provides students, teachers, cafeteria staff, parents, etc. with hands on experiences in
growing, harvesting, and cooking fresh locally grown food. These types of activities, examined in greater detail later in the chapter, create opportunities to build familiarity with and community ties centered on local farms and food.

*The Primacy of Farm Economic Sustainability*

Jeff said, in a kind of matter of fact way during an impromptu office discussion, “The economic sustainability of farms is first. If we can’t meet that then we can’t address any other kind of sustainability.”

This excerpt from my field notes points to another premise that underlies MFF’s work – change in the food system is going to be a long term, incremental process and that process begins from the economic sustainability of farms. This perception is intimately connected to the idea of market-based change and political consumerism. It is the basis of MFF’s definition of local and strategies that mediate between inclusivity and exclusivity with Local Food Campaign participants.

Departing from the point of capitalism and from a context of declining farms and farmland, organizers presume that the economic viability of farms must be addressed first. Farms are the material foundation of the region’s food system – without farms, the region does not have the capacity to produce food. Farmers unable to farm profitability are more apt to sell their land for development and as one Cooperative Extension agent told me, “once it’s gone it’s gone.”

This conviction is behind MFF’s strategy of farm inclusivity; local, circumscribed by geographic boundaries, is inclusive of all family farms and not exclusive to certain types of farms, those with certain productive capacities or farms that use particular types of production methods, for example. An inclusive strategy provides all farms in the region with opportunities to benefit economically from the prospects in the market for
locally grown food and, within organizers’ theory of change, to respond to the demands
of a local customer base for particular products and food produced using specific types of
production and business practices. Farms excluded from local food efforts and the
potential economic benefits they bring will not have these opportunities. One staff
member articulated this philosophy in a reply email to a local chef who questioned
MFF’s support of a tomato grower, through the Appalachian Fresh branding program, not
using organic practices. In his reply, Greg contextualizes his response by relaying a story
from a recent farmer meeting in which the speaker asked the farmers in the room how
many had been approached in the last two months by a housing developer wanting to buy
their land – 80 percent raised their hands. In this context, Greg states, MFF supports all
farms, organic and conventional. Without that approach, the region will continue to lose
farmland and with that loss the option to produce food locally. As a buyer for a
restaurant, the chef has the choice to purchase or not to purchase from this particular farm
and also communicate directly with the farmer about the qualities she looks for in the
products she purchases for the restaurant.

So the upshot is I'm thrilled to have this tomato grower and any other western NC
farm signed on as Appalachian Fresh. I'm also thrilled for your business to not
choose to buy from all those farms, based on what you and your customers want,
and to tell this grower that you are looking for produce free from unhealthy
chemicals... It is true that MFF’s broad approach is already, and will further, anger
and frustrate certain people who have been staunch supporters. We have spent a
lot of time and money focused on promoting some marketing channels that only
work for the very smallest farms in our region. Moving forward MFF will also
spend some time and money on promoting marketing channels that work for the
larger farms in our region (still small by national standards). Some MFF
supporters (perhaps what you call the organic community) won't like that we're
working with larger farms and larger businesses, some of whom use and sell
chemical-intensive produce, but it takes large farms and large businesses to feed
locally-grown food to a region of a million people, and to have a significant
impact on farm preservation in a region with 10,000 farms. As the buying public
increasingly asks questions about chemicals in food, production will hopefully
shift to more environmentally-conscious methods. But that can't happen if we have no farms left. We're in crisis mode in terms of having to quickly create an atmosphere in which all farms perceive that there is hope for their profession because market conditions give them hope. If they don't see that hope then their farmland will be gone.

This framework also grounds the approach organizers take with food businesses and buyers in the region. Industry engagement strategies enable food businesses handling minimal local product to participate in movement activities – to list in the Local Food Guide or participate in the Appalachian Fresh program, for example. For organizers, a set of stringent standards that requires businesses achieve minimal purchase thresholds of local food and to make immediate and perhaps significant changes to established systems of food procurement and distribution would discourage rather than encourage participation. Discussed in further detail later, in the context of a nascent movement to affect food industry norms, organizers aim to create opportunities to “prove the value” to businesses of supporting local farms. Buying food from local farms is an economically viable business practice.

Creating a Movement Culture

Defining the Problem

In its inception, the Local Food Campaign promoted the concept of local food in relation to the industrialized, global food system, simultaneously articulating the problems with the conventional system and the benefits of buying and eating food grown by the region’s farms. Organizers, through a public media campaign have educated the public about the downsides of the industrialized food industry – the impact of long distance travel on the freshness, flavor, and nutrition of food; the effects of intensive agriculture on the environment; the implications of an anonymous system of food
production for consumer awareness of the impacts of their choices. In a 2002 article one organizer describes the losers in the conventional food system – the environment, farmers, and consumers:

So who loses in this industrial food system? The environment loses because of the massive chemical inputs, wasteful resource use, and concentrated animal wastes...[f]armers lose because industrial farming only pays the farmer 7 cents of the food dollar, the majority going to processors, marketers, and input suppliers...[t]he consumer loses because the food we are eating is now developed and grown for transportation and shelf life rather than for nutrition or taste, we’ve lost control of how our food is grown because we no longer know our farmers, and we are losing our countryside of forest and farms.

Farm loss is at the heart of campaign discourse that defines the problems inherent to the globalized food system. With the globalization of the food system, the small farms that characterize the agriculture in the Appalachians have declined. In another 2002 article, one organizer writes:

Due to the small average farm size, limited infrastructure, and more difficult growing conditions, it was, and still is, hard to thrive as an Appalachian farmer growing for global markets. Farm products can be grown more easily and more cheaply somewhere else. The globalization of agriculture, at least around here, has hurt family farms.

Organizers cite statistics from the Census of Agriculture to put this loss in perspective: “North Carolina is losing 1000 farms per year” and “WNC has lost 70% of farmland over the past 50 years.” With dwindling farmer profits, development pressure, and the imminent tobacco buyout, “Western North Carolina is farming on the edge” writes one organizer. He continues:

Our farms are under attack by structural changes in the food and fiber system, urban sprawl, rural scattered development, a decline of farm gate commodity prices, and the uncertain future of the Burley tobacco market. During the years from 1949 to 1992, the total area used to grow crops in western North Carolina declined from two million acres to 600,000 acres – a decrease of 71%.
For decades, increasingly centralized and consolidated systems of food production have excluded the region’s small farms from national and global commodity chains. Organizers cite the often quoted “1,500 miles” to describe the estrangement from food production in modern life and point to the dwindling profits for farmers that are an outcome of this distance. “[F]arm and trade policies threaten the traditional cultures around the world and likewise threaten the viability of family farms in our own country” writes one organizer in a 2005 article. The long distance food travels not only represents the expanse between producers and consumers, it encompasses a host of middle men and marketers usurping the profits of food production. Organizers write, “[f]armers receive less than 10 cents for every dollar spent by consumers,” “[o]ur grocery dollar is more about supporting the transporters and distributors of food than the farmers who grow it,” and “[y]our typical tomato grown on a larger farm goes through six or seven middle people, and that just drives the price down and down for the farmer.”

With the looming tobacco buyout, the end of the federal price support program, the press between 2002 and 2004 educated readers about the significance of tobacco to the region’s agriculture. Organizers promote their tobacco transition program, one of the organization’s initial programs designed to help tobacco farmers transition into organic crop production. To frame the significance of the loss of tobacco for the region’s agriculture, organizers cite the prediction by agricultural economists that with the buyout 50 to 80 percent of farms will completely exit farming.

Food industry consolidation, declining profits for farmers, and the imminent tobacco buyout, contribute to an aging farm population and the pressure to sell farmland for development. With no incentive to pursue farming as a vocation, organizers point to
the aging farm population as a critical threat to the region’s agriculture. In an article titled “Taking Back Control of Our Food Sources” one organizer, cataloging a multitude of destructive effects of industrialized agriculture, writes specifically about the aging farm population: “We are at a critical time for farmers and farmland, with the average age of farmers approaching retirement and too few new farmers to take their place.”

The Consequences of Farm Loss

Within a framework of farm loss organizers articulate the value of farms to the public. The region’s agricultural base is the key to the character of the region – its landscape and its history and cultural heritage. The loss of farms has implications for health, the environment, and the economy and for the power of consumers to affect the qualities and impacts of food production.

Over the course of the Local Food Campaign, organizers have linked local farms and the food they produce to a constellation of qualities and benefits. Farms are important to the region’s economy and landscape and to the health of individuals and families. Farms are a source of nourishment and provide food that is fresher and better tasting. In a series of ads that appeared in local publications in 2006, organizers articulated the significance of farms to the region’s residents. The ad’s header asks readers, “What is the value of a farm?” and continues:

Farming is key to the cultural heritage of our region.
Nearby farms give us a dependable and secure source of good food.
Farms provide wildlife habitat.
Farm landscapes are treasured by tourists and locals alike.
Having local farms allows us to get to know the people who produce our food.

Make a Difference. North Carolina is losing 1000 farms per year. [MFF] is here because we want farms to be here. We think the best way to preserve farms is to help you find ways to buy local farm products. We know that if enough people seek out the products of local farms, the farms won’t disappear. When you
purchase food from a farmer who’s listed in [MFF’s] Local Food Guide, you contribute to the local economy and help save farmland. Actually knowing the person who grows your food is a powerful way to take control of the quality and character of the food you consume.

Framed within an overall trend of farm loss, the ad communicates the pivotal role of farms to the region’s history and cultural distinctiveness, to the capacity of the region to produce food, to the protection of wildlife habitat and scenic landscapes, and to the capacity of consumers to have a direct connection with the person growing their food. The continuation of these qualities and benefits pivots on the presence and preservation of a historically significant activity and on the economic decisions of readers. Decisions to buy food from local farms preserve farming as a way of life and preserve the benefits farms provide.

*Control Over Food Production*

Within the context of industry consolidation, declining profits for farms, the imminent tobacco buyout, development pressure, the aging and declining farm population, organizers warned the public about the consequences of farm loss. One of the key consequences will be the inability of the region to produce food for its communities. Without this ability, the region’s residents lose the power to exert control over the way food is produced.

If current trends continue, our area will forever lose farming, the scenic beauty it fosters and our ability to grow food locally. With that, we will forfeit some of our independence, forcing us to become ever more dependent on other areas and peoples.

Control, specifically loss of control, is a strong theme in the early years of campaign discourse. Loss of control is the outcome of the dual and interrelated conditions of the estrangement from food production in modern life and the decline of the region’s
agricultural base. The far flung food supply chains of the global food system correspond to a “disconnect,” to a lack of knowledge consumers have about the food that they eat. As explained by one organizer for a regional publication:

Not getting food from local farms has led to our rather radical disconnect with our food and where and how it came to arrive on our dinner plates…[f]or 10,000 years of agriculture, all food has been local. Only in the last fifty years or so have we lost our connection to the farms that sustain us and to any control we have over the food that we eat.

Campaign language, drawing attention to the opaqueness of the conventional food system, encourages the public to start thinking critically about food and the material consequences of their food purchasing decisions. With the continued loss of local farms, consumers will lose their capacity to impact the qualities of food production. In keeping with organizers’ theory of change, local farms are the foundation of a food system that provides the communities in which they are embedded a say in how food is produced.

We never get to meet the farmer, see the land being farmed, or have any control over the process of how our food is grown…With the loss of agriculture [in our region] we lose any control we might have over the way our food is grown, the quality of our food, or the environmental and social impact of food production.

The Legacy of Agriculture – Unique Landscapes, Foods, and Farms

In framing the importance of farms to the public, organizers tie agriculture to place. Campaign discourse, rife with references to Appalachia – “Appalachian flavors,” “Appalachian farms,” “Appalachian way of life,” “Appalachian landscape,” “the fresh flavors of [Appalachian Fresh] food,” “the farm heritage of Appalachia,” ground agriculture in a particular place, and tie the region’s landscape, food traditions, and culture to a heritage fundamentally defined by farming. “Why should [we] be interested in the fate of farmland?” asked one organizer in an early publication. Agriculture links the past and present – it is “a traditional way of life that has seen this region through two
hundred years of change.” In this sense, farming is a legacy, and farms today are custodians of this heritage.

As a historically dominant pattern of land use, farming has shaped the qualities of the region’s landscape, which is characterized by a mix of farm and forestland. Campaign discourse links the landscape’s distinctiveness and aesthetic features directly to farms – eating locally grown food preserves “our rural landscapes,” “our scenic mountain landscape,” “our Appalachian landscape.” As shown in the following excerpts from articles written by organizers between 2002 and 2004, this discourse also connects agriculture to the preservation of natural resources and to a quality of life for residents linked to the beautiful scenery and views that includes farms.

Farmland is necessary for the preservation of the mixed landscape of woodland and field that makes the Southern Appalachians such a special place, as well as providing an important habitat for wildlife.

We have people moving to our region wanting a quality of life. Part of this is having farms as part of their landscape.

When we make choices about what we eat, we directly affect the landscape where we live. When we eat locally grown food, we vote for a local landscape that includes farms.

Buying local food is the best way to ensure an Appalachian landscape that includes farms and nurtures small family farms that can produce unique regional flavors.

*Unique Foods*

Within the framework of farms and heritage, campaign discourse portrays the food produced by the region’s farms as distinct in terms of cultural significance and flavor. This excerpt, from a publication written by organizers targeting tourism and economic development authorities, encapsulates the idea that farms are the custodians of
a unique food culture, which contributes to a unique regional identity and is valuable to a tourism industry that can benefit from marketing this distinctiveness to travelers.

Farms also play a key role in protecting something else of incredible value: our food culture and heritage. Many people eat locally grown food simply because it is fresher and tastes better. Others buy the traditional foods they grew up eating. What’s more, our distinctive eateries, festivals, and historic sites are made more distinctive by the people still actively producing stone-ground white cornmeal, greasy beans, sorghum syrup, Keiffer pears, country ham, and (even) liver mush…

Organizers working through local media outlets and through MFF’s Eat Local campaign, a special marketing campaign that highlights seasonal foods each month of the year, educate the public about traditional regional foods. In July 2009, for example, the Eat Local campaign featured beans. An MFF press release, picked-up by regional media outlets, publicized beans as the seasonal food of the month, one with particular historical significance to the region:

Forget the expression, “doesn’t amount to a hill of beans.” In the Southern Appalachians, beans amount to plenty. They’ve been an area mainstay since the first settlers arrived in the region, and there are dozens of varieties of the crop grown here. In fact, it’s even been asserted that more heirloom beans, or traditional cultivars, originated in WNC than anywhere else in the country…

[o]ne of the heirlooms distinct to the area is the greasy bean, so called because of its smooth, fuzz-free pod.

In another article profiling one of the region’s few remaining gristmills, organizers described a traditional food and process. Like the previous example, organizers define the distinctiveness of food produced in the region by heritage, in this case a traditional variety of corn and a time-honored way of processing corn into grits. Evoking a sense of tradition linked to flavor and quality, the article begins: “Like many old-fashioned things, the process is slower, but the product is sweeter.” At this particular
mill, the miller grinds a variety of corn indigenous to the community in which the mill is located:

About three-quarters of what's ground at [the mill] is white corn meal and grits. Modern food scientists have made grits white by processing corn to death, and as a result most natural foods buyers look for yellow grits and cornmeal as a sign of a heartier and healthier product. But in the South, grits have traditionally always been white, not because of overprocessing but because the whole grain they come from is white corn. [The] mill uses…an open-pollinated white flint corn grown by [one] family [in the community]…since the 1820's. This exact strain of corn may exist nowhere else.

Irrespective of heritage, farms also produce fresher and more flavorful foods.

Freshness and flavor, two key qualities campaign discourse attributes to locally grown food, are a product of farms producing for specifically for local markets within a particular set of growing conditions. Guided by the results of surveys conducted with consumers in the region in 2000, freshness has been a key quality promoted by campaign discourse and is the focus of MFF’s bumper sticker – Local Food-Thousands of Miles Fresher – the campaign’s most highly visible and recognized promotional material.

Flavor is an outcome of freshness, the unique growing conditions of the Southern Appalachians, and to fruit and vegetable varieties grown for taste rather than shelf-life.

These two excerpts, the first from an article profiling farms with CSAs, the second profiling one of the region’s cheese producers, demonstrate the way organizers use the idea of “Appalachian flavor” to characterize the food grown by the region’s farms.

An appreciation of farms and regional culture, coupled with the special mountain flavor that comes from our soil, water, climate, and long growing season combine to create a truly unique Appalachian flavor that can be found, among other places, by subscribing to a CSA farm.

The …[c]reamery’s Appalachian mountain location, with the high quality grasses and pure mountain water, along with their commitment to creating specialty
cheeses for local markets, lends their products a distinctive Appalachian Fresh flavor.

Unique Farms

Farms – as the successors in a long tradition of agriculture, as the keepers of enduring food traditions, as the producers of foods with unique Appalachian flavor – contribute to the distinctiveness and character of the region. At the same time, the region’s history and landscape define the distinctiveness of farms. Farms – due to the limitations imposed by the region’s mountain topography, their inability to achieve larger scale – have been unable to shift their production to suit the demand in global markets and largely operate outside global commodity chains. Over the course of the campaign, organizers in collaboration with regional media outlets have written a series of articles that portray the distinctiveness of the region’s farms. These articles profile farms, introducing readers to specific farmers, outlining the history of their operations, what they grow, how they grow it, where they sell it. Combined, they construct a picture of agriculture distinct from industrialized production in scale, production practices, and products. Food produced by local farms is an alternative to the products and practices of the global food system, and growing food for local markets is the crux of the difference.

This excerpt, from a story about one particular farm with a CSA program, contrasts the choices made by farmers producing for local markets versus production for global markets. Growing for local markets, farmers in the region choose to grow varieties of produce for taste not long distance travel and shelf-life. These choices contribute to the preservation of genetic diversity, which has been diminished by the global food trade.

[They] specialize in heirlooms – fruits and vegetables that have been developed over centuries for their taste and other qualities but not necessarily for the demands of packing and travel. For most of the food we get from the grocery
store, travel and shelf life are the most important characteristics. Industrial food producers also diminish the genetic diversity by concentrating on a few varieties, through hybridization or genetic engineering, that meet the demands of food that travels an average 1500 miles before it reaches the dinner table. [These farmers] prefer varieties that taste great, and because they are picking and delivering weekly, they can concentrate on variety and not worry about shelf-life.

This excerpt from a story about a cheese producer clearly distinguishes the farm’s animal husbandry practices from the practices of conventional animal agriculture.

The dairy is pasture based, and the pastures and hay fields are managed using sustainable organic practices. No herbicides, pesticides, or chemical fertilizers are used and no growth hormones are given to the cows. The cows remain vibrant and healthy because they are not stressed, not confined, and not pushed for milk production.

The practices used by the featured creamery provide an alternative to the industrialized practices of confining animals. The article continues by suggesting that the cheese produced here is made distinctive by these alternative, “new old ways” of producing cheese.

You can’t get this kind of cheese everywhere, but you can get it in western North Carolina because [these] innovative farmers are experimenting with new “old” ways of making a living on a small southern Appalachian farm.

The alternatives that local food production provides are also framed in relation to the organics industry. In a 2002 article titled, “Sustainable Eating: Support Your Community by Buying Local,” one organizer examines the “sustainability” of organic food shipped thousands of miles. Providing context for the growth of the organics industry, he writes that 85 percent of organic produce comes from California, a 3,000 mile distance.

So although organic food from further away might seem cheaper than local, the consumer pays the price in less nutritious food, loss of local agriculture, environmental costs that come from shipping (50% of the trucks on our interstate are carrying food!), and the disconnect from food and farming.
Key to the alternative that food grown by local farms provides is the direct connection to farmers and direct knowledge of their production practices. With the conventionalization of organic production and concomitant changes to founding organic production principles, locally grown food provides consumers concerned about farming practices with the means to know about practices firsthand. One organizer articulates this message in an article that appeared in 2006.

The growth of the organic foods industry has drawn big companies to the table, and because of their scale (and profit motive) they are able to efficiently move organic production to where the cost of labor is lowest, compromise growing practices right up to the line of the organic standard, and ship food worldwide at the expense of flavor and freshness. One key group making the shift to local are those informed organics shoppers looking for something more trustworthy than that green and white label. To many, nothing is more trustworthy than being able to look the grower in the eye and ask where and how the food was grown.

In the context of widespread food borne illnesses between 2006 and 2008, organizers framed local food in relation to food safety, contrasting the risks between food grown for local markets and food grown for distribution through global commodity chains. In this discourse, food grown by the region’s farms provides a safer alternative because of scale, known provenance, and differences in production practices. The point of the following statement, from an organizer quoted in a story in the Asheville Citizen Times on the heels of the 2008 salmonella outbreak eventually linked to jalapeno and Serrano peppers is that the food supply chains of the industrial system, through their complexity, create health risks.

The big and astounding problem is that they don't know where it (the salmonella) came from. That doesn't occur when you buy the product right from the farmer who grew it.

Organizers frame local food as a safer alternative, because the shorter supply chains and smaller scale of production mean that food safety outbreaks are localized,
smaller in scale, and can be traced quickly to their source. Furthermore, the production practices of farms in the region are not using industrial scale practices associated with specific food contamination risks. In a 2007 article addressing the 2006 E. coli outbreak linked to spinach (which sickened over 200 and killed three people), MFF organizers contrasted the food safety risks of large-scale industrial agriculture with the agriculture practiced by the region’s small family farms. In the article, the author directly addresses the practices of industrial scale agriculture that inherently create food safety risks. In this excerpt the writer directly addresses the proposition by food safety experts that wild animals wandering through the spinach field were responsible for the outbreak rather than the confined cattle kept close to the field.64

Clearly, somebody’s been playing a careful game of “who’s best to blame.” If we blame the cattle, we’ll raise public awareness about the fact that most of our nation’s pre-cut leafy green produce is grown in close quarters with industrial-scale dairy and beef production. We’ll draw attention to the fact that it is a specific strain of E. coli, the 0157:H7 strain that causes illness and death. This strain is far and away most often found in one place: the guts and feces of cattle being kept in close quarters and fed grain.

Addressing the risks of concentrated food production, the writer questions the idea that food science will make us safe from food contamination. He points out that while large-scale producers and processors spend lots of time and money to ensure the safety of food, when the system fails, it fails on a huge scale. With small family farms selling to local customers, when food safety protocols fail, fewer people are impacted and the source of contamination can be identified and addressed quickly.

[In industrial systems] the damage is more widespread, harder to contain, harder to traceback to the sources, more of a news story and, thus, more damaging to the livelihoods of all farmers.

64 The cattle tested positive for the same strain of E-coli found in a wild pig wandering near the fields months after the outbreak.
By contrast, food grown by the region’s family farms is not produced in the same industrial-like conditions nor distributed through commodity chains that pool and then distribute product from multiple sources – spreading the contamination.

Local family farms are likely not adjacent to huge commercial dairy operations, not processing products from multiple sources, not passing products through multiple hands and locations, and thereby hold little risk of causing an E. coli 0157:H7 outbreak.

**Local Farms and Health**

Campaign discourse also ties local food to health. Meaningful connections to food impact individuals’ relationships to food, affecting their eating practices and ultimately their health. The discourse frames the link between local food and health within a critique of the industrialized food system, which has created unhealthy food environments dominated by cheap, unhealthy food options and a population of eaters alienated from the processes of food production and preparation. Campaign organizers argue that “connections to food” is the path toward healthier individuals and communities.

In the early years of the campaign, organizers linked health and local food within the “loss of control” framework. Campaign discourse located eating in everyday life; it is a daily activity that has implications for individual and family health. Food with an unknown history is risky. These two excerpts from articles written in 2002 and 2004 communicate the significance of knowing where food comes from to the safety and health of families.

In these times of adulterated food that comes from Anywhere, USA, putting a face and place with food is more important than ever. At the tailgate markets, the person selling the tomato is the same as the person who grew it. Ask them where their farms are and about their growing practices... [d]emand to know where your food comes from by asking for locally grown. After all, this is the food you are going to eat and feed to your family, isn't it important to know where it came from and how it was grown?
Eating is one of the most important things we do everyday. It has lifelong implications for our health, our children's health, and the health of the planet. Something odd has happened with our food – most of us don't know who grows it or how it is grown anymore. How could something so important be so out of our control?

Early campaign communications also linked the freshness of local foods to their superior nutritional value; because of their freshness, locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables are a healthier choice. Campaign discourse often cited the statistic that leafy greens can lose up to 50 percent of their nutrients in five days in relation to another statistic – in the conventional food system it takes six days, on average, from harvest to consumption. Ad language promoting the region’s tailgate markets and CSAs, exemplified by the following three quotes, often linked the qualities of fresh and healthy together.

Tailgate Markets! Have fun and support local farmers while enjoying the freshest, healthiest, and best tasting food available. It’s all happening at the tailgate markets.

Fresher food is healthier food.

Get fresh healthy food all season long. Buy Appalachian.

In 2004, campaign discourse began framing the link between local food and health in relation to rising rates of obese and overweight individuals. Citing statistics to demonstrate increases in the number of overweight and obese children and adults in the region, MFF organizers began to tie high and growing incidences of overweight and obese children and adults to the conditions created by the global food industry – the ubiquity of unhealthy, cheap food choices and a population disconnected from food, from the processes of food production to the preparation of meals. Unhealthy food choices
dominate the food environment.65 “[T]he most affordable food on grocery store shelves is often the least nutritious,” notes one Farm to School organizer in a 2005 article explaining the paradox of food insecurity and obesity. School food, a key focus of the Farm to School program, is part of this unhealthy food landscape. Schools – constrained by tight budgets that not only pay for food but also for equipment, repairs, custodial maintenance, worker salaries, and overhead costs – rely on cheaper processed foods. To generate the additional income needed to cover the costs of running school lunch programs, schools have turned to an a la carte system with choices like French fries, candy bars, and sugary drinks.

The counterpart to this environment of unhealthy choices is food alienated from context and by extension a population of eaters that have no relationship to the food that they eat – no knowledge of how it was grown, where it came from, or who grew it. Food comes from a store shelf, a box, a drive-thru. In an article profiling the school garden work of the Farm to School program, one organizer, noting the prevalence of busy working households and the ease of buying prepared foods, observed, “this generation is disconnected…it’s ironic that children from an agricultural area need to learn at school how to plant vegetables.”

Framed in this way – the pervasiveness of unhealthy food options and the estrangement of the population from the processes of food production – organizers link health to place. Health is fostered through meaningful connections to food. Locally grown food is not only a source of nourishment, it connects eaters to a larger context – to

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65 The term food environment is used by the health sciences to describe external factors influencing diet including physical access to food stores, food prices, food and nutrition assistance programs, food advertising, cultural and peer influences, and community characteristics.
a place-based system of food production that explicitly links food, land, and people.

Organizers distinguish between healthy food and healthy, local food. Commenting on the difference, one organizer, Ella, noted, “just because it’s there, doesn’t mean they’ll eat it.” In other words, access to fresh, healthy foods is not enough to impact the health and well being of individuals. In a recorded interview posted to a funder’s website, Ella explains the significance of place to impacting individuals’ food choices.

Healthy food all by itself doesn’t have a story or a face or a connection. That’s why we maintain, and it’s kind of the premise that we operate under, that it has to be local because then it’s something bigger than yourself.

Connecting children and adults to food through “local food and farm experiences” – on farms, in gardens, in cooking demonstrations, at tailgate markets, etc – provide them with “positive experiences.” Providing the public with these types of positive experiences is the path to impacting food preferences, food choices, and health. This excerpt taken from a grant proposal, explains the importance of instituting local food and farm-based activities in schools for students and staff – these place-based experiences engage participants meaningfully with food and farms and affect their relationships to food.

The focus on local food and farm based instruction and activities – farm field trips, cooking with local chefs, school gardens – connects children, teachers, cafeteria workers, parents, CNDs, and other school personnel to the region’s agriculture. This place-based strategy, which engages students, school staff, and community members in a rich experience with locally grown food, is key to developing healthy relationships with food.

In the media, Farm to School organizers, dispelling the idea that children do not like fresh fruits and vegetables, maintain that that the way to get children to eat healthy foods is to engage them in processes of growing and preparing it. As noted in these

66 Child Nutrition Directors
article excerpts, these experiences engender an appreciation and preference for fresh, locally grown food.

A lot of adults say their kids won't eat vegetables. That’s a myth. Children who are given the opportunity to have some relationship with vegetables – planting them, growing them, harvesting them, preparing dishes with them – love to eat vegetables, all kinds of vegetables.

Getting kids involved in growing vegetables reaps immediate rewards. They want to eat everything they grow.

If students have a chance to see fresh foods growing and then cook them, they are a lot more likely to eat them.

Furthermore, when kids see their food growing on a farm, meet the farmer who grows it, grow it themselves, or prepare it, they’re more likely to value their food and eat healthily.

**Local Farms and the Local Economy**

One of the key messages in the campaign discourse revolves around the contributions farms make to the region’s economy. In the first years of the campaign, organizers focused on dispelling the notion that the value of land lies in development.

Drawing on studies conducted by American Farmland Trust, organizers promoted the idea that working farmland is more valuable to the region and its residents. In this excerpt from a guide MFF published on farmland preservation strategies, organizers contrast the cost of providing infrastructure and services to residential property with the cost of those same services to farms. Residential development is a “financial drain” because residences generate less in tax revenues than they consume in services. By contrast, the tax revenues generated by farms exceed what they require in services.

Contrary to common wisdom, it is cheaper to keep land in farms than to develop it. For every tax dollar that residential development generates, it costs any given

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67 Chapter Three discusses the studies conducted by American Farmland Trust. For more information see (Freedgood, et al. 2002).
county an average of $1.67 in municipal services. In contrast, farming the same land would cost as little as twenty-one cents in services for each tax dollar generated. In other words, farming makes money for taxpayers while residential development is a financial drain. Ironically for a profit conscious society like ours, we are replacing the money generating practice of farming with costly urban sprawl and scattered rural development.

With the growth of the movement and increasing demand for locally grown food, the discourse focuses on the impact buying food from local farms has on the region’s economy and the relevance of the region’s farms and the developing local food economy to the economic viability of other industries. Buying from local farms generates economic activity, which benefits the larger community of the region. Two articles written by organizers, one in 2005 and one in 2006, particularly illustrate this idea, and in doing so, both question common consumer behaviors during holidays and vacations – indulgent consumption behaviors for special occasions that support distant communities and anonymous companies rather than local companies and the communities in which they live. In the 2005 article, the writer proposes to readers to spend vacations at home. Why is it, the author muses, that in our day to day lives at home we seek out the most inexpensive goods, and it is only during vacation in some faraway place “that we open our wallets and purses freely?” He continues, “Vacation time is splurge time, and where is that money going? Far, far away from home.”

The same organizer makes a parallel observation in a second 2006 article in relation to consumer purchasing practices around the holidays, also a time of splurging:

In the Hollywood version of Christmas, we're all getting to know our families and friends better again and warming our toes in front of the fire while enjoying Mom's timeless home cooking. In reality, our holidays are increasingly disconnected from our homes and communities…Many of us like the idea of making buying choices that support local businesses and farms. But when it comes to late November and December, by far our biggest money-spending
months, as a nation we’re voting with our wallets to support big faraway companies rather than the local little guy.

Both articles allude to the concept of the multiplier effect. Buying from local farms, as well as other locally based businesses, supports members of the community and generates additional local economic activity. Money spent on the products of local farms and those of other locally based businesses re-circulates as those farms and businesses spend money locally to operate their businesses and/or as the farm or business owners and employees spend their personal income in the local economy. In reference to local gift buying, the author writes, “Studies say that the local economic benefit of a dollar spent on a local business is $2.60. So by choosing to buy local gifts you’re generating benefits you can’t begin to imagine.” Reflecting on the conditions that would be created if more people vacationed at home, the author suggests the region’s economy and citizens would benefit from greater locally-based expenditures:

If more of us found ways to have fun close to home, how many of our neighbors’ jobs would be preserved? How much more money would our local governments have to create great parks and schools? Would we be more grounded in our local cultures and traditions, and more likely to care about preserving them?

With the results of a multi-year research project conducted by MFF to assess the region’s farming economy and quantify market demand for locally grown food by the region’s food industry, movement discourse begins to frame the relationship between the region’s farms and developing local food economy to the economic viability of other industries and to a regionally-directed economic growth strategy. To substantiate the economic importance of local food, organizers worked with local and regional media outlets to publicize the results and implications of MFF’s research documenting the growth in demand for locally grown food by the public and, accordingly, by the
businesses seeking to capture this demand – grocery stores, restaurants, hospitals, colleges, and public schools.

Between 2007 and 2008, regional media outlets carried articles and editorials with headlines like: “Locally Grown Food Making Huge Gains”; “Homegrown Food, Homegrown Profits. Local agriculture Gets Marketing Boost”; “Local Produce Making a Splash. Appalachian Fresh Made $10M in ’07”; “Locally Grown. Growing Trend Takes Root in the Mountains”; “Locally Grown Food Making Huge Gains. Report Backs What Farmers are Seeing: Interest is High”; “Demand for Locally-Grown Food May Keep Farms in Business.” The content of these stories repeated the major findings from the study, which across consumers and food businesses found $36.5 million in market demand for fresh fruits and vegetables and $452 million in market demand for all locally grown food. In the following excerpts, the articles report two other key findings from organizers’ research with consumers – the willingness of consumers to pay more for locally grown food and buy more of it if it is labeled as locally grown:

Supporting local farms is an important consideration for consumers. Research commissioned by [MFF] shows that more than 80 percent of area residents say they would make buying preferences for local if it were labeled.

More than 80 percent of area customers report that they would prefer to buy locally grown food, according to [MFF] research, even if it costs a little more. That’s higher than the national number of about 70 percent of respondents who say that they prefer locally grown food.

82 percent of consumers surveyed say that they would buy more locally grown food is it were labeled as local.

Accordingly in campaign discourse the local food economy has emerged as a significant source of regional economic activity and has relevance for the non-farm businesses tied to this emerging local food economy – to the businesses that sell or serve locally grown food. As custodians of the rural landscape, farming and its continued
viability is especially relevant to tourism, the region’s number one industry. The significance of agriculture to tourism is stated in this excerpt from a 2007 report summarizing the key findings of MFF’s research (emphasis in original):

A strong farm sector is important for its own contribution to the region’s economy, but it also plays an important part in maintaining tourism, the region’s number one industry. The $2 billion tourism industry depends heavily on the scenic landscapes and views made possible by the region’s farms, which occupy over one million acres in WNC.

With increasing public interest in local farms and local food, organizers link agriculture to tourism and in campaign discourse position the region’s farms as the foundation of regionally-directed economic growth. In the context of shrinking economic opportunities and job loss in the region’s traditional manufacturing sectors and in relation to strategies that focus on national economic development trends in areas like technology and health care, organizers point to agriculture as the “economic future” for the region. In a 2009 publication created for tourism and economic development authorities organizers wrote:

We believe that farms are at the starting point of reversing a downward slide, and are poised to become a growth industry in your community. Farms can create jobs in your community. Farms can increase tax revenue for your community. Farms can attract visitors to your community. Farms can redirect some of the $370 million spent by tourists on food and drink in our region (and $2.2 billion spent by residents) into your local economy. Farms can help your community stand out as a place to live, visit, retire, and work.

Accordingly, as custodians of a scenic landscape, as bearers of a unique cultural heritage and food culture, as the foundation of an emerging local food economy, farms are valuable to regional economic growth and farm promotion can support the goals of tourism and economic development authorities. This excerpt from MFF’s farm tourism publication, tells tourism and economic development authorities how their support and
promotion of farms will sustain the landscape made distinct by farmland that is the foundation of the tourist industry in Western North Carolina:

Here in the Blue Ridge, note that farms offer what many come here seeking: views. Much of our public land is hemmed in by tall trees, and overlooks can feel crowded and inauthentic. But many of our mountain farms abut National Forest land and Parkway land and feature open land with stunning views.

Moreover, visitors are increasingly drawn to Western North Carolina to experience the region’s farms and food. To tourism and development authorities, organizers contend that the region’s farms are uniquely positioned to “provide a taste of local culture, heritage, and history – exactly the authentic experiences that today’s travelers are seeking.” Within this framework of experience, organizers promote a broad definition of agritourism that includes activities on and off the farm. This conceptualization is described in this passage from a grant proposal (emphasis in original).

Visitors are drawn to the region for its scenic beauty and outdoor recreational opportunities and increasingly to experience the region as a food and farming destination. Visitor experiences with the region’s agriculture happen on and off the farm. Off-farm connections involve eating at restaurants or staying at Bed & Breakfasts that feature locally-grown food, attending festivals or events celebrating regional cuisine, or traveling scenic trails through the region’s farmland. These kinds of experiences are important both to the economic viability of farms and to the restaurants, inns, and other businesses that distinguish their operations through their connection to local farms…[and] to the small rural towns in the region that are increasingly looking toward agriculture as a means to revitalize their local economies.

Within this conceptualization, farms are at the center of local and regional economic activity generated by increasing interest in local food and farms. Buying locally grown food not only supports farmer livelihoods and the rural economies grounded in agriculture, it supports farm-linked businesses and economic activities – the restaurants, groceries, produce stands and stores that source food from the region’s farms,
the community and county level food and farm initiatives – fairs, farm tours, festivals, farm to table initiatives – striving to generate local economic activity.

**Engaging the Public: Framing the Solution**

STOP! Before you take another bite, you might want to consider that your food choices have a much bigger impact than you could ever imagine. Food choices CAN make a difference! Eating food grown locally can help to preserve our remaining family farms and our rural landscape. Eating food grown locally means that food dollars stay in the local economy, that the food we eat is fresher, more nutritious, that we are caring for our environment, and that we're thinking of our future and our children's futures! …Get to know the farmers in your area. Actually knowing the person who grows your food is a powerful way to take control of the quality and character of the food you consume.

Within movement discourse, farming is instrumental to the region – key to the region’s history and cultural heritage, key to the region’s the landscape and quality of life that depends in part on the region’s scenic beauty and access to fresh food, key to the health of its residents, key to a vibrant local economy that benefits local businesses and provides an avenue of regional economic development. The globalization of agriculture, the liberalization of the tobacco market, declining farmer profits, development, and the aging farmer population threaten this asset. As articulated in the above passage from MFF’s 2003 Local Food Guide, buying food from local farms provides the people that live in the region with the means to take direct action – to impact not only the qualities of the food system and the food they eat but also the environment and communities in which they live, the vitality of the region’s economy, and their health and the health of their families.

Organizers frame the solution to farm loss – buying locally grown food – within the idea of consumer activism. “Become a Local Food Activist” declares the title of a 2003 article, which then goes on to tell readers, “In a world where it is increasingly hard
to have an impact, we can take direct action by supporting local farms.” The consumer in this framework is a citizen, actively participating in and taking responsibility for the qualities of food production. Campaign discourse links for the public the relationship(s) between their consumption choices and the material impacts of those choices. Buying food from local farms provides consumers with the means to meaningfully participate in food production and in their communities – to simultaneously reject the practices of the industrialized food system and affect the way food is produced locally through a direct connection with the farmers growing it. In one regional publication, organizers wrote, “We can take back our food system,” and then continued:

The one sure way to make certain you are not supporting the current destructive industrial agriculture system is to buy locally grown food. Getting to know the person who grows your food is a powerful way to reconnect with food and community – when you support your local farm, you get the freshest food, keep money in the local economy, and make sure that we keep farms as part of our landscape, while making sure that you have a say in how the food is grown.

Within the framework of consumer activism, communication strategies articulate specific actions the public can take. Within the general directive to buy locally grown food, campaign discourse encourages consumers to become active participants – “get to know farmers,” “ask them about their growing practices,” “tell farmers what you are looking for,” “tell farmers you want food with particular qualities,” “visit the farms in your community,” “see firsthand who grows your food.”

Direct to consumer markets have been especially integral to campaign strategies – to both validate the solution and motivate action. Alternative market venues like tailgate markets and CSAs bring farming directly to consumers and provide opportunities for personal interaction between farmers and community members. Writing specifically
about tailgate markets in the region, in this story excerpt from 2002, organizers explained to readers the distinct advantages gained by buying directly from farmers:

These markets are a wonderful place to learn exactly where your food comes from. In these times of adulterated food that comes from Anywhere, USA, putting a face and place with food is more important than ever. At the tailgate markets, the person selling the tomato is the same as the person who grew it. Ask them where their farms are and about their growing practices.

Buying food from the farmer that grew it puts consumers in a position of power. Direct contact with farmers places consumers in a direct relationship with farming; it provides direct knowledge of growing practices and a direct means to influence what farmers grow and how they grow it. Within a consumer activist frame, local food is the path toward impacting systems of food production. The final sentence of the opening passage to this section epitomizes this campaign message, “[a]ctually knowing the person who grows your food is a powerful way to take control of the quality and character of the food you consume.” The close connection created through localizing food production and consumption enables consumers to make informed and deliberate decisions, which simultaneously support and reject certain kinds of agriculture.

Calls to action also encourage the public to patronize businesses that serve or sell locally grown food and to ask questions of them – ask for local where you dine or shop for food, ask businesses where their food comes from, tell the businesses where you shop and eat that you want locally grown food. Consistent with the consumer activist frame, this excerpt from a 2002 article tells readers explicitly the significance of the market – of consumer demand – to changing the food system.

Ask for local wherever you buy food-restaurants, grocers, caterers. If a restaurant or store says they sell local, ask them where it came from and ask that they carry even more locally grown. Pressure from the consumer is often the most important change factor.
In 2006, campaign discourse shifted from the directive “buy local food” to the directive “buy [Appalachian Fresh] food.” Freshness and flavor, supporting local farms and the local economy, preserving the region’s landscape and agricultural heritage, etc are still central tenets of campaign discourse but ads, stories, articles, and social media tie local food and farm campaign messaging to a particular definition of local. As will be discussed in greater detail below, in the context of increasing consumer interest in locally grown food, concomitant interest by food retailers in capturing consumer dollars, and the potential for the co-optation of the market for local food from the region’s farms, organizers launched the Appalachian Fresh program to certify local farms and label local food in non-direct market outlets, e.g., grocery stores, institutional cafeterias, and restaurants. Press releases and stories generated by organizers in 2006 tell readers that local is corruptible and ask the public: “How do you know if what you are buying is really from a local farm?” and “What can consumers do to guard against misleading labels and ensure their dollars are supporting “local” farms?” The answer is to “look for” and “ask for” Appalachian Fresh. Shoppers that buy food labeled with the Appalachian Fresh brand are buying products that are “truly” from the region’s farms. In a 2006 article, organizers warn readers about the broad interpretation of the word “local” in the marketing messages of big grocery retailers in the region. In this context, organizers ask, “[w]here does that leave the consumer?” Commensurate with the consumer activist frame, organizers tell readers to take an active role, to ask retailer questions about their local food labeling practices and what their labels mean.
Engaging the Public: Building Community Connections to Agriculture

In this section I return to one of the key aspects of movement organizers’ theory of change: embedding the economy of food production in place. If the globalization of food production has been about alienating food production, provision, and consumption from specific contexts and human relations, then the Local Food Movement is fundamentally about re-embedding these processes in specific locations and in the social relations of those locations. In this framework, the construction of place and attachment to place are fundamental to movement strategies designed to mobilize collective action in support of local farms.

Through the Local Food Campaign, movement organizers have defined place by a bound physiographic/geographic region inextricably shaped by agriculture. In framing the assets farms confer to the region and its residents, organizers have at the same time constructed a conception of place fundamentally linked to agriculture. A distinct cultural heritage is imprinted today on a picturesque landscape of forest and farms and in enduring food traditions. An agriculture of small family farms, itself shaped by the physiographic conditions and climate of the region, provides an alternative to the practices and products of the conventional food system and contributes to the distinct identity of the region.

To create “local food and farm advocates” – to construct a shared sense of place, to instill an appreciation for farms and locally grown food, to mobilize action in accordance with changing sensibilities – organizers through the Local Food Campaign have conceived of and enacted specific strategies to engage the public with local farms and locally grown food. Organizers position farms and locally grown food at the center of
activities designed to build community linkages and provide the public with “positive local food and farm experiences.” Direct to consumer markets like tailgate markets and CSAs, Farm to School activities, local food meals and events, and MFF’s Farm Tour, Eat Local promotional initiative, and social media activities create engagement “spaces” for the public to interact with farmers and farming – to learn about regionally significant foods and the seasonality of food production, to observe and participate in the processes of growing and harvesting food, to cook with seasonal, local ingredients. The following excerpt, from a press release organizers wrote about their annual Farm Tour, demonstrates organizers’ strategy of engagement to facilitate direct experiences with farmers and farming. Note the use of active verbs – bring, watch, see, try, learn, take, identify, visit, explore, and stop.

Bring your curiosity – and your cooler and your appetite. A variety of vegetables and fruits, beef, pork, lamb, eggs, artisan cheeses, herbs, mushrooms, honey, garlic, and much more will be available to sample or for sale. Watch animals such as chicks, baby lambs, bunnies and llamas. See traditional skills in practice and even try them out yourself during demonstrations of border collie shepherding, outdoor apple butter making, hand milking, the maple syrup tapping process, and wool spinning. Or learn about new ideas during the tour of renewable energy systems, take a sustainable forest walk and identify plants, visit an edible landscape, or explore a garden labyrinth. And stop for a picnic at one of the many beautiful farms along the way.

The goal of the Farm Tour as well as other local food and farm focused events and activities is to connect economic decisions about what food to buy and eat to the conditions and relationships of place – to develop within participants of these activities an emotional connection, a sense of advocacy that conditions their economic decisions. To repeat Ella’s explanation for the purpose of farm field trips for chefs, “We are trying to make chefs advocates, and you can’t be an advocate unless you have an emotional
connection.” Developing this emotional connection is at the heart of organizers’ public engagement strategies.

In the industrialized global food system, food is anonymous and without history. It is not connected to a person, to a place, to a “story” that imbues food with meaning. Food choices are in essence value-free. Organizer strategies designed to engage the public with the region’s agriculture aim to develop a shared sensibility of support for the region’s farms. Organizers’ understanding that the engagement with and the experience of a particular place gives rise to attachment and influences the decisions of individuals is manifest in the Charles Jordan quote organizers chose to include in the beginning of the farm field trip guide and in this organizer’s observation in a 2006 article, quoted earlier:

If more of us found ways to have fun close to home, how many of our neighbors' jobs would be preserved? How much more money would our local governments have to create great parks and schools? Would we be more grounded in our local cultures and traditions, and more likely to care about preserving them?

This observation in particular articulates the reason for organizers’ strategies of engagement with local agriculture. Engagement facilitates appreciation – in terms of knowledge and sentiment – and actions commensurate with a perceptual shift. Connections to food developed through local food and farm experiences imbue food with meaning – with the significance of interactions with farmers and the significance of experiences on farms, shopping at tailgate markets, participating in cooking demonstrations with local chefs, as members of CSAs, as participants in local food and farm focused activities. Food choices become an extension of these experiences and a means to express a growing sense of community, of appreciation for the region’s farms,

68 “What people do not understand, they do not value; what they do not value, they will not protect, and what they do not protect, they will lose.”
of developing sense responsibility toward community. One organizer, quoted in a 2006 article, expressed this conclusion in this statement: “When people enjoy delicious prepared food from area farms and get to know the farmer, even indirectly, they think twice about sitting by idly while small farms disappear.”

Within this framework of understanding, organizers devote significant resources and energy to providing the public with opportunities to directly engage with farming, interact with farmers, and participate in various sorts of local food and farm centered activities. Organizers use discursive practices to connect the public to the region’s agriculture: to educate them about farming, excite them about seasonal buying and eating, and persuade them to go out and experience the region’s farms and landscape and seek out locally grown foods at tailgate markets, restaurants, grocery stores, etc. Through discursive practices and community organizing, movement organizers construct community spaces and organize events where the public can purchase and try locally grown foods, socialize with farmers and other community members, spend their leisure time, be entertained, and experience farms and farming directly.

The Local Food Guide has arguably been the Local Food Campaign’s central public communications tool. Published annually since 2002, the guide is a directory to the places in the region consumers can eat and shop for locally grown food; it lists tailgate markets, CSAs, u-pick farms, roadside stands, and the food businesses and retailers – restaurants, groceries, B&Bs, wholesalers and distributors, etc – that buy from local farms.

Now printing and distributing 90,000 to 100,000 copies annually, the guide is one of the most visible aspects of the Local Food Campaign and organizers use it to
communicate the movement’s message and values and connect the public to all of the ways they can experience the region’s agriculture first-hand. Until more recently, a core item in the guide has been the “reasons to buy locally grown food.” While evolving over the years of the campaign, the reasons restate the benefits and qualities local farms confer to the region and its residents – fresher, healthier, and more flavorful food; open landscapes; the promotion of genetic diversity; more environmentally friendly production practices; the economic contribution of working farmland; and the link between farms and community. In this excerpt from the 2009 guide, organizers situate the movement within the larger global economic downturn and the importance of supporting local farms in this context. Commensurate with earlier campaign discourse around the ‘loss of control’ theme, in a time of uncertainty, buying from local farms provides consumers with a way to effect change and impact the world around them.

This eighth edition is published in a time of uncertainty about the global economy, but this much is clear: Never has there been greater need to support our local food system. Buying local and paying a fair price keeps farmers farming. Small farms help to preserve rural culture and landscape, strengthen the local economy, encourage sustainable farming practices, and increase the availability of fresh foods. Use the guide to search for vegetables, fruits, meats, cheeses, plants, and preserves. You’ll find these and much more, including ways support family farmers and to reconnect with your food.

Direct to consumer market venues like tailgate markets and CSAs have been, in the words of one organizer, “the frontline of campaign efforts,” because they put a “face on food” and are places where farmers and the public interact directly. In campaign discourse, tailgate markets are not only the location to buy fresh food from local farms, the markets are fun weekly social events, a source of entertainment, and community

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69 MFF’s reasons to buy locally grown food were also originally adapted from Growing for Market, as discussed in Chapter Three.
gathering places where participants simultaneously shop for food and socialize with farmers and other community members. Working through local media outlets – regional papers, magazines, and public radio – and social media, campaign tailgate market promotions have been a consistent mainstay of activity. Weekly tailgate market updates across these media venues provide tailgate market locations and educate the public about what foods are in season or coming in season. Articles and ads highlighting the benefits of shopping at tailgate markets have consistently described the markets as “fun” and “festive,” “a place for whole family.” A commonly used phrase in earlier ads described tailgate markets as “a street fair every week!” A more recent variation, used in promotions of a tailgate market managed by MFF, describes the market shopping experience as “a weekly farm fresh adventure!” The 2012 Local Food Guide used this description to introduce the section listing tailgate markets in the region:

Farmers tailgate markets are the perfect community experience: a chance to talk with farmers, meet neighbors, try new foods, enjoy live music, and more. Luckily, the Southern Appalachians are home to 90!

Organizers use the weekly tailgate market scene to engage the public in the season’s unfolding. The following passages, excerpted from MFF’s weekly tailgate market website post, illustrate an engagement strategy designed to create excitement and anticipation around seasonal and regionally distinctive fruits and vegetables. In keeping with campaign food and farm discourse, the language focuses on the qualities of freshness and flavor.

Spring’s boldest flavors – from ramps to asparagus and stinging nettles to spring onions – were front and centre at area farmer tailgate markets this past week and weekend, and they should be available for your favorite recipes a little longer. These are the salad days of area farmers tailgate markets. They’re young, just beginning, bustling with excitement, and chock full of everything you need for a spring salad—from lettuce mixes to spinach to radishes!
Strawberries and rhubarb go together like peanut butter and jelly, peas and carrots, salt and pepper…you get the idea! Luckily, both members of the dynamic duo are available at area farmers tailgate markets now—fresh from farmers and already baked into classic pies and crisps thanks to bakery vendors.

Whatever the weather this week and weekend, area tailgates will offer up a bounty of greens like chard, spinach, and salad mixes. Spring onions are in abundance now. Also look out for green garlic. Green garlic is harvested when the plant is young, resulting in a mild flavor.

Concurrently, organizers coordinate or support individual markets to coordinate weekly activities and special celebratory events around the seasons (e.g., summer and fall celebrations) and holidays (e.g., Father’s Day, Mother’s Day, Independence Day, etc.) that create festive market environments and variously feature live music, special food tastings and contests, cooking demonstrations with local chefs and fresh market ingredients, and activities designed specifically for children. For a number of years, for example, several of the region’s markets have celebrated “tomato week” annually to mark and celebrate the season’s first tomatoes. Consumers shopping at these markets can taste an assortment of tomato varieties, vote for their favorites, win a raffle of market goods, and watch local chefs prepare fresh dishes with local tomatoes.

Months prior to the start of the growing season, organizers also begin promoting CSAs in ads and social media, listing farms with CSA programs, and through stories in regional media that feature specific CSA farms. In 2011, MFF also began organizing annual CSA fair events – spaces for farmers to promote their CSAs to the public and for the public to shop for CSAs. Key to organizers’ discourse around CSA’s are the benefits that come from subscribing to a farm – subscribing to a CSA provides another opportunity for participants to support the region’s farms, to connect directly with food
production, and to develop relationships with the people growing their food. The following excerpts from articles organizers wrote in 2003 and 2005 illustrate:

CSAs can provide a way for farmers to keep control of their livelihoods, and the CSA members can find a powerful way to gain control of an extremely important part of their lives - the food that they eat!

By connecting to a CSA farm, consumers are able to create valuable relationships and at the same time, they help maintain the unique characteristics of the region.

Members of the CSA community get to participate in how and where their food is grown.

CSAs are distinct from farmers markets in that they provide customers with a means to connect with farming and the farmers growing their weekly supply of food in a more significant way. Notable in the following description of a CSA from MFF’s Local Food Guide is the use of the possessive pronouns – their and your – to describe customers’ relationships to farms through CSAs. Commensurate with the philosophy behind the CSA model, the use of the pronouns suggests that in subscribing to a farm in advance, for a season CSA customers have a level of ownership in the farm. On their farm, participants will share in the farming experience – learning about the practices of farming and the seasonal nature of food production – and in the farm’s bounty.

As a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) customer, you subscribe to a farm, purchasing a year’s harvest of the farm’s goods. Each week, receive a share of what’s in season. CSAs are great for both the farmer, who knows he or she will have customers’ support throughout the season and the members, who get a direct connection to their farm. You’ll see the effect of the season and the weather on your farm, try a wide variety of vegetables, and have a regular supply of the freshest food.

In 2008, MFF launched the Eat Local initiative, a year round farm to table promotional campaign that highlights one seasonal food each month – e.g., ramps in

70 As the Local Food Movement as grown the single farm CSA model has expanded to include a variety CSA models including multi-farm models. Here I am referring to the traditional single-farm CSA model.
April, lettuce in May, mushrooms in June, blackberries in July. Featured foods are chosen for their relative abundance in the region; while in season, consumers can readily find them at tailgate markets, farm stands, and grocery stores and in dishes served in local restaurants and institutional cafeterias. From the perspective of organizers, Eat Local makes locally grown food and its seasonality more accessible to a public (consumers as well as food industry buyers) largely disconnected from the seasonality of agriculture. Organizers use Eat Local as an organizing framework to engage the public (and food industry buyers) in monthly promotional activities and events. Articles and social media focused on the food product of the month educate the public about product qualities, provide cooking tips and recipes, and drive the public to find it at farmers markets, restaurants, and retail outlets. Each month organizers work with local restaurants and chefs and tailgate markets to coordinate special events – special local food meals at restaurants featuring the monthly ingredient and cooking demonstrations or food tastings at the markets. The following two passages, excerpted from a food blogger site MFF contributes to, announce the Eat Local featured food of April and May, respectively. Like the tailgate market posts, the language focuses on seasonality and freshness and on the distinctiveness of flavors and varieties.

April is the only time of year for local ramps, members of the onion family found growing wild in forests and cultivated on forestland. Naturally, [MFF] will shine the light on the region’s beloved early-spring vegetable this month… Ramps are known for their bold flavor and are often described as a tasteful mix of onion and garlic. Area food entrepreneurs anxiously await their two to three weeks of harvest every year to create products with the distinct flavor.

Western North Carolina’s farmers and chefs are out to prove that lettuce can be a lofty vegetable. Farmers grow dozens of colorful, flavorful types and varieties – from Bibb to Romaine and Black Seeded Simpson to Lolla Rosa. Chefs embrace these offerings, even lesser-known heirlooms, and elevate them in all types of dishes. Farmers and chefs are joining with [MFF’s] May Eat Local initiative to
encourage showing lettuces love….The flavor of lettuce is at its peak while some cool weather remains, making May a perfect time for the veggie to stand in the spotlight.

Efforts to engage the public in positive experiences with the region’s farms and locally grown food permeates the work of MFF’s Farm to School program. Within a problem framework of rising rates of overweight and obese children and a solution framework that proposes the idea that connections to food have a bearing on relationships to food and to health, MFF’s Farm to School program focuses on engaging children as well as the adults that interact with children with the region’s agriculture through four key activity areas: field trips to farms, gardening in schools, cooking with locally grown food, and eating locally grown food in school cafeterias. On farms and in school gardens, participants learn how food grows first-hand – participating in the processes of planting, tending, and harvesting; learning about soils, insects, farm animals, and lifecycles. In participatory cooking demonstrations, students, teachers, cafeteria staff, parents, and others interact with local chefs to prepare dishes with locally grown ingredients; in some cases demonstrations incorporate the ingredients participants harvested themselves in school gardens or farm field trips. In school cafeterias, students and staff eat locally grown food, and organizers link the food served from local farms to specific farms and farmers with promotional materials like farmer profiles.

Within the idea of food environments, organizers’ strategies have evolved from a focus on children as the primary recipients of Farm to School activities to focus also on the adults interacting with children at schools. Organizers use food environments, a concept that has emerged from the health sciences, to understand and frame the purpose and impact of Farm to School programming. The food environment is not just a product
of the food available and the ease of access to healthy food, it is also a product of the food related attitudes and behaviors modeled to children by peers and mentors. Within this framework, the food related attitudes and behaviors of adults are a significant component of the food environment with the power to influence the formation of children’s food preferences and practices. Explaining the impact adult attitudes toward food have on kids, one organizer observed:

If you’re doing a cooking demo or a tasting with local food and the teacher won’t try it because she doesn’t like broccoli, or has never eaten eggplant and doesn’t want to try something new, that sends a message. Kids pick up on that.

“Modeling” – i.e., how to start and develop a school garden, how to lead successful farm field trips for students, how to conduct age-appropriate cooking classes with locally grown food, how to integrate nutritional education into Farm to School activities, how to use farm field trips, cooking, and school gardens to teach core curriculum requirements – is a significant strategy organizers use to engage adults in Farm to School activities. Through modeling, organizers aim to achieve two primary goals – to engage and cultivate the support of adults in the implementation and continuation of Farm to School activities and to provide the participants themselves with positive experiences on farms, in school gardens, in cooking demonstrations and local food tastings. In training the participants how to implement the activities themselves, organizers aim to demonstrate the ease with which Farm to School activities can be implemented and, for teachers specifically, integrated to satisfy existing teaching requirements; to demonstrate the positive impact these activities have on children; and the same time positively impact their perceptions of locally grown food and local farms. Across these activities, organizers develop and share lesson plans, classroom activities,
and age-appropriate recipes and provide teachers, parents, chefs, and volunteers with the material resources to implement Farm to School activities – seeds, cooking equipment, small grants to pay for farm field trips, suitable children’s literature. Organizers assume the role of mediators, helping for example to connect teachers to farms open to school groups for field trips and to chefs for cooking demonstrations.

The modeling strategies organizers use in Farm to School recognize a relationship between the private and public roles of individuals – the relevance of personal experiences and perceptions to individuals’ decisions and actions in their capacities as public figures, i.e., as teachers, as chefs, as Child Nutrition Directors, etc. As will be discussed in greater detail in the section below on engaging the food industry, this understanding informs MFF strategies to engage individuals in the food industry – what organizers refer to as “gatekeepers” or individuals within the food industry in positions to impede or facilitate local food campaign efforts.

**Scaling-up: Engaging the Food Industry**

A decade ago when MFF launched the Local Food Campaign, organizers’ framing strategies promoted local food as a general idea. Local food was a new concept. Movement strategies, aiming to “put a face with food,” focused primarily on promoting tailgate markets, CSAs, u-pick farm operations and on-farm stores and stands – alternative market venues that brought farmers and consumers in direct contact. This statement by one organizer articulates the rationale for the development of the Appalachian Fresh initiative, a regional local food branding and certification program that aims to hold the market accountable to a particular definition of “local.”

Direct sales were the frontline of the campaign. When [MFF] began, local food was a new concept and the strategy was to put a face with food and literally get
the issue out in front of people. At that point we didn’t have the problem of people taking the local concept and watering it down… When we started this, it was enough just to tell people to look for local food, but it isn’t anymore. If you tell people now to buy local you leave them at the mercy of the marketers that will call anything local.

In 2006, in the context of increasing consumer interest in locally grown food and concomitant interest by the food industry in capturing consumer dollars, organizers shifted from the promotion of a general concept of local food to the promotion of certified local food. Freshness and flavor, supporting local farms and the local economy, preserving the region’s landscape are still central tenets/components of campaign discourse but ad campaigns, stories, and social media began to tie local food and farm promotions to a particular definition of local.

Appalachian Fresh

Echoing the increasing momentum of the Local Food Movement nationally, in 2006 in Western North Carolina, large retailers had taken notice of consumer interest in locally grown food. Local food messaging was appearing in their advertisements and circulars and in their stores; phrases like “locally grown” and “local food” were becoming more common in retail environments. How “local” was defined, however, was widely interpreted and varied from retailer to retailer. Stated by one organizer in a 2006 article, “[t]he word ‘local’ is, in theory, uncorruptible: it either comes from around here or it doesn’t.” Nevertheless, the writer goes on to point out that how retailers were defining ‘from around here’ was different. Emerging local food programs defined local broadly and ambiguously or used to language to describe food in stores that alluded to but did not definitely state “locally grown.” Here, the organizer describes the local food marketing practices of two large grocery store chains with stores in the region:
[Food Mart] evokes local by calling their produce section a “Farmers Market” and using language like “fresh from the farm everyday” on their website, but they don’t deliver [i.e., they don’t carry produce from local farms], at least not yet…Similarly deceptive is [Food World’s] use of the word “local” to refer to anything grown in the Southeast. Their weekly sale fliers show farmer images and stories from ‘our local farmers’ in the South Carolina lowlands and even Florida. While there’s probably a [Food World] somewhere near these farmers, to broadcast the local message across an area so big is to greatly compromise the meaning of the word.

This same year, one of the region’s grocery retail chains contacted organizers to talk about participating in the Local Food Campaign. For organizers, this development brought with it both exciting opportunities to “scale up” or mainstream movement activities and potential risks to the ideals and integrity of movement goals. Southeast Foods, a locally based company, provided organizers with an opportunity to directly engage with the conventional food industry. With store locations in towns and rural communities across the region, the participation of Southeast Foods offered a promising market for the region’s farms and the means to significantly increase the distribution and availability of locally grown food. At the same time, working with Southeast Foods presented a set of risks to movement activities. The potential relationship with Southeast Foods raised, as one organizer articulated, “the whole Walmart question.” This statement was not meant compare the two retailers, Southeast Foods to Walmart, but to raise the issue of scale with large retailers. Southeast Foods, as a much larger retail entity than the relatively small food cooperatives and independently owned groceries already participating in the movement, opened campaign activities to a qualitatively different type of business. In 2006, the retailer had 60 store locations in Western North Carolina and over 200 stores in the southeast. It is a self-distributing grocery store chain with a central distribution warehouse and trucking fleet for distribution to all store locations. For
organizers the potential relationship raised serious questions about the direction of movement activities and how to engage with the food industry without jeopardizing movement goals.

During this same time period, MFF was in the final year of a multi-year study of the food and farming economy of Western North Carolina focused on developing a deeper understanding of the region’s agricultural base, identifying existing systems of food distribution in the region, and quantifying demand for locally grown food by the region’s markets and consumers. For organizers, one of the major implications of research findings was the need to label locally grown food in the marketplace. On the consumer side, survey results showed a consumer preference for food grown locally, the willingness of consumer respondents to pay more for it, and their inclination to buy more local food if it were labeled “local.” On the food business side, the research revealed that buyers often overestimated their purchases of locally grown food. When sourcing produce through locally based produce vendors – through wholesale distributors and packers, for example – food buyers often erroneously assumed that what they were purchasing was grown by the region’s farms. In a 2009 staff meeting, the continued salience of this issue emerged in relation to a discussion about the region’s state run farmers market, which sells a mix of locally grown and non-locally grown food. Because it is a “farmers market,” however, many shoppers (end consumers and food industry buyers) assume they are always purchasing locally grown products. The discussion was spurred by a proposed initiative to start a producer-only market in the

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71 The North Carolina Department of Agriculture operates five farmers market in the state. In the western part of the state, NCDA markets are distinct from the tailgate markets, which are organized and managed by farmers and/or community-based entities. The majority have a producer-only rule, which means that producers can only sell what they grow; they cannot buy products from other farms and “resell” them.
farmers market – a special area of the market where farmers vending would only sell what they grow.

Greg in one of his updates told us that the department of ag’s farmers market is looking to start a producer-only market in the farmers market... Greg noted the name – the fact that it is called a farmers market – is deceiving because many of the producers there buy and resell. In other words, it’s not producer-only. The issue for organizers is that a lot of chefs and consumers go there to buy produce, and they assume that it is local. [MFF]…did a survey with buyers and consumers there and this was one of the findings. Also [MFF] in a survey to restaurants to gauge the demand for local and current local purchasing practices found that many chefs shop at that farmers market intending to buy local produce.

With increasing demand for locally grown food, the research data demonstrating the need for local food labeling, and the potential for a partnership with a relatively large food retailer, organizers realized the imperative to define local and label it in the marketplace and launched the Appalachian Fresh regional branding and certification program. The decision to launch Appalachian Fresh marked a key shift in the way that organizers framed locally grown food – from the general promotion of local to clearly defining what local is and is not. The request by Southeast Foods in particular compelled organizers to formalize the program – to finalize the design of a logo and the definition of local, to develop logo use standards and the criteria for program participation by farmers and food businesses, to establish a system to maintain the integrity of logo use. In keeping with organizers’ aim to effect change within the conventional food system, the program expanded Local Food Campaign activities beyond the focus of direct markets. Organizers developed Appalachian Fresh specifically to identify locally grown food in non-direct market outlets – to create a proxy for use in retail and institutional settings where consumers are not in direct contact with farmers. Organizers have used the program to engage food industry players in movement activities and protect movement.
integrity – to protect the market for locally grown food for the region’s farms and hold retailers and other food system entities accountable to a particular definition of local. In the words of one organizer, “[Appalachian Fresh] is all about the integrity of local in local food and making sure that it does not become watered down and meaningless.”

*The Structure and Rules of the Appalachian Fresh Program*

Appalachian Fresh brands local food grown on family farms within 100 miles of Asheville, the region’s largest urban center and market. The program certifies family farms, and program participants – farmers and food handlers – are able to promote and label products grown or raised on certified farms.

Organizers developed the definitions, criteria for participation, and the rules for using the logo to engage the food industry in the Local Food Movement and at the same time maintain control over the way that local is being defined and promoted. Appalachian Fresh is at once a definition of local and a programmatic structure for maintaining the integrity of the logo’s definition and the market for locally grown food. Appalachian Fresh is a certification mark owned by MFF, and organizers depict the logo with the trademark symbol, TM, to claim public ownership of the mark. To govern the way the logo is used organizers have developed program license agreements for farmers, food handlers (restaurants, grocery stores, wholesale distributors, institutions), food processors, and tailgate markets; participants are required to sign the license agreement annually. This structure – the agreements and trademark – were designed to provide the program with some “robustness” and organizers with legal recourse if standards are

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72 As will be discussed in Chapter Seven, the Appalachian Fresh definition of “local” has changed with the development of the program’s activities and in relation to organizers’ observations about program’s workability and impacts. The 100 mile definition is the definition current to 2012 and is used by organizers to explain the geographic reach the public. In reality in some directions the region is slightly more than 100 miles and in others slightly less.
abused or another entity infringes on the logo’s identity and meaning, i.e. tries to use the brand or a similar mark in commerce.

The license agreements identify MFF as the “sole and exclusive owner of the [Appalachian Fresh] logo” and define the ways the logo can and cannot be used. The agreements use legal language and conventions common to license agreement documents, defining the ownership of the mark, the conditions of use, and a termination process for failure to observe the agreement terms and conditions. The license agreements define several conditions of logo use but in essence pivot on one key rule: the logo can only be used to identify products grown or raised on Appalachian Fresh certified farms.

For farmers to participate in the program, their farms must be located within the Appalachian Fresh region, a 60-county area covering portions of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and Virginia. Farms must also meet MFF’s definition of a family farm: “… one in which the family holds the financial responsibility, takes the risks, and provides the majority of the management decisions for the farm.” Organizers developed the definition to exclude farms engaged in contract farming, a business arrangement in industrialized agriculture commonly associated with large-scale confined animal feeding operations. The arrangement exclusively links producers in vertically integrated supply chains with particular food companies. While farms in the region are primarily family farms growing food outside of agribusiness contracts, the region is home to some large-scale chicken production for a large processor and marketer of poultry.

Additional definitions exist for producers of meat and nursery products (e.g., vegetable starts, fruit trees, etc) to guard against reselling practices and for processed
products to ensure locally sourced foods comprise the majority of the ingredients. Meat producers cannot market products with Appalachian Fresh unless the animal has been raised on the farm, as defined in the producer agreement: “the animal spent 75% of its life after weaning on the certified farm or on another certified Appalachian Fresh farm.”

A similar rule exists in the producer agreement for nursery products – “at least 75% of life beyond propagation or at least 1 year on the farm.” Processed products, e.g., sauces, relishes, jams and jellies, baked goods, pickles, and other artisan foods, must also meet a particular set of criteria to be labeled with the Appalachian Fresh logo. Organizers developed percentage thresholds to define how much of the processed product is made from ingredients from Appalachian Fresh certified farms. For a processed product to brandish the Appalachian Fresh logo, 75 percent of the product’s total weight excluding certain ingredients (sugar, water, salt, oil, and wheat) must be comprised of local ingredients from certified Appalachian Fresh farms and 40 percent of the product’s total weight. Additionally, no single ingredient, e.g., tomatoes, can originate from both local and non-local sources.

In 2009, organizers developed the Tailgate Market Agreement in response to increasing requests by tailgate markets to participate in the Appalachian Fresh program. Given the purpose of the Appalachian Fresh logo, to label products in non-direct market settings and fulfill a proxy role, the requests from tailgate markets was unanticipated but perceived favorably by organizers in terms of promoting the authenticity of the logo. In the words of one organizer, “it’s not an undesirable outcome…to have consumers encountering the logo at tailgate markets in their direct encounters with farmers.” The tailgate market agreement certifies the market; participation criteria specify that the
majority of the vendors at the market are farmers (as opposed to producers of baked goods or crafts), the market is producer-only, and is located in an Appalachian Fresh county.

Food handlers – grocery stores, restaurants, institutional food services, wholesalers, and other locally based businesses that serve or sell food – sign the Appalachian Fresh License Agreement for Handlers. The Appalachian Fresh program began with an unwritten rule that participating businesses be headquartered locally, in the Appalachian Fresh region. Accordingly, the license agreement for handlers is for businesses and institutions based locally. The terms of logo use comprise the core of the agreement.

1. LICENSEE shall use the [Appalachian Fresh] logo and other [Appalachian Fresh] promotional materials solely in connection with [Appalachian Fresh] certified products. Products represented, labeled, or sold as [Appalachian Fresh] must be grown or raised by certified [Appalachian Fresh] farms.

2. LICENSEE shall not use the [Appalachian Fresh] logo in any manner that encourages customers to associate the logo with products that are not [Appalachian Fresh] certified.

3. LICENSEE shall not combine the [Appalachian Fresh] logo with any other trademark name.

4. LICENSEE shall not use the [Appalachian Fresh] logo in any manner that may disparage or impair the validity of the logo.

5. LICENSEE use of the [Appalachian Fresh] logo shall be in accordance with applicable trademark law. LICENSEE shall use its best efforts at all times to promote and increase the awareness and acceptance of the [Appalachian Fresh] logo in a manner consistent with sound business practices.

Organizers developed additional criteria for prepared foods – freshly prepared or ready to eat foods identified in deli cases or on restaurant menus. A percent threshold stipulates that 50 percent of the ingredients (by volume) of prepared foods come from
Appalachian Fresh certified farms. An additional rule, however, allows the labeling of prepared foods that do not meet that standard. This rule recognizes the climate and growing conditions of the region and, accordingly, the crops that can and cannot be grown the region. Noted by one organizer, “there may be dishes that don’t meet the 50 percent rule because the main ingredient is pasta or whatever but that nevertheless meets the spirit of [Appalachian Fresh].” To accommodate this circumstance, organizers created this rule:

Items that cannot be made with 50% or more locally grown ingredients can be displayed with the logo if the product contains a significant proportion of [Appalachian Fresh] ingredients. This means that the logo should be used to showcase dishes that feature ingredients from [Appalachian Fresh] farms and not dishes with token amounts of locally grown ingredients.

As will be discussed in detail in Chapter Seven, over the life of the program organizers have revisited the stipulation that handlers be locally based, debating its sensibility in the context of increasing interest by the food industry and new and emergent understandings of the region’s food system, and in terms of the way rules might help or hinder the economic viability of the region’s farms. In 2009, spurred by the interest of one broadline distribution company in promoting a line of Appalachian Fresh produce to their institutional customers in the region, MFF developed the Restricted Handler License Agreement, which stipulates further participation criteria. In addition to core license agreement rules, the Restricted Handler Agreement requires handlers participate in training on how to use the Appalachian Fresh logo, appoint a local contact responsible for communication with MFF, and provide MFF with the dollar value of Appalachian Fresh product purchased on an annual basis.
Promoting Appalachian Fresh

Consistent with the Local Food Campaign’s promotion of “local food,” a media campaign links the Appalachian Fresh logo to the meanings and values organizers have ascribed to local farms and food over the years of the campaign, but ads, stories, social media, and product promotional materials tie local food to a defined geographic location. Language and images link the brand to freshness and flavor; buying Appalachian Fresh supports the region’s landscape, local economy, and family farms. The logo, which depicts rolling farmland and a red barn in a mountain landscape, combined with the words “Appalachian Fresh,” “Local Food,” and “Fresher,” communicates a sense of place defined by agriculture. Large posters created for display in retail and institutional outlets ask readers in large bold lettering, “Looking for Local Food?” or “Who Grows Your Food” and then direct them to “Ask for [Appalachian Fresh]!” These kinds of posters feature photographs of farmers or striking food images, typically fresh produce. Farmer posters show farmers in their fields or posed with the products they produce. To connect consumers to farmers in the absence of direct interaction, posters profile farms, describing the history, location, production practices, and crops of featured farms. This language, from a poster created in 2009, defines the meaning of Appalachian Fresh to the public. The poster image is a hand holding a brown egg.

The [Appalachian Fresh] symbol is displayed with farm products grown or raised in Western North Carolina and the southern Appalachian Mountains. When you see the [Appalachian Fresh] logo, you know you’re buying fresher, better-tasting foods that support family farms, strengthen the local economy, and protect the natural beauty of the Appalachian Mountains. Look for the [Appalachian Fresh] logo when you shop.
Key to Appalachian Fresh branding discourse is authenticity. Organizers frame the need for Appalachian Fresh branding within a marketing environment increasingly saturated with vague local food messaging. Press releases and stories that appeared in 2006 tell readers that local is corruptible and ask the questions, “How do you know if what you are buying is really from a local farm?” and “What can consumers do to guard against misleading labels and ensure their dollars are supporting “local” farms?” With no legal definition of local and no means to enforce the veracity of local food messaging (i.e., as with the USDA’s certified organic label and program), organizers promote Appalachian Fresh to the public as a trusted label for locally grown food. The logo provides consumers with an assurance – food branded with the logo is “truly” local, and their purchases of Appalachian Fresh branded products support truly local farms. In the absence of a direct relationship with a farmer, consumers should be critical of retailers’ local food labels and should look for the Appalachian Fresh logo. In the article describing the buy local programs of Food Mart and Food World, organizers frame the importance of the Appalachian Fresh program within the spurious marketing practices of some of the region’s large retailers:

Where does that leave us as consumers? Ask questions. If you don’t see labeling, ask your grocer what’s local. If you see local labeling, address potential misuse of the term by asking your grocer what it means. Finally, look for the [Appalachian Fresh] logo…[Appalachian Fresh] is displayed with farm products from western North Carolina and mountain counties in surrounding states, a definition of ‘local’ that we think reflects a shared bioregion and cultural heritage, and limits the labeling to independent family farms.

This discourse of authenticity is embodied in specific marketing efforts to promote Appalachian Fresh. In 2008, for example, organizers conceptualized and ran the “From Here” Appalachian Fresh ad campaign. Ads featured photographs of local
products at their source – tomatoes on the vine, apples on the tree, etc – with the tagline, “From here. Local and season” and then: “Fresh from family farmers at markets, grocers, and in restaurants throughout our region.”

In 2010, in anticipation of the launch of a state wide local food marketing campaign by NC Sustainable Agriculture, MFF began promoting Appalachian Fresh as “certified local.” Organizers developed a logo variation to replace the words “Local Food” with “Certified Local” and began to describe Appalachian Fresh as “authentically local.” The state wide marketing initiative was conceptualized as a pledge campaign; it would direct the food industry and end consumers “to commit 10 percent of their existing food dollars to support local food producers.” For organizers, the state wide campaign threatened their efforts with Appalachian Fresh. Locally grown food, defined by the state of North Carolina, would place the small farms in the western part of the state in direct competition with larger farms in the eastern part of the state. Furthermore, as noted by Jeff, the state wide campaign was simply a marketing campaign, telling participants to buy local without providing the means to verify the origin of products. In Jeff’s words, “any business participating in the [campaign] can claim anything is local. It means nothing.” He continued:

We’re in a completely different environment now; now is not the time for a general campaign…We’re at the point now that local has to be identified for consumers; the meaning needs to be protected. Ten years ago buyers didn’t know how to manipulate this.

In another example, in 2011 organizers developed an Appalachian Fresh product logo specifically for honey in response to feedback from local honey producers about fraudulent practices in the larger honey industry. The results of a survey of local honey producers indicated that one of the biggest obstacles to the market for local honey is
competition from cheaper honey made cheaper through the use of additives like corn and cane syrup. Commensurate with organizers’ efforts to promote the authenticity of Appalachian Fresh products, the honey logo organizers created uses the descriptive phrase, “100% Real.” For consumers the way to avoid adulterated honey products is to buy locally produced honey – to actually know the honey producer or to buy honey labeled with the Appalachian Fresh “100% Real Honey” logo. This excerpt is from an article promoting the new logo.

How do you know you’re buying local honey? Start by looking for the [Appalachian Fresh] logo, [MFF’s] certification for products grown or raised on family farms in WNC and the Southern Appalachian Mountains. Then, you can even look for a specific [Appalachian Fresh] honey logo…

Strategies to Engage the Food Industry

In the creation of the Appalachian Fresh program, MFF developed a certified brand for locally grown food to benefit the mountain farms of the region. With the program’s implementation, organizers began a process to build the identity of the brand in the marketplace – strong brand recognition and demand would establish a normative definition of local for locally grown food and hold food retailers and other businesses in the food industry accountable to a definition of local that supported the region’s farms.

To build the identity of Appalachian Fresh, organizers’ strategies have strived to balance supply and demand – simultaneously securing the participation of farms and businesses in the branding program, ensuring the availability of product branded with Appalachian Fresh in the marketplace for consumers to purchase, and conducting a public campaign to raise brand awareness and direct consumers to specific market outlets. One key challenge for organizers has been to secure the participation of retailers in a program that in essence makes it more difficult for them to market food as local.
Greg explained this challenge and the basic strategy of MFF to a movement organizer from a different region in the United States.

In a way you’re making it harder for businesses to market local. Instead of calling anything local, you’re asking them to limit their definition. So how do you convince retailers to participate in your program? …[E]veryone is recognizing the [local food] message is being diluted. Chain grocers recognize that everyone has a local program. Offer a way to make theirs mean something. Sell that idea.

The strategies developed and enacted to engage the food industry are grounded within organizers’ presumption of economic sustainability – demonstrate the economic value of locally grown food branded with Appalachian Fresh to food industry businesses. From the perspective and experience of organizers, if businesses do not perceive the economic viability of locally grown food, i.e., that local food meets their economic bottom line, they will not participate or continue to participate in movement activities.

Prove the value of local food through Appalachian Fresh branding, and businesses and buyers will have the incentive to source more locally grown food from the region’s farms. This philosophy is evident in a marketing proposal MFF developed for Southeast Foods in 2009. The proposal outlines promotional strategies the chain can use to communicate to customers its purchases of locally grown food. One strategy articulates the positive response Appalachian Fresh branding will invoke with Southeast Foods’ customers:

Identify the products in-store with shelf-level and large-format signage. Consumers who see the local labeling in ads will respond positively to more in-store identification of local product, using the logo.

Within this market-based framework, organizers have developed a combination of strategies designed “to prove the value” of locally grown food marked with Appalachian Fresh. Organizers utilize national marketing research and their own marketing research.
to demonstrate the market potential for locally grown food and validate the Appalachian Fresh program. Organizers design and produce customized marketing materials to meet the preferences of retailers and institutions for unique promotional materials and to suit specific store and cafeteria layouts. Organizers allow businesses to “start where they are” – to participate in the program without achieving minimal purchase thresholds of locally grown food.

**Help Businesses “Start Where They Are”**

Helping food businesses to “start where they are” captures a key strategy organizers adopted to engage the food industry in movement activities and provide organizers with the opportunity to demonstrate to industry buyers the value of locally grown food labeled with Appalachian Fresh branding. This strategy, which helps businesses identify and promote what they are already and sometimes unknowingly purchasing from local farms, is grounded in firsthand experience with conventional food market outlets. Grocery store chains, institutions including schools and hospitals, wholesale distributors, and restaurants entrenched in centralized and vertically integrated systems of food procurement and distribution do not want to go outside existing supply relationships to source food from local farms. Articulating the conflict, one organizer stated, “[They] have established relationships with the national stream of commerce. They get product year round, at the price, quantity, and quality they want.” Locally grown food by contrast is seasonal and farms in the region by and large do not have the capacity to produce at a scale needed to meet food industry expectations. As will be discussed in Chapter Seven, for businesses accustomed to procuring food through conventional supply chains, sourcing food from local farms is difficult.
With this understanding, organizers from the inception of the Appalachian Fresh program decided not to require food industry businesses to purchase certain percentages of locally grown food to participate. The strategy, to make it as “easy as possible” for businesses to participate in the program, hypothesized that minimal purchasing standards – standards that required businesses to make immediate and perhaps significant changes to established systems of food procurement – would discourage rather than encourage participation. In the context of a nascent movement and in relation to MFF’s goal to affect food industry norms, organizers decided on a strategy of inclusivity, one that would allow businesses to begin sourcing and promoting minimal quantities of locally grown food and observe a positive economic response from customers. This excerpt from my field notes describes how organizers conceptualize the change in business purchasing practices that will result from this approach.

Show them the benefits that can accrue to their business. This fits into the change theory and the type of strategies that [MFF] uses. You start with a market-based economy and the belief that consumer demand will drive changes in retailer demand. You raise public awareness and create the desire for local. You don’t ask businesses to chuck everything they’ve been doing, their systems and established ways of doing things. You help them to “start where they are” so to speak. You make the first steps as painless as possible. You find out what they already source that is local but is perhaps not identified as local. Or you work with them to work with their distributors, which are likely sourcing some local but not identifying it as such. You work with them to get that product identified. Consumers respond. Retailers want to do more.

To Southeast Foods, organizers proposed a “model store” concept as a strategy that would enable them to prove the value of local and Appalachian Fresh branding to the chain. In the model store, organizers would work with retail personnel to create an elevated level of local food promotion with Appalachian Fresh branding. Significantly, the Southeast Foods’ store suggested by organizers to be the model store was located in
proximity to the newly built store of a retail competitor, a brand new Cheap Goods, one of the world’s largest retail chains. Conceptually, Appalachian Fresh would provide Southeast Foods with a way to distinguish themselves from their competitor.

Commenting on the competition between Southeast Foods and Cheap Goods in this particular location, Jeff asked:

How will they outcompete [Cheap Goods]? Not on price. Their connection to community, their connection to being here. [Appalachian Fresh] says, “We’re your hometown grocery store, supporting the local economy and local farmers.”

This excerpt from the proposal articulates for Southeast Foods the potential economic impact of the model store concept.

[Southeast Foods] increases sales of locally-grown farm products. Due to having a customer base that is highly educated about the value of buying locally grown products, the Model Store is able to sell these products more consistently and at a higher profit margin if desired.

[Southeast Foods] improves customer loyalty and customers’ perception of community value of the Model Store. [Southeast Foods] market share among shoppers near the Model Store is increased.

[Southeast Foods] and [MFF] develop a model that can be replicated at other [Southeast Foods] locations.

The goals of the proposal articulate the change stages conceptualized by organizers. With Appalachian Fresh branding and promotions, sales of local food will increase. The availability of local food in the store, clearly identified with Appalachian Fresh marketing materials, will demonstrate to shoppers the retailer’s support of local farms and a favorable public perception of the chain will increase customer loyalty and store profits. With the economic value of Appalachian Fresh local verified, the retail chain will have the incentive to implement model store promotions in other stores.
In theory, a positive customer response validates local as a viable business strategy; it encourages businesses to increase purchases of locally grown food. In practice, organizers work individually with retail, wholesale, and institutional market outlets to determine what they are already purchasing that is grown by local farms, certify the farms Appalachian Fresh, and develop the promotional materials—point of purchase materials, farmer profiles, table tents, check stuffers, etc. – that individual stores, restaurants, cafeterias, and farmers can use to brand products. To use the phrase commonly used by organizers to explain the need to label locally grown food in non-direct market settings like grocery stores and institutional cafeterias, “it isn’t local unless it’s labeled as local.” Consumers cannot act on a preference for food from local farms if they are unable to identify it.

Promote Businesses’ Support of Local

In 2010, in a meeting with the director of an organization outside the Appalachian Fresh region developing plans to launch a local food branding and certification program, organizers from MFF discussed “lessons learned” in the effort to build a brand. In this discussion, Greg from MFF pointed out the importance of doing for the business what they lack the time and resources to do themselves.

For a business, the most difficult commodity is time. Take pictures, write stories, produce stock labeling items. We offer the time and capacity to make connections [to farms] and create these materials.

The marketing and promotion activities of MFF organizers include the development of materials for use in stores, restaurants, or cafeterias (stickers for use on products, product level signs, large-scale posters of farmers or seasonal foods, display boards that list local items, table tents for restaurants and cafeterias, restaurant check
stuffers, menu labels, deli and meat case signs, shelf tags, produce case stickers, etc.) and promotion through regional media outlets to increase public awareness of Appalachian Fresh and direct consumers to specific outlets to find Appalachian Fresh product.

Organizers devote significant resources – time, labor, funds – to the development of materials for specific retail and institutional settings. Organizers meet with the marketing personnel of individual businesses personally to conceptualize the design of marketing materials appropriate to the layout and particularities of individual store, restaurant, and institutional settings and, just as significantly, materials that are unique to individual businesses. This latter emphasis developed fairly early in the program as organizers learned that businesses do not want their displays and promotions to look like their competitor’s displays and promotions. “Unless you create materials specific to their business,” stated one organizer, “they won’t use them.” To create unique Appalachian Fresh materials, organizers incorporate store or institutional logos and create customized text and formats. With Southeast Foods, for example, organizers developed a series of large-scale farmer profiles that incorporate the Southeast Foods store logo and the phrase “Southeast Foods supplier since” with the year the farm began supplying the retailer. This unique addition to their farmer profiles was suggested in organizers’ 2009 model store proposal:

Some campaign elements use [a] “[Southeast Foods] Supplier Since 19XX” line to reinforce that buying local is not a new trend at [Southeast Foods], but rather part of the company history.

In another example, organizers developed a set of unique set of smaller-scale farmer profiles for Sustainable Foods, one of the region’s natural grocery store chains. In cooperation with the chain’s marketing director, organizers created Appalachian Fresh
farmer profiles with the company’s logo and in sepia tone to complement Sustainable Foods overall marketing style.

In 2008, organizers implemented a cost share program for businesses (and farms) to market locally grown food with the Appalachian Fresh logo. Through the program, Appalachian Fresh retail and institutional outlets received matching funds for marketing activities designed to promote the availability of local food with Appalachian Fresh branding (e.g., in advertisements, with point of purchase and other in-store, cafeteria, and restaurant materials, etc.). For organizers, the cost share program would achieve two goals. It would increase the presence and visibility of the logo in the marketplace. Commensurate with the strategy of proving the value of local through Appalachian Fresh branding, the cost share program would provide businesses with the incentive to promote their current local food purchases, provoke a positive consumer response, and in turn a positive business response – an expansion of purchases from local farms.

Marketing and promotions through the media – in regional and county level newspapers, magazines, local blog sites, social media, radio – tie local food promotions to Appalachian Fresh and promote the businesses that are selling and serving Appalachian Fresh food. In 2006, the year MFF launched Appalachian Fresh, organizers wrote a story warning consumers about the dubious local food marketing practices of some of the region’s large grocery retailers and promoted Local Food Campaign retail partners as sources of truly locally grown food. In particular the article pointed consumers to Southeast Foods as a locally based store with a long history of sourcing produce from the region’s farms:

73 The cost share program was also created for farms – this aspect of the program is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven as a movement outcome.
WNC-based [Southeast Foods] is an interesting story. [Southeast Foods] has always carried local farm products, and in fact store-level produce managers still buy direct from farmers. When [Southeast Foods] stores begin to carry creasy greens in late winter, they're all from small farms around here but the signage has never told that story. [Southeast Foods’] company management is now leading the charge to more clearly distinguish local produce on their shelves.

To further promote the efforts of businesses to source from the region’s farms, organizers also coordinate with reporters writing for local media outlets to frame local food and farm related stories. In 2007, for example, organizers worked with a local reporter to publish findings from their multi-year study on the region’s emerging local food economy and draw attention to the efforts of specific retailers and institutions. In particular, the story quoted an MFF staff person about the efforts of Southeast Foods to source from local farms and “boost its [local food] marketing efforts.” A 2011 article, written by the same reporter, published the finding from a 2011 survey with Western North Carolina consumers that more than half of respondents named Southeast Foods as their “grocery store of choice for locally grown food.”

The Eat Local promotional campaign provides a focal point for regular Appalachian Fresh promotions. Eat Local, described earlier as a public engagement strategy, is also a food industry engagement strategy. The program, which revolves around the promotion of one local seasonal product each month of the calendar year, was developed to provide restaurants and later institutions with a structure to source and promote locally grown food. For chefs and food service directors and managers that do little or no local sourcing and are accustomed to procuring food for their businesses through established conventional streams of commerce, the program was conceived to present businesses with an un-daunting path to begin sourcing food from local farms. Sourcing one local ingredient per month – chosen by organizers for its abundant seasonal
availability – does not require radical changes to menus or established systems of food procurement. Commensurate with organizers’ strategy to prove the value of locally grown food, Eat Local promotional materials and media outreach efforts are designed to promote businesses’ participation in the campaign, drive consumers to find monthly products at specific outlets, and generate local food sales.

Organizers have developed Eat Local promotional materials suitable to specific market settings: table tents for restaurants and institutional cafeterias, check stuffers for restaurants, Eat Local calendar posters to hang in restaurant and institutional kitchens for staff and on cafeteria walls to educate eaters about the seasonal availability of products. Described earlier in the chapter, organizers conduct a media campaign around the product of the month. Organizers use regional media outlets, social media, and MFF’s website to educate and excite the public about seasonally available farm products and where to find them. Organizers write a monthly column in one of the region’s print publications – stories profile farmers that produce the featured monthly product, restaurants showcasing it seasonal dishes, and tailgate markets and retail locations consumers can shop for it.

To engage school cafeterias specifically in the Eat Local promotional campaign, organizers have developed a distinct Eat Local @ School program to accommodate the unique sourcing challenges of schools and to publicize the efforts of Child Nutrition Directors to integrate locally grown food into school menus. Organizers designed a unique Eat Local @ School calendar to feature local products nutrition directors can source at “the cost and volumes” suitable for schools. As stated on the MFF’s Farm to School webpage, “[s]erving local food in school cafeterias can sometimes be a daunting task. We encourage schools to start where they can, such as featuring one local product a
month.” To engage Child Nutrition Directors further, organizers strive to acknowledge Child Nutrition Directors’ efforts to source food from local farms. In the excerpt below, Ella explains how to engage and how not to engage Child Nutrition Directors. While applied specifically to schools, the sentiment – that Child Nutrition Directors will respond positively to praise for their efforts to source locally grown food – describes a key MFF philosophy. Note that Ella links the actions that promote businesses’ efforts to source from local farms to relationship building.

It’s about building relationships. You’ve heard the phrase “you catch more flies with honey”…Well we have some parents, well-intentioned but demonizing, blaming the Child Nutrition Directors [for the food served in schools]. They don’t understand – and I guess we need to do a better job of educating them – that they have to run their cafeterias like a business. They have to pay for the food, the salaries, the equipment, the light bill from one pot and not a very big one. They don’t have a lot to work with. And you don’t bring them on board by pointing your finger at them…praise them for what they are able to do, create more hoopla around local food in schools. They will respond to praise and do more.

Ella expressed this same conviction to participants of a conference hosted by MFF designed to teach other organizations and individuals MFF’s approach to building local food economies. In this excerpt, she emphasizes the importance of praise over criticism to affecting change in school food.

...I don’t know if you’re familiar with like [Frustrated Moms], which is a national Farm to School kind of initiative…They want you to go to school and eat with your kid and then confront the cafeteria manager about what your child was eating that day. Well, that’s not engaging, that’s accusing. Again that’s not the positive way to go about it. And anyway that one person that’s running that one cafeteria doesn’t have the power to make those decisions.

Eat Local @ School promotional materials are specific to school settings and are designed to promote to students, school staff, and parents the local food served in school lunches. Eat Local @ School product posters hang in school cafeterias. Table tents feature the product of the month and local farmers. Child Nutrition Directors use monthly
menu templates developed by organizers to highlight to parents and children the local products being served in cafeterias. Students can take home Eat Local recipe cards and bookmarks. Organizers also created a children’s edition of the Local Food Guide to promote the schools serving locally grown food and honor the work of Child Nutrition Directors and cafeteria as exemplified in this guide excerpt:

Q: Who works hard to plan school lunch menus and bring local ingredients into school cafeterias?
A: Child Nutrition Directors, that’s who! We appreciate Child Nutrition Directors, Cafeteria Managers, and staff for their enthusiasm and commitment to bring fresh local foods to cafeterias…

*Legitimizing Local and Appalachian Fresh through Marketing Research*

MFF situates Appalachian Fresh branding within national marketing research to demonstrate both the market power of local and the need for retailers, institutions, and other food businesses to transcend general, vague messages of local to capture the market potential. Organizers use the research of national marketing firms like the Hartman Group,\(^{74}\) which study consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviors. MFF draws on their marketing forecasts and recommendations to validate local food as a palpable economic driver and Appalachian Fresh as a specific consumer marketing strategy. The following excerpts are from a “local food fact sheet” organizers developed for buyers of larger-scale market outlets. The fact sheet cites firms’ (JWT, the Food Marketing Institute, and the Hartman Group) marketing statistics and predictions to document the growth in the market for locally grown food and demonstrate the value of the Appalachian Fresh brand as a symbol of authenticity in an increasingly crowded market for locally grown food.

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\(^{74}\) The Hartman Group is a marketing firm based in the United States that studies consumer purchasing behaviors and patterns.
JWT, the largest advertising agency in the U.S. and fourth in the world, recently identified local food as one of the top trends for 2007 and predicted that consumer demand will shift from organics to locally sourced food.

From The Food Marketing Institute: When cost is the same, 50% of consumers say they would choose locally grown produce vs. organic (28%).

From The Hartman Group, leading market research company studying consumer behavior and trends: contemporary food scares from tainted imports, growing environmental awareness and concern, continued desire for less processed foods, and the increased demand for goods deemed to be unique, distinctive and handcrafted has elevated interest in, and given credence to, the “buy local” movement.”

Local Has to Be Real: As local continues to evolve in sophistication as a marketing concept, the ultimate success of the “buy local” message (e.g., selling more products, increased revenues, higher profit margins, improved quality image, repeat purchases, etc.) and its sustainability over time depends on any number of cultural, societal and lifestyle factors, all covered by this overarching principle: you can’t fake authenticity.

The fact sheet tells the intended reader – the person responsible for making food purchasing decisions – that not only is local the top marketing trend in food, the ability of food businesses to tap into consumer demand depends on their capacity to communicate the qualities of local that appeal to consumers – authenticity. It is no longer enough to promote local with generalized messages, “local has to be real” and marketing programs must tie local to place. Organizers share these facts with buyers to convince them that Appalachian Fresh branding, while limiting their definition of local and their ability to use local food messages, provides the means to distinguish and authenticate their local food programs. To reiterate Greg’s statement above, Appalachian Fresh branding is the means to make their local programs “mean something.”

Organizers also use the results of their own market research to frame the economic importance of the Local Food Movement to the public and, by extension, to the region’s food industry. As alluded to earlier in the chapter, research into the impacts of
the Local Food Movement on the region’s food system has been a key MFF activity. In 2007, organizers completed a multi-year study focused on the local food and farming economy of Western North Carolina; the study quantified demand for locally grown food across a range of local market segments. Annually since 2007, organizers have calculated and publicized local food sales numbers, and in 2011 organizers commissioned a consumer survey across nine counties in the region to measure changes in demand for locally grown food. Also in 2011, organizers formally instituted research as a programmatic activity to study the impacts of localizing food systems – the economic as well as the social and environmental.


A series of articles published in 2007 and 2008 presented findings from organizers’ multi-year study highlighting the dollar value of unmet demand for locally grown food. Annually since 2007, organizers have calculated and released a local food sales number to the media. In 2011 organizers worked with a reporter for one of the
region’s newspapers to publish the 2010 local food sales figure and findings from their recent consumer survey. This article excerpt frames the growing economic impact of locally grown food on the region’s economy:

It’s pretty simple: When it comes to local food sales, mountain consumers pony up the cash. [Mountain Family Farms] has released estimates that Western North Carolina consumers bought $62 million worth of local food in 2010. That’s a four-fold increase since [MFF] started its “[Appalachian Fresh]” certification and branding program in 2007.

Among the results of the consumer survey (discussed in detail in Chapter Seven) published in the article are findings directly pertinent to the region’s food industry – the finding that for 77 percent of survey takers locally grown food is a significant consideration in choosing a grocery store and for 64 percent a significant consideration in choosing a restaurant. As noted above, the article published the finding that more than 55 percent of respondents named Southeast Foods as the place they shop for locally grown food.

Organizers, using the findings from their market research, relate national trends in local food to the region and strive to demonstrate the economic potential of the market for locally grown food to the food industry. The “local food fact sheet” also includes findings from MFF’s research to demonstrate the scale of unmet consumer demand for locally grown food – $452 million annually. As reported in articles, organizers cite the three findings below to illustrate the potential if demand and supply were matched – despite demand, most of the food consumed by residents is produced outside the region and most of the food produced by farmers is sold to consumers outside the region.

Farms in WNC produce more than a half-billion dollars worth of product, and 96% is consumed outside the region.
Of the 2.6 billion dollars of food consumed in the region, 99% is grown outside of western North Carolina.

80% of …consumers surveyed by [MFF] say that when locally-grown food is made available, they will preferentially buy it, and are willing to pay more for it.

Engaging Middlemen

The focus on larger-scale market outlets compelled organizers to focus on the middle men – the wholesale distributors and packers of produce – that link farms to grocery stores, hospitals, schools, colleges, and restaurants. In the Appalachian Fresh region, wholesale distributors occupy an important link between the region’s farms and conventional food outlets, and the buyers for many are unwilling or hesitant to source food outside of their established food procurement channels. Wholesale distributors and packers aggregate product from multiple sources and this, combined with the post harvest handling infrastructure to grade, cool, package, and distribute, provides smaller farms with opportunities to access opportunities in larger-scale markets.

At the same time that wholesale distributors offer opportunities to increase the distribution of locally grown food and penetrate the conventional food industry, they also extend challenges. As the part of the food supply chain that sources and pools product from different farms and, to accommodate seasonality and volumes, from different regions, wholesale distributors challenge the integrity of local food supply chains, specifically the veracity of local food labeling. Moreover, as middlemen increasing the number of steps from farm to end consumer and absorbing some of the profits, organizers questioned the impact on the profitability for farms marketing their products through wholesale distributors and packers. Organizers questioned the benefits wholesale distributors provided to individual farms. With little direct knowledge about the inner
workings of this particular market segment, organizers wondered if wholesale distributors actually supported farm viability. As stated in the minutes of one Appalachian Fresh meeting: “Do we want to work in a broker system where farmers may not be treated fairly and are not making any money?”

With the means to overcome two key constraints of local food – volume and seasonality – organizers asked themselves how they could avoid working with the middlemen that have the capacity to serve larger markets. Within a change theory that pivots on proving the economic value of locally grown food to buyers of conventional food outlets and on strategies that enable markets to start where they are, efforts to engage large retailers and institutions required organizers to work with the existing systems of distribution serving them. Engaging the region’s wholesale distributors would be crucial to identifying food grown by the region’s farms already in distribution and for sale in retail and institutional outlets unidentified.

As the Appalachian Fresh program has developed organizers have developed a set of strategies to engage this link in the regional food supply chain – tracing the path of food supply chains, developing rules for wholesalers to participate in the Appalachian Fresh program and hold them accountable to organizers’ definition of local, and eliciting pressure from wholesaler customers. Organizers dedicate significant time and resources to learning about the region’s food system, specifically about regional supply chains or mid-tier value chains – the regional supply networks of food-related businesses that move food products from production to consumption (Agriculture Marketing Service n.d.). In a presentation describing MFF campaign strategies to a group of organizations and
individuals starting local food initiatives in other regions, one organizer provided the following advice:

The food system is shockingly complex. A wise early – and never ceasing – use of resources is to dedicate time to understanding how food moves from farms to distributors and retailers and food service to consumers in your region. Trace food back from the consumer to the farm, and each step gives you new information.

Through a process of detective work – literally tracing food from the point of sale back to the farm, organizers have uncovered relatively invisible regional networks of food distribution and procurement linking the region’s large food retailers and institutions with the region’s farms. Despite the loss of infrastructure for aggregation and distribution, the region is still home to many wholesalers and packers that source and distribute produce seasonally from the region’s farms, much of it unidentified.

Organizers meet with wholesale distributors to learn about their systems of food procurement and distribution, determine what they are already sourcing locally, and examine the practicalities within these systems to segregate local product from nonlocal product and maintain the identity of locally grown product. In addition to being able to demonstrate they can reliably segregate local product, wholesalers are expected to cooperate with organizers to ensure the farms they source from locally are Appalachian Fresh certified. As with grocery stores, restaurants, and institutions, wholesalers sign the Appalachian Fresh Handler agreement and agree to only market products with the Appalachian Fresh logo from Appalachian Fresh certified farms.

To encourage participation in the Appalachian Fresh program by wholesalers, organizers have appealed to the desire of food retailers and institutions to participate in Appalachian Fresh – to be able to promote to their customers locally grown food with the Appalachian Fresh logo and marketing materials. In this way, organizers use the
customer – the intermediate customer – to incite market change. Recognizing the significance of this potential leverage, one organizer stated: “We need to get upstream players to buy into the program because retailers can dictate downstream to packing houses to participate.” Within the context of an ongoing conversation about organizers’ repeated inability to engage one particular wholesale distributor supplying a key Appalachian Fresh grocery partner, one organizer concluded: “the pressure may need to come from Southeast Foods who buys a lot of [their] product and wants to be able to use the Appalachian Fresh label on it.”

Making Connections: Developing Local Food Supply Chains

Selling and buying food in local markets is markedly different from selling and buying food through national and global food supply chains. Sourcing food through the industrialized food industry is an anonymous endeavor – producers, processors, wholesalers, and retailers are linked and separated through vertically integrated supply chains. This kind of compartmentalization has significant implications for the work of movement organizers. The distance between producers and retail and institutional buyers in the conventional food system is not only spatial, it is social. For movement organizers, this normative social distance is a barrier to the development local food supply chains. Buyers are largely ignorant of the needs, expectations, and constraints of farmers, and farmers are largely ignorant of the needs, expectations, and constraints of buyers. Buyers accustomed to sourcing through conventional supply chains have limited or no knowledge of local production. They lack knowledge about the seasonality of local food, what can be reasonably produced at smaller scales, and where or how to source local product. For buyers entrenched in conventional food supply chains, buying locally grown
food takes more time and effort; it is easier for a buyer to source produce from California than from a farm located in the next county. Farmers, unaccustomed to marketing their products to larger-scale retail and institutional buyers, lack knowledge related to industry standards and requirements and how, as stated by one farmer, “to break into the supply chain.”

In their efforts to scale-up movement activities and penetrate established food supply chains, organizers have assumed a mediating role between farmers and buyers, developing different strategies to build the capacity of farmers to sell into local markets and of buyers to source locally grown food. The Farm Outreach Specialist position, tools like the Local Food Trade Directory, a farm to business trade directory, coordinated farmer-buyer meetings, and training and technical assistance in marketing and business planning are strategies organizers have developed to build local food supply chains – to educate farmers and buyers about mutual needs and expectations and facilitate “suitable” farmer-buyer business relationships.

For organizers, the suitability of the farmer-buyer business connection is crucial for the sustainability of the relationship and for the continued development of the local food economy. The types of guidance and support organizers provide to farmers and buyers across these strategies are intended to mitigate the frustrations and failures that arise from miscommunications and incongruous business connections. Organizers’ efforts are grounded in the assumption that different types of farms are suited to supplying different types of markets. Farm scale; access to post-harvest handling equipment that can adequately cool, wash, and grade produce; and the ability to meet other industry requirements related to liability insurance, product packaging and labeling,
product identification through PLU and barcodes, delivery standards, food safety
certifications, etc. are dimensions of difference across farms. As noted by Greg to a
group of workshop attendees, “[t]he kind of farm that’s good to visit with kids…may be
very different from the kind of farm that is a good candidate to sell stuff to your school.”
A five acre farm selling primarily through tailgate markets, for example, is not going to
be a suitable match for a 60-store grocery store chain.

Through workshops and individualized consultations, organizers offer farmers
assistance with farm business and market planning to help them understand the
production and marketing capacity of their farm operations in relation to the requirements
and needs of distinct market segments. In response to a call to MFF staff from a farmer
with a large quantity of shitake mushrooms and no place to sell them, one organizer
observed, “what we find is that most farmers think about production first, they grow their
crop and then think about where to sell it.” The goal of farm business and market
planning is to reverse that pattern – production plans are developed in relation to known
market outlets and within a business plan that articulates farmers’ costs and profits.
Annually since 2003, organizers have conducted a daylong marketing conference for
farmers interested in selling to local markets. Workshops provide farmers with training in
farm business planning and, with guest speakers representing different local market
segments, knowledge of specific industry standards and insight into the challenges and
opportunities to accessing those markets from the buyers themselves.

Training and technical assistance is the purview of key staff with expertise in
farm business planning and with detailed knowledge of changing market conditions in the
region for locally grown food. In 2006 with the launch of the Appalachian Fresh
program, organizers created and hired a new position in the organization – the Farm Outreach Specialist. The Farm Outreach Specialist serves as a liaison, a match-maker, between farmers and markets. The outreach specialist develops personal relationships with farmers and with food buyers across different market outlets and through this process of relationship building directs farmers to suitable market outlets and buyers to suitable sources of locally grown food. Accordingly, the primary task of the specialist is to develop a body of knowledge relevant to this match-making process. The specialist focuses on markets to stay informed of buyers’ desires for local product, industry standards, and systems of food procurement and distribution. The specialist focuses on farms – conducting what organizers term farm assessments – to understand the production and post harvest handling capacities of individual farms and farmer groups to meet market criteria and penetrate buyers’ supply chains. With knowledge of markets and production, the outreach specialist identifies the potential for the development of new supply chains and points of intervention into established supply networks.

The Local Food Trade Directory, published annually by MFF since 2006, was designed to function as a match-making tool – a local food sourcing guide for buyers and a marketing guide for farmers. Buyers use the trade directory to search for farms with particular product offerings in particular locations that meet particular criteria. Farmers use the directory to find buyers in search of products they offer and information on the standards they require.

In place of the individualized assistance and expertise of the Farm Outreach Specialist, the Local Food Trade Directory offers guidance – “tips” – to farmers and buyers on “what to expect” as a buyer or a grower. These tips instruct buyers that want to
utilize locally grown food to “think seasonally” – become educated about product availability and utilize what is fresh and in season different times of the year. Buyers should expect to “pay a full, fair price” for locally grown food and not expect “local farms to be a source for bargain-hunting.” For farmers, the trade directory offers marketing advice: “sell your product,” “know your customers and their customers,” and “specialize and diversify.” Farmers should visit potential markets personally, eat at the establishment, read the menu, find out how products are or could be used. Offer samples of products and suggest ways to use products in menus. Ask buyers what they need. Offer products they cannot source elsewhere. The central message of the directory to buyers and farmers is the importance of communication for establishing viable working relationships – “it’s all about the relationship.” Farmers and buyers need to communicate regularly about product quality, quantities, and changes in expected supply or demand and to commit to an agreed upon business arrangement. For buyers, “if the product meets expectations, buy what you say you will buy, and buy consistently while a product is in season.” For farmers, “call when you say you will, deliver what you promised, and don’t be late. Maintain consistent quality so the buyer knows what to expect.”

Organizers also coordinate farmer-buyers meetings, spaces where local farmers and buyers can interact directly, discuss the potential for business relationships, and the specificities of what business arrangements might entail. MFF’s annual marketing conference for farmers includes a dedicated timeslot for farmers and buyers to meet face-to-face. Buyers interested in sourcing locally and representing a variety of local market outlets – restaurants, grocery stores, colleges and other institutional cafeterias – are invited to attend. Farmers attending the conference are able to sign-up to sit down with
particular buyers for 15 minute time periods to discuss the potential suitability of a market connection and discuss issues like quality standards, volume, price, delivery methods, and requirements related to liability insurance, packaging, and labeling.

Commensurate with strategies designed to engage the public personally with local food and farms, organizers also strive to engage members of the food industry with the region’s agriculture – to provide them with meaningful local food and farm experiences. To paraphrase a statement made by Ella – quoted earlier in the chapter – organizers are trying to make chefs as well as Child Nutrition Directors, the buyers for grocery stores, the food service directors of hospitals and colleges, the cafeteria staff serving students, and others in the food industry local food and farm advocates. Key to the development of this sense of advocacy is the development of an emotional connection. MFF staff organize activities and events for food industry personnel that provide spaces for meaningful interactions with the region’s agriculture, farmers, and local food. Organizers coordinate farm visits for chefs, institutional food service personnel, teachers, and retail buyers; purchase CSAs for cafeteria staff; organize local food cooking demonstrations with local chefs for the cafeteria staffs of hospitals and schools and other institutional food services. Parallel to public engagement strategies, these activities aim to instill an appreciation for local farms and local food and affect the economic decisions of food industry personnel.

For organizers, food buyers as well as sales personnel in retail, wholesale, and institutional food markets are gatekeepers – individuals that have the capacity to facilitate or impede the flow of food from local farms to end consumers in food procurement.
decisions or in their interactions with customers. Organizers’ conceptualization of the function of gatekeepers is articulated in the language from one grant proposal:

Gatekeepers – buyers and frontline personnel in wholesale, retail, and institutional markets – are closest to the customer. They hear customer questions, desires, complaints; they observe customer behaviors first hand; and they have the capacity to relay information and ideas about products. They also make decisions about what and how much local food is available for customers…they play an invaluable role in the development of local food markets.

Organizers’ understanding of the significance and nature of gatekeepers has been highly articulated within the context of the Farm to School program. Within Farm to School, organizers have framed the significance of the gatekeeper role within the idea of “educators,” which Farm to School organizers apply broadly to the adults in schools that have direct interaction with children – teachers and other school staff, cafeteria staffs, Child Nutrition Directors, parents and volunteers – and are in a position to positively impact the school food environment, which is inclusive not only of the types of food available for consumption but of the behaviors and attitudes around food modeled to children. This understanding is the philosophical underpinning of efforts to provide educators with positive local food and farm experiences. This passage excerpted from a grant proposal explains organizers’ rationale for engaging a broad range of adult stakeholders in Farm to School activities:

The focus on “educators”…recognizes the significance of adult attitudes and behaviors around food and their influence on the formation of children’s food preferences and behaviors. Teachers, cafeteria workers, and RDs75 are also “eaters” and they model their own set of values and attitudes toward food and eating. Adults interacting with children also need positive attitudes toward healthy food in order to create healthy food environments.

75 Registered Dieticians
This conception of educators recognizes a relationship between private and public realms of experience. The decisions and actions of teachers, cafeteria workers, chefs, food buyers, food retail sales personnel, wait staff, and other food industry workers are influenced not just by structured roles, responsibilities, and expected professional behaviors; private experiences and attitudes bear on professional performance. In their professional capacities in the food industry, individuals’ decisions about food procurement and preparation, about what to communicate to others about food, mediate between professional and personal principles. Verbalizing this understanding, one organizer accounting for the particular enthusiasm for local food by a produce buyer for one of the region’s grocery stores observed, “He and his wife have a small organic farm. They sell at the tailgate market.”

Articulating the significance of a Farm to School strategy that engages a wide array of school stakeholders, organizers hypothesize a broad community impact. In a report to a funder, MFF links the personal and professional lives of Farm to School participants to explain how individuals’ local food and farm based experiences not only transcend public and private domains, shared with friends, family, colleagues, and other social networks, these experiences can affect others.

Activities implemented in schools naturally extend beyond school boundaries. Parents … are also business owners or work in other community-based institutions and school staff … are also parents, church members, and participants of networks of family, friends, and colleagues.

Applied broadly to organizers’ public and industry engagement efforts, individuals assume multiple social roles and accordingly interact across multiple social networks. Participants take their experiences with local food and farms home, to work,
and to other spaces of social interaction, potentially impacting the perceptions and practices of individuals in these spaces.

**Conclusions: Theorizing the Local Food Movement in Western North Carolina**

By the mid 1990s, farms in Western North Carolina were already being impacted by an impending change to US agricultural policy that would end the federal tobacco program. Anticipating the negative impacts of the cessation of the tobacco program on the region’s farms, a group of citizens, farmers, and agricultural support personnel formed a collaborative effort to identify strategies to sustain the region’s farms. Tobacco had been an enormously significant crop – a stable and profitable source of income for farms for nearly 70 years and, to a degree, shielding the region’s agriculture from the consolidating trends in global agricultural market. The organizers of this early initiative understood that producing farm products for global markets was not an option for the relatively small mountain farms in the region, unable to achieve the economies of scale required to compete globally. Organizers conceived of and implemented a strategy centered on the development of an alternative market for locally grown food, and in 2000, Mountain Family Farms launched their Local Food Campaign. Grounded in the conditions and particularities of this part of the Southern Appalachians, the Local Food Campaign invoked a cultural politics to challenge the normative values and practices of neoliberalism and a global system of food production and provision alienated from local contexts.

**The Hegemonic Process**

In challenging the principles and practices of neoliberalism organizers are not challenging “the market,” they are challenging a disembedded market that operates
outside of the social concerns of particular places and its destructive impact on the traditions, livelihoods, communities, and ecologies of place. At the local level, the hegemony of the global agri-food system is evident in the food choices available to consumers in grocery stores, restaurants, and cafeterias and in their concomitant expectations about food. As will be shown in Chapter Seven, the dominance of the agri-food industry is also evident in the entrenched structures and processes food industry businesses use to procure food and the concomitant desires and expectations of food industry buyers, who are constrained by these structures and processes and who are accustomed to sourcing food in particular ways and with particular qualities – year round, in the quantities needed, from few suppliers, at competitive prices achieved through large scale production.

The Local Food Campaign is grounded in a market-based theory of change. Within this framework, consumer demand for locally grown food is the mechanism that drives changes to the practices of the region’s food industry. Over the course of the campaign, movement discourse has framed action as a consumption choice, linking explicitly for the public the material impacts of their economic decisions – to the economic sustainability of the region’s farms, to the quality of the region’s landscape, to the characteristics of the communities in which they live, to the qualities of the food that they eat. Buying locally grown food is an act that supports the viability of the region’s farms and all that farms confer to the region and the region’s residents. As public interest in locally grown food gained momentum and captured the interest of the food industry, organizers expanded their strategy from a focus on alternative market venues – tailgate markets, CSAs, and other direct to consumer markets – to conventional market outlets.
Organizers devised and implemented a local food branding and certification program to both engage the region’s food industry in campaign activities and protect the integrity of movement goals. As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven, organizers continuously transverse a line between maintaining movement integrity and engaging with the system they seek to change. Through processes of reflexive and recursive action and assessment, organizers have made strategic choices to limit and expand industry engagement.

Organizers designed the Appalachian Fresh program to maintain the identity of locally grown food moving through regional food supply chains to end consumers in non-direct market venues like grocery stores, institutional cafeterias, and restaurants – places consumers and farmers are not in direct contact. Recognizing the dynamics of the hegemonic process, the program seeks to hold the food industry in the region accountable to a particular definition of local. Appalachian Fresh is intended to protect the region’s emerging market for locally grown food for the region’s farms and mitigate the risk of co-optation by the industry.

With the launch of the Appalachian Fresh program, organizers focused on building brand identity – linking the values and meanings of the movement’s discourse to Appalachian Fresh – and securing the participation of farmers and conventional food outlets. Campaign discourse shifted from a general directive to buy locally grown food to buy certified locally grown food and with this instill an accepted definition in the social consciousness of the public. Organizers developed a program framework – standards establishing the rules of logo use and participation agreements to govern its usage.
Through the program, organizers have confronted established webs of interdependence in the marketplace – tightly integrated chains of commerce, established systems of food procurement and distribution, the ingrained expectations of buyers conditioned by these food system relationships. In an effort to disrupt established relationships and create space for food grown by the region’s farms, organizers have conceptualized and enacted strategies to demonstrate the market potential for locally grown food and the value of Appalachian Fresh branding. Guided by their market-based theory of change, organizers have adopted an inclusive strategy, one that enables businesses sourcing even minimal amounts of locally grown food to participate in the program. Organizers work with businesses to determine what they are already, and perhaps unknowingly, sourcing from local farms and identify it with Appalachian Fresh labeling. Appalachian Fresh media promotions raise brand awareness and drive the public to specific outlets to find Appalachian Fresh product. In theory a positive customer response provides businesses with the motivation to expand their purchases, to make changes to established systems of procurement and distribution to source more food from the region’s farms.

Organizers use publicity and the results of their market-based research to build a public perception of the economic relevance of locally grown food for the region’s economy, to validate movement activities, and to praise the efforts of specific businesses sourcing food from the region’s farms. Organizers legitimate the use of Appalachian Fresh to promote locally grown food with the results of research conducted by national marketing firms. In an increasingly crowded market environment of local food labels and logos, organizers promote Appalachian Fresh to the food industry as a label with a
quality of authenticity that provides them with a means to distinguish their local food programs from their competitors’ and appeal to an increasing sentiment of public support for the region’s farms.

**Place-Making**

Despite the framing of movement organizers and the assessment of scholarship, the understanding that consumers are the agents of change in the Local Food Movement oversimplifies the mechanism of change and movement strategies and goals. The shift to a more locally based food system, while requiring changes in the practices of consumers and the food industry, is also predicated on shifts in the way consumers think about food and their food purchases. It requires shifts in the consciousness of consumers – from consumers making “rational” economic decisions apart from an understanding of the relationship between consumption choices and the material impacts of those choices to consumers that are citizens, members of a community making decisions with an awareness of how their decisions impact the communities in which they live. In this sense, while organizers rely on a market-based framework to exert a positive material impact on the region’s farms, even more fundamental than the market transaction is the development of different consumer subjectivities. Following Gibson and Graham, movement activities aim to transform the consumer subjectivity that is norm of the global, neoliberal market economy and promote new forms of subjectivity that can be “inhabited and enacted” each time an individual makes a choice about what food to purchase or eat. Consumers in this framework, to quote the phrasing of one organizer, become “deliberate eaters” – they become conscious of the role their economic practices play in the creation and transformation of the world they inhabit.
To foster this process of transformation, organizers are engaged in processes of place-making to root consumers in the conditions of Western North Carolina and the issues affecting the region. Returning to Escobar’s theorization of “place” in relation to modern movements, MFF organizers endeavor to create place-based consciousness – to instill in the residents of the region a shared sense of and appreciation for a particular conception of place and mobilize collective action to defend place from the destructive impacts of the global economy and consolidated food industry. Within the idea that people grounded in the particularities of the communities in which they live do not act from positions of detachment, movement organizers have conceived of and enacted strategies to meaningfully connect the public and the region’s food industry to local farms, farmers, and farm landscapes. Local food and by extension local farms are at the center of organizer place-making strategies. Local food is a strategy in and of itself – conceptualized by organizers over a decade ago as the means to connect and familiarize the public with the region’s agriculture and address the detachment from place that is a condition of the global economy. Local food is at the center of organizer efforts to embed agriculture and decisions that affect agriculture in community relations and in the mundane daily practices of the region’s residents – to build relationships and foster new practices around the processes of food production and provision.

Organizers have used movement discourse to construct a conception of place fundamentally defined by agriculture and strategies to engage the public and food industry directly with the region’s farms. The discursive practices of organizers have defined place by a physiographic region inextricably shaped by a tradition of agriculture. A distinct agricultural heritage is imprinted today on a picturesque landscape of forest
and farms and in enduring food traditions. An agriculture of small family farms, itself shaped by the physiographic conditions and climate of the region, contributes significantly to the character of the region and to quality of life for the region’s residents.

Organizers enact a cultural politics that links this conception of place to place-based ideas about food and food production, economy, economic development, citizenship, and health. The presence of agriculture is key to a system of food production that provides residents with an alternative to the practices and products of the industrialized food system. In contrast to food produced for the conventional food industry, local food is fresher, better tasting, and healthier. The continued viability of the region’s farms is fundamental to the democratization of the food system – to the power of the region’s residents to contribute meaningfully to the creation of the qualities that define food production and in turn the food that they eat and the communities in which they live. Systems of local food production and consumption generate local economic activity grounded in the region’s natural resource base and in local communities. In a region impacted negatively by economic globalization, agriculture provides the foundation for regionally directed economic development that builds on and preserves the region’s natural resources and rural character, vital to the region’s main economic driver, tourism. Local farms and food also have implications for health; a place-based conception of health promotion centers on connections to food. Meaningful experiences with local farms and food change individuals’ relationships to food and positively impact their food choices and ultimately their health.

Movement activities strive to promote and create spaces of engagement to familiarize and build participants’ experiences of the region’s agriculture; to develop
community linkages around the processes of food production and provision; and
ultimately to imbue food with meaning and the significance of these experiences and
interactions. Through direct to consumer markets like tailgate markets and CSAs, local
food cooking demonstrations, Farm to School activities, local food meals, MFF’s farm
tour and CSA fairs, local food and farm festivals and events, and other food and farm
linked activities, participants learn about regionally important foods and the seasonality
of food production, observe and participate in the processes of growing and harvesting,
taste and cook with regionally important foods, and interact with farmers and other
movement participants. For organizers these types of experiences have an affective
impact on participants, cultivating an emotional connection and response. Food choices
in the words of one organizer become something “bigger than yourself.” Decisions about
food are conditioned by these experiences, and buying locally grown food is an act that
expresses a sense of and appreciation for place.

Engagement strategies organized for buyers and other individuals positioned
within the food industry are also designed to connect them meaningfully with the
region’s agriculture and positively affect their perceptions of local farms and locally
grown food. Movement engagement strategies with the food industry recognize a
relationship between private and public realms of experience and the salience of personal
perceptions to public performance. Buyers and other food industry personnel are
gatekeepers, individuals in a position to facilitate or impede the flow of locally grown
food to end consumers through their purchasing decisions and through their
communicative practices with customers. Engagement strategies encompass gatekeepers
to build their experience and familiarity with the region’s farms and locally grown food
and embed their actions – in their capacity as buyers, as cafeteria staff, as retail sales personnel, etc – in a subjectivity that values the region’s farms.

**Creating New Webs of Interaction**

Following Habermas’ ideas on communicative rationality, the tailgate markets, the CSAs, the farm tours, the local food and farm linked events and activities are public spheres – spaces of interpersonal interaction where participants participate in and collectively create experiences centered on local farms and food. These spaces facilitate the collective interpretation of shared experience, the dissemination of ideas, and the formation of shared understandings and meanings. Following Voloshinov’s and Vygotsky’s theorization on the formation of social consciousness, these engagement spaces provide the foundation for shifts in configurations of meanings that comprise social consciousness and that can translate into the enactment of different social practices. Within Diani’s interpretation of social capital relative to social movements and the need for movements to reproduce and create new social networks, these types of food and farm linked experiences develop new social linkages and reproduce established social networks of interaction. For movement organizers these experiences not only affect participants, by sharing their experiences and through their performance of different subjectivities, they also impact members of participants’ social networks – friends, colleagues, family, and others.

Following the ideas of Escobar, Casey, and Gibson and Graham, these spaces of engagement are simultaneously place-making and people-making. People and place are mutually constitutive; as people are transformed, so are the places they inhabit and vice versa. For organizers, local food and farm experiences are key to the development of an
emotional connection, a sense of advocacy toward the region’s farms that conditions the
economic choices of consumers and individuals within the food industry. Perception and
action are linked, and as new meanings and values and perceptions and attitudes are
enacted, different practices are established, new relationship develop and upset the
stability of the status quo. Movement participants that act on a desire to support the
region’s farms by shopping at tailgate markets, subscribing to CSAs, asking for locally
grown food at grocers and restaurants, sourcing locally grown food for their restaurants,
grocery store, or cafeteria effect change on the region’s food system through their
collective embodiment of movement meanings and values. Following Clemens, these
actions disrupt entrenched patterns of interaction, which give stability to the conventional
food industry, and develop new webs of interaction anchored in the region’s agriculture.
Chapter Seven:
Movement Outcomes

The focus of Chapter Seven is movement outcomes. How are the strategies and actions of movement organizers affecting the food system in Western North Carolina and the region’s agricultural base? Building on ideas that theorize the importance of networks of social interaction and interpersonal communication for the creation of collective identity and action, are organizers creating the conditions needed for collective understandings and action to emerge in support of movement goals? Are movement activities creating the spheres of social interaction, the public space for individuals to reflect collectively on observations and ideas, to develop shared understandings and meanings, to build social relations, and ultimately to act collectively? How are movement activities affecting the perceptions and practices of consumers and farmers and of the businesses that serve and sell food? Have movement activities disrupted the entrenched webs of interdependence that comprise and give stability to the centralized and consolidated food industry?

The assessment of movement outcomes in this chapter begins from the concept of hegemony and, accordingly, from the understanding that social movements are an integral part of a process that shape the dominant meanings and ideas that legitimize and govern human practice. Social movements are counter hegemonies that challenge and interact with the dominant social order; they affect and are, in turn, affected by the system they seek to change. This framework demands a processual perspective on
movement outcomes, one that attends to the emergent nature of social movements and the actions of organizers and participants. In this sense, the ideational and material outcomes of the movement in Western North Carolina are both provisional and incremental. Outcomes are the responses of movement organizers, observers, and participants in relation to the encounter between the espoused ideas and practices of the Local Food Movement and the entrenched ideas and practices of the industrialized global food system.

As discussed in Chapter Two, for scholars of social movements it is difficult to demonstrate causality – to definitively link movement actions and to movement outcomes. In terms of changes in the food system in the Western North Carolina region, is increasing support for local farms (manifest in increasing demand for locally grown food) a direct outcome of organizer activities or is it an outcome of a confluence of circumstances and developments that include organizer activities but also highly publicized food safety scares, increasing awareness of the unsavory practices of industrialized agriculture, the economic downturn, increasing fuel prices, and a growing public environmental sensibility and public awareness of agriculture’s contribution to environmental quality? Within a political opportunities analytical framework, the outcomes movements are able to achieve must be examined within a larger context and consider the effect of larger, widespread developments on public opinion. Accordingly, the outcomes discussed in this chapter assume a confluence of movement actions and larger political-economic developments.
Changes in the Western North Carolina Food System

More than a decade after the launch of the Local Food Campaign, changes in the
Western North Carolina food system are tangible. With an increasing public sentiment of
support for local farms and interest in buying food grown locally, a local food economy
has emerged, is emerging. This emerging economy is manifest in the shopping and
purchasing practices of consumers, in the practices of farmers and food industry buyers to
satisfy demand, and in the shifting services of agricultural professionals. The
proliferation of tailgate markets and CSAs and other direct to consumer market venues is
evidence of consumer interest in knowing who is growing their food, of shifting shopping
patterns in favor of buying at least some food directly from farmers. A growing number
of farmers are producing an increasing variety of food for local customers. Local food is
no longer dominated by fresh fruits and vegetables; farmers are also producing meats,
cheeses, eggs, honey, processed products, herbs and other items. Farmers, employing a
variety of marketing strategies, are fully engaged in practices designed to build a local
customer base and penetrate the supply chains of local market outlets. An increasing
number and variety of food businesses are participating in campaign activities.

Concomitantly, food industry buyers are devising and implementing food
procurement practices to source food from local farms and build supply chains for locally
grown food. Businesses across a range of food market outlets are using a variety of
marketing strategies to promote their purchases of food from local farms, their support
for the region’s agriculture, and attract customers looking for locally grown food. In the
developing local food economy, the role of Cooperative Extension is also shifting and
agents are expanding beyond their traditional production focused activities to assist farmers with marketing activities.

Direct evidence of an increasing public sentiment of support for local farms and interest in buying locally grown food comes from three consumer surveys commissioned by MFF between 2000 and 2011. Commensurate with the framing of the Local Food Campaign, the results across the surveys show that the majority of respondents believe locally grown food tastes better (between 84 and 91 percent), is more environmentally responsible (between 84 and 88 percent), and important to the health of families (between 81 and 90 percent); and that buying locally grown food contributes to the local economy (between 89 and 94 percent) and preserves the rural character of the region (between 82 and 90 percent). Alone, the results of the 2011 survey show that consumer motivations to buy locally grown food are strongly tied to place and community. Across ten statements provided to respondents that articulate different reasons that would motivate them to buy locally grown food, the most important reasons for respondents were related to supporting local farms (83 percent), contributing to the local economy (82 percent), having the capacity to know their where food comes from (78 percent), and preserving the rural character of the region (72 percent).

Compared to previous years, motivations related to health, taste, and the environment were not as important – the motivation of taste fell from 91 percent in 2000 to 84 percent in 2011, the motivation of health dropped

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Survey reports are not cited to protect the anonymity of MFF. The 2000 and 2004 surveys surveyed 300 residents in the three counties closest to the activities of movement organizers. The 2011 survey surveyed 703 residents in a nine county region – the three counties from the 2000 and 2004 surveys and, to measure public perceptions and actions farther from the epicenter of movement activities, an additional six counties in more remote areas of the region.

Not all of the 2011 statements can be compared with previous survey years. The 2000 and 2004 surveys included five statements, the 2011 survey included the five statements from the 2000 and 2004 surveys and five additional statements.
from 90 percent to 81 percent, and the motivation of environment decreased from 88 percent to 84 percent.

The results of the 2011 survey also show that the majority of respondents’ definitions of “local” are commensurate with campaign discourse; the majority chose definitions of local food that if acted upon, would support farms within organizers’ 100 mile definition: 37 percent of respondents defined local as Western North Carolina, 23 percent defined local as within “my own county,” 19 percent define local as “100 miles from my home.” In contrast, a minority of respondents indicated broader conceptualizations of local – eight percent defined local as North Carolina and six percent the United States.

In terms of practice, one third of respondents reported in the 2011 survey that they spend more than 20 percent of their overall monthly food budget on locally grown food, an increase from 12 percent in 2004 and from 11 percent in 2000. From 2000 to 2011, an increasing percentage of respondents indicated a willingness to pay more for locally grown food, from 77 percent in 2000 to 83 percent in 2011, and the inclination to buy more locally grown if was labeled as local, from 76 percent in 2000 to 88 percent in 2011. Asked about the importance of locally grown food when selecting a restaurant or grocery store, three-quarters of respondents (76 percent) indicated that the availability of locally grown food was an important consideration for them in choosing a grocery store and 64 percent stated it was an important consideration in choosing a restaurant. These figures represent an increase from 42 percent of respondents in the 2004 survey.78

Responses to a 2011 question about where they purchase locally grown food show that

78 The 2004 survey combined grocery stores and restaurants into a single question. The 2000 survey did not include this question.
grocery stores (49 percent), tailgate markets (49 percent), and farms and farm stands (41 percent) are nearly equally important sites for consumers looking to buy locally grown food.

Within MFF’s theory of change, market demand creates the incentive for farmers to produce food for local customers, to innovate with production and marketing practices, and for buyers to shift their practices – procurement, marketing, and menuing – to accommodate locally grown food. The data show that within a context of increasing support for the region’s farms and interest in buying locally grown food, local farms and local markets are developing and implementing different strategies to meet the demand. The strategies and actions of farmers and buyers and other personnel in the food industry mediate between multiple motivations. Buyer strategies and actions to source locally grown food mediate between their motivations to source food from local farms – consumer demand, the desirable qualities of locally grown food like freshness and flavor, the benefits their businesses will accrue through their public support of local farms – and the challenges they encounter – the contradictions between the qualities of locally grown food and the entrenched, centralized systems of the conventional food system in which they are embedded. At the same time farmers navigate between their perceptions of the opportunities to produce food for local markets and the barriers that challenge their capacity to successfully penetrate the supply chains of grocers, restaurants, institutions, and other non-direct market outlets.

**Buyer Motivations for Sourcing Locally Grown Food**

Privately, buyers across grocery stores, restaurants, hospitals, and schools cite consumer demand, the importance of supporting the local economy, and the desirable
qualities offered by food grown locally as the reasons they choose to source from local farms. Consumer demand is the foundation for buyer decisions to source and promote locally grown food, and buying from local farms is an act that supports the local economy and contributes to the development mutual community support. Moreover, food grown locally offers qualities absent from food produced for distribution in the conventional food industry; for many of the buyers, the preferred qualities of locally grown food hinge on the potential to develop personal relationships with farmers.

**Consumer Demand**

The emerging practices of food retailers, restaurants, and institutions to source and promote locally grown food are grounded in consumer demand. Nick, a buyer for one of the region’s major grocery retailers, stated it simply: “The public has spoken, and the retailers are listening.” The pressure to source food from local farms comes directly from customers of specific market outlets and from industry personnel within these markets with decision-making power – the customers of food retailers, the retail customers of wholesale distributors, the staff and student bodies of universities and colleges, parents and school board members, hospital staff and board members, and in at least one case, a hospital president. When asked how he knew their customers were demanding locally grown food, Nick noted that the grocery store chain’s customers call and email him and that the number one comment left on store comment cards is to support local farms and buy more locally grown food. “[These] are our customers. We take those comments very seriously,” he stated. He also noted that the impetus to source from local farms comes also from the chain’s owners who are “adamant supporters of local.” The general manager for one of the region’s larger produce wholesalers explained that their desire to
implement a local purchasing and promotional program came from a feeling that they were “behind the eight ball for not having a local program.” In this interview excerpt, James, the food service director for one of the region’s hospitals, recalls the moment that pushed him to implement changes to their food purchasing practices. Pressure on James from board members motivated him to exert pressure upstream on his existing suppliers of produce.

… I was giving a speech, a presentation about a year [ago] and it had nothing to do with local grown but one of the board members that was there had asked specifically, “What are you doing about local grown products? Do you plan on purchasing those?” So sure I was put on the spot and, in turn, turned around and asked my suppliers, “What are we doing? I’m getting feedback from people within my, my customers are asking, now I’m asking.”…I’m sure [our suppliers] had rather keep [sourcing food] on a national level and let their corporate people deal with it a lot easier but when the customer speaks you eventually have to listen or someone else will. So I think that’s helped move that along because enough people have asked. You know we want to do something…our customers are asking. We need to make this happen. And I think that…it’s been the exerted pressure and popularity that has moved it along.

The food service director for another hospital describes a similar experience – pressure from the governing body of the hospital, specifically the president, who was responding to pressure from community members to “support the local economy” and source food for the hospital from the region’s farms.

We got an email from the president of the hospital and he had been, I think it was in a social capacity, I want to say a party or something, where somebody was giving him a hard time about whether or not his hospital supported the local community and sure enough Monday morning he sent out an email to us saying we need to know what we’re doing to support the local economy.

Buyers describe the incentive to buy locally grown food specifically in terms of public relations – the benefits that accrue to their business, which translates for them into an economic impact. Commenting on the level of demand for locally grown food and the
benefit to businesses that demonstrate a commitment to local farms and food, a chef and restaurateur observed:

And at this stage, it’s – and I don’t think this is unique to our food movement here in Western North Carolina though it definitely applies here – the word “local” goes a long way and so we benefit greatly in our public perception by using local ingredients.

The food service chef at one of the region’s universities, who began sourcing and promoting locally grown food in response to pressure from students and staff, noted that with this procurement change meal “swipes” doubled from 800 to 1700 with a minimal increase in the student population. Sue, one of the region’s Child Nutrition Directors, stated that local food promotions provide them with a means to counteract pervasive negative perceptions of school food and the potential to generate a positive material outcome – increased school lunch participation, which means increased funding to spend on food. In this excerpt, Sue explains why local food promotions are valuable.

I think it’s beneficial you know in a public relations and marketing way. The students themselves [may not] care but have parents that might work for [the] schools so that they’re more inclined to get their kids to eat with us…school lunch doesn’t have too much positive PR in general so anything we can do to get positive marketing and public relations is always a good thing. We’re always fighting against the stereotypes.

Another School Nutrition Director expressed this same sentiment in co-press release with MFF about the local food being served to students in her school district. The press release highlighted the school’s purchase of apples from local farms and the promotional efforts of organizers to link the apples to specific farms with farmer profiles in the school cafeterias. Concluding the story, the Child Nutrition Director states:

Now what the cafeteria needs is customers. We hope parents will support our program by letting us provide their kids with great breakfasts and lunches everyday.
Local food promotions, in the opinion of Ken, another School Nutrition Director, brand food and pique the interest of students. In Ken’s school district, school cafeterias utilize a combination of lettuce grown by local farmers and lettuce grown by high school students in a school greenhouse. Speaking about the “lettuce project” in an article, Ken states:

It’s a win-win situation. This has really helped us in branding a salad. That means consumption of salad goes up…

**Supporting Local Farms, Supporting the Local Economy**

Commensurate with the framing of the Local Food Campaign, buyers tie the purchase of food from local farms to the support of the local economy and, by extension, the local community. Buying from local farms has both tangible and intangible benefits. Purchasing from local farms is an act that creates local resilience tied to the creation of a stronger local economy and to a stronger sense of community. Articulating this idea, buyers describe a philosophy linked to the notion of mutual community support. One of the region’s major grocery store buyers put it this way: “We want to support the community that is supporting us.” Joel, a hospital administrator, explaining his hospital’s reason for purchasing from local farms, expresses the same sentiment.

If we’re going to spend the dollars that we bring in by treating you or your family, this community, frankly when we go give back it better be [in] one of those four or five counties that we serve because that’s where the resources came from.

One restaurateur, explaining their reasons for buying locally grown food for their establishment, stated that “it’s not even a consideration to do otherwise…it goes practically without saying.” Buying from local farms helps to create an economy of mutual support that cannot be created by supporting distant companies. The “back and
“forth” not only makes sense from an economic perspective, it is simultaneously a process that builds community connections and resilience within the community.

When we’re buying from our community, those people are coming back here and spending their dollars back here, and we just see this enrichment of our economy…it’s a very simple calculation. The exportation of our food dollars drains our economy of dollars…it makes us more poor…the more we keep in here, the better off we all are…It’s a completely fiscal calculation and…personally happens to be our religion that we feel like we’re building some really good energy here, that reciprocation and that community support, the back and forth really it fortifies us as a community and makes us stronger and so contributing to that, being part of that, it’s a really, it’s a really righteous thing.

The idea that sourcing food from the region’s farms builds community connections was also expressed by Joel. He explained his hospital’s philosophy on the link between food, community, and health. Food not only has a role in providing nutrition to the patients the hospital serves, it has the potential to link patients to their community. The locally grown food served to patients – food grown by members of their own community – contributes to what Joel describes as “connectivity,” an intangible support to patients alienated from the normalcy of their day to day lives but that is important to their well-being and to the healing process. Food, in this philosophy, is the link between health and community.

You can’t quantify it….if you wanted say, well how quickly do they heal or how much happier are they or all these things? I can’t give you a statistic….a couple days ago, a couple weeks ago there was this delicious peaches and blackberry cobbler…it was all local items…you know basically just natural sugar from what was in it and they just put it together in this beautiful amalgam and for that to go to a new mom along with even [local] trout… or [local] beef…what is the difference in giving them that verses something mass produced somewhere? To me there’s some, it’s really an unspoken value, it’s something I can’t get my arms around, it’s a bit esoteric. But I think there’s value in that just for healing. I think there’s value in that for the state of mind of that person, because while they’re in the hospital…they lose control of what’s around them. They lose their connection to their community, their family, what’s normal to them. And if during that short period of time we can surround them not only with their family, with their friends, with their pastor, with their community, whatever it may be but also surround
them by “this is a farmer that you well may be neighbors with.” And so that’s been the neat thing, it’s been a neat connectivity…that folks have actually known the person that produced their food.

**The Qualities of Locally Grown Food**

The qualities of locally grown food are also significant to buyers’ favorable perception of local farms and food. Across the buyers interviewed – from independently owned restaurants to grocery stores chains to institutional food services operated by national companies to the Child Nutrition Directors of school systems – food sourced from local farms has qualities that are largely missing from food produced for the conventional food industry. Describing their experiences with produce sourced through the conventional food system, buyers used adjectives like mealy, rotten, old, thick-skinned, gassed and flushed, tasteless, and unhealthful. The qualities offered by locally grown produce are freshness and flavor – characteristics made possible by short supply chains and the ability of farmers to produce varieties for flavor rather than shelf-life – and a superior nutritional value that hinges on freshness. It is the difference, described by one buyer, between produce that “is picked and delivered the same day” and produce “bred to travel long distances.” It is the difference, stated by a hospital food service director, between produce that is “gassed and flushed and has no flavor” and produce picked at the “height of the season.”

For many buyers the desirable qualities of locally grown food are the outcome of close supply relationships. The ability to form direct relationships with farmers has implications not only for the quality of the food they can source but for culpability. The relationships afforded in local food systems provide buyers with direct knowledge of farm products and practices and, through the development of personal relationships,
create a chain of accountability. In this excerpt, Marshall, a chef and restaurateur, describes the difference between food sourced from local farms and food sourced through the industrialized food system in terms of interconnectivity and culpability.

Well, first of all you don’t have to wonder about the quality of anything you get in because usually you’re watching it grow or you’re involved in the process somehow or people come by and say, “Hey, do you want this?” and you say “yes” or “no.” It’s not like you put in an order and it comes and it shows up, and you have to inspect every last thing and make sure they’re not giving you rotten meat and make sure it’s the right temperature and then you have to make sure you catch it and send it back while the delivery man is still there or else you’re required to pay for it anyway just for the honor to throw it out. You’re a nameless face and a number when you deal with things like that. You have to deal with the sales representative who deals with his boss who deals with the distribution man who in turn deals with the purchasing agent who is buying from very far away and there’s just, there’s no interconnectivity to bring to that world…There’s no chain of like culpability, there’s nothing.

In this summation, Marshall, who before opening a restaurant in Western North Carolina worked for many years in the restaurant industry on the US West Coast, directly links the nature of conventional food supply chains to the quality of products, or the lack thereof, he is able to source. The quality of locally grown food is a result of the “interconnectivity” possible in local food supply chains – the ability to communicate directly with farmers, the capacity to know firsthand the qualities of local product and the production practices of farms, and the sense of mutual responsibility that develops in personalized markets. Here, Marshall talks specifically about how he began finding farms to source ingredients for food served at his restaurant. His description of the process of finding farms is a description of the process of creating that community “interconnectivity,” which provides him with the ability to source the quality from farmers he knows and trusts.

I’d go and visit farms and see if they were up to the standards that I wanted to represent and if they have sustainable practices, and I like them because I was
going to be dealing with them and relying on them. So this is much more about interconnectivity of a community than it is just about like a business like point of sale program.

Kevin, the food service director for one the region’s hospitals, named “service” as the key reason he shifted from sourcing fresh fruits and vegetables through a national broadline distributor to a locally based wholesale distributor that both farms and distributes produce from other farms in the region. Paralleling Marshall’s perspective, Kevin’s choice of the word “service” to describe his motivation encompasses the lack of quality in food produced for the conventional food system and the absence of accountability in long-distance food supply chains.

You know we did it originally, I’ll be honest, I did it more for the service end of it than anything. If I had to get one more rotten bag of diced celery from National Food Distributors I was going to go crazy. And it's just the quality wasn’t there but it was so, actually to back that up a little bit, it was the quality issue and the ease of service...Those were the two primary reasons I switched to [Doug’s Produce Company]. It wasn’t to support the economy, and it wasn’t to please the president of the hospital. Those were just very good benefits.

The accountability theme also emerged with buyers’ thoughts on food safety. The perception that locally grown food is safe, in some cases safer than food distributed through the conventional food system, is grounded in the proximity and scale of local production and the personal relationships buyers have with local farmers. In this excerpt, Joel contrasts the scale between local food systems and conventional food systems and the implications for food safety. Referring to an E. coli outbreak in the United States linked to spinach in 2006, he points out a complexity and accompanying risks in the industrialized food system by highlighting the protracted investigation to try and pinpoint the source of contamination. The smaller scale of local food production and the more
direct links between production and consumption mitigates the magnitude of this type of risk; it provides him with a sense of confidence in food produced locally.

We are a health care institution and … we are interacting with people again who are not well, and we don’t take chances. We don’t take chances at all with sanitation, with safety, with food and so if anything these folks [local farmers] have to demonstrate a certain commitment to sanitation and health. And again if anything I think it’s easily controlled in a smaller environment, in a local environment and if there is a problem I think it will be recognized quicker. Quite honestly, in a small environment [rather] than in a large institutional environment where it may take a long time and then we’re looking for well, “Where exactly did the E. coli bacteria come from with the spinach?” And well, “We’re going to try and track it down. And we think it’s in this part of Mexico, no, no. It’s in California. No. It’s over here.” And it’s that same idea. There’s a certain level of confidence with the local farmers that, like I say, if there is a problem I believe it will be recognized and addressed in a quicker manner.

Nick and Matt, two buyers for Southeast Foods, one of the region’s grocery retailers, also described a confidence that comes from buying from farmers they know.

The confidence in the safety of products sourced from local farms is a result of a direct connection. For their local food purchasing program, Nick visits and inspects each farm. Speaking about his trust in the measures local farms use to assure the safety of their food, he stated, “I’ve seen their farm. I know their production practices. I know them.”

Nick and Matt believe that the confidence in the safety of food grown by local farms is at least partially responsible for the growth in the market. They link consumer demand for locally grown food to the seemingly increasing prevalence of food borne illness outbreaks. Careful to point out that neither believe there has been an actual increase in the incidence of food borne illnesses but rather better science linking previously unknown or unreported illnesses to specific food sources, both buyers believe that the frequency of food recalls and the frequency of food safety headlines in the press
has been a selling point for locally grown food. Knowing exactly where their food is coming from provides the public with a sense of confidence. Nick explains:

So there’s more and more attention to the fact that a lot of food being produced is unsafe. And so there’s a lot of, a lot of concern and people really just wanting to know where their food comes from, wanting to know exactly where their food comes from.

As will be discussed in a subsequent section, confidence in the safety of locally grown food is not shared across all buyers. For some buyers, particularly institutional buyers, anxiety about the safety of locally grown food is a key area of concern, and this concern in part dictates how they are willing to source locally grown food. It is worth noting here, however, that the data show that the disparate opinions of buyers on local food and food safety exhibit a dichotomous pattern between buyers that form and do not form relationships with farms from which they source. Buyers that expressed a positive relationship between local farms and food safety have one-on-one relationships with farmers – they visit and inspect their farms, they find out firsthand about their production and handling practices. Buyers that expressed a wariness related to the safety of local food do not interact with farmers directly but source through a third party.

**Buyer Procurement Practices: Mediating Motivations and Challenges**

Buyers’ procurement strategies mediate between their motivations to source food from local farms and the challenges they encounter – contradictions between the qualities of locally grown food and the entrenched systems of the conventional food system, which structure their own procurement systems and condition their expectations and presumptions. From the perspective of buyers, locally grown food, in addition to its desired qualities, has qualities that challenge their ability to source from local farms.
Food businesses’ systems of food procurement and preparation are structured largely in accordance with the conventional food system from which they receive desired quantities of year round product from a small pool of suppliers. Locally grown food is seasonal, and most farms in Western North Carolina are unable to produce at the scale required to meet larger-scale buyer requirements and/or expectations related to volume, price, and product consistency. Production is decentralized, and the dearth of infrastructure to aggregate, distribute, and process challenges the capacity of farmers to develop relationships with buyers that are accustomed to and prefer to source through few suppliers and order products with particular qualities – e.g., graded product or processed – chopped and bagged lettuce, greens, potatoes. The smaller scale of production means higher production costs for farmers and higher purchase costs for buyers and end consumers. With multiple obligations and limited time and resources, buyers describe their limited capacity to not only find sources of locally grown food but develop relationships with farmers and suppliers able to meet industry requirements.

With a few exceptions, locally grown food comprises a relatively small percentage of food businesses’ overall food purchases. Exactly how much locally grown food individual businesses source is difficult to quantify. Buyers sourcing through wholesale distributors for example often do not know what product originate from local farms. In surveys conducted by MFF in 2006 with over 100 food businesses (grocery stores, restaurants, summer camps, schools, hospitals, and colleges) in Western North Carolina, businesses reported spending between 10 and 20 percent of their total food budgets on locally grown produce. The question posed to buyers interviewed for this study elicited a range of responses. Several declined to estimate; for those that did,
produce estimates ranged from 20 percent to 60 percent during the growing season. The meat buyer for Sustainable Foods, another grocery retailer in the region, estimated that locally raised meats comprised 30 percent of their meat case year round.

All of the buyers interviewed for this study generally indicated their expectation that their purchases of locally grown food would continue to increase with increasing consumer demand and further development of local food supply chains. To provide a sense of the increase in sales of locally raised meats in their stores, the meat buyer for Sustainable Foods stated that in 2004 the store sold $10,000 to $20,000 of locally raised meats. At the time of the interview, in 2009, he estimated that annually the store did a half of million in sales of locally raised meats, a number he projected would continue to increase. To estimate local food sales in the region, organizers have surveyed Appalachian Fresh participants annually to quantify farmers’ sales data and buyers’ local food purchasing data. Based on organizers’ calculations, local food sales have increased 265 percent, from $17 million in 2007 to $62 million in 2010.

In their efforts to source locally grown food, buyers’ use procurement strategies to accommodate the scale, seasonality, and decentralized nature of the region’s food production. Some buyers purchase directly from local farms; other buyers purchase through established procurement relationships, asking existing suppliers to make changes to their procurement systems to accommodate food grown by the region’s farms. For the purposes of description and discussion, this section divides procurement practices into strategies that source directly from local farms, strategies that source through centralized systems of aggregation and distribution, and strategies that combine both, specifically the dual procurement strategies of large grocery retailers. This structure, which begins from
the point of sourcing strategies, reveals the various and sometimes contradictory motivations of buyers.

**Sourcing Directly from Local Farms**

In practice, buyers across restaurants, grocery stores, institutional food services, and wholesale buyers utilize a variety of strategies to develop supply chains for locally grown food. Buyers sourcing directly from farms and/or farmer groups develop these relationships in a number of ways: through the services and programs offered by MFF – the use of the Local Food Guide and Local Food Trade Directory, the farmer-buyer meetings organized at MFF’s annual farming conference, source recommendations proposed by the Farm Outreach Specialist and other MFF staff – and on their own – shopping at tailgate markets, the placement of ads, hosting information meetings for farmers, and through social networks.

Buyers advertise their interest in sourcing from the region’s farms through listings in the Local Food Trade Directory. In the trade directory, 160 businesses – restaurants, small scale grocers, public schools, hospitals, locally based wholesale distributors and farmer groups, bed & breakfasts, caterers and bakers – advertise the products they want to source from local farms and the requirements farms need to meet to sell to them. Buyers can also use the directory to search for farms with desired products and qualities.

Buyers also literally advertise their interest in developing relationships with local farms; two of the region’s main natural foods retailers have used advertising to solicit business from the region’s farms, placing ads in regional publications and in the Local Food Guide. For example, the marketing department for one of these retailers, Eco Grocery, placed an ad in a popular print publication that stated, “Local farmers, we want
your product, no amount too small.” On the outside of Sustainable Foods’ produce
warehouse, which is based in the region, hangs an immense yellow banner with the
company logo and the words: “We support local farms & farmers. (We’d like that to
include you). Please inquire within.”

Annually 15 to 20 buyers across a variety of market outlets – restaurants, large
scale grocery chains, food co-ops and small independent groceries, locally or regionally
based wholesale distributors, and farmer-distributors – participate in “farmer-buyer”
meetings at MFF’s farmer conference. Described in Chapter Six, at these meetings buyers
and farmers meet face to face – buyers describe their product needs and purchasing
requirements; farmers describe their farming practices and products. Together farmers
and buyers assess the potential for a suitable business connection. Two buyers for two of
the region’s grocery store chains talked about the significance of the farmer-buyer
meetings for them in identifying new sources of locally grown food. Nick of Southeast
Foods talked about the importance of the annual meetings for him and for the buyers of
grocery outlets in general who would “just would never be able to find [local
farmers]…with everyday buying and merchandizing, we just would never have the time
to do that.” The relationships Nick developed through the meetings, in part, provided the
procurement support the company needed to implement their Homegrown store level
purchasing program. Nick piloted the program in 2009 with a farmer he met at MFF’s
annual conference. Several months after the conference, the farmer began selling his
lettuce to stores in two counties. That same growing season, other farmers growing a
variety of locally grown produce including strawberries, tomatoes, and peppers also
began selling to individual stores.
In addition to the meetings at the annual conference, buyers across restaurants, grocers, institutions, and wholesale distributors solicit personal sourcing assistance from MFF. Described by one chef:

…I can call up their office and say, “Hey, I would really like to find someone that’s doing this in November, and I’m just stumped or have too much going on,” and they’ll put me in touch with someone that I can then develop a relationship with.

Between 2008 and 2011, MFF staff documented nearly 300 “market connections” – 300 instances of staff connecting buyers to farmers and farmer groups. Staff facilitate these connections through face-to-face meetings, farm visits with buyers, and recommendations to buyers to contact particular farmers themselves.

Buyers also organize and host informational meetings for farmers to advertise their product needs for the upcoming year and to educate farmers about their specific vendor requirements. This strategy has been used by the region’s grocers including Eco Grocery and Southeast Foods, locally-based wholesale produce distributors, farmers growing and distributing product from other local farms, farmer groups seeking additional growers to sell through their food hubs, and county level food and farm initiatives striving to create food supply links between farms and markets within their counties.

Restaurant and food service chefs, in particular, use tailgate markets to source locally grown food. One of the chefs interviewed stated that they developed most of their local supply relationships by meeting and developing relationships with farmers at the

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79 A food hub, defined by the USDA, is a central facility that coordinates the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and/or the marketing of locally produced foods.
Another chef, in addition to finding farms through mutual acquaintances and word of mouth, sources through his community’s tailgate market.

There’s a market here Wednesday afternoons and so any of the participants of that market that I also get product from stop by here on the way. And then there were some of the farmers that were in the farmers market and they would stop by here and I would purchase everything they pulled out of the ground and so they didn’t even do the farmers market.

In addition to its established procurement practices, one of the region’s hospitals began buying directly from three different farms through relationships established at a tailgate market cooking demonstration. The week prior to the cooking event, the two chefs visited the market to find out what types of local product would be available for the upcoming cooking demonstration and in that visit established sourcing relationships with two of the farmers vending. Another hospital food service began sourcing from a farmer group that hosted a weekly tailgate market on the hospital campus. At the close of the weekly market, the food service purchases the remaining product for the cafeteria.

In general, chefs sourcing through the region’s tailgate markets contribute to a patterned relationship between local chefs and the region’s tailgate markets – a relationship established through chefs’ participation in cooking demonstrations at the markets like the one cited above as well as a competitive restaurant industry. As noted by one farmer, the intense competition between restaurants in Asheville drives chefs to find ways to distinguish their establishments and cuisine; locally grown food has become that “way.”

**Sourcing through Systems of Aggregation**

The sourcing strategies of buyers also rely on more centralized ways of procurement. Mediating their desire to procure and market locally grown food with their
desire to source through centralized systems of procurement, buyers choose to source through local and national wholesale distributors who are able to aggregate the product of the region’s relatively small farms and supply product year round and have the infrastructure to provide them with specific product qualities and assurances. The degree to which buyers want to be able to source through systems that aggregate and distribute product is reflected in buyers’ responses to MFF’s annual survey. In an annual survey to businesses participating in the Appalachian Fresh program a consistent request is for MFF to assume an aggregation and distribution role for locally grown food, as expressed by one respondent, “one-stop [Appalachian Fresh] purchasing.” This desire is also reflected in the increase of distribution companies listed in the Local Food Trade Directory. Fifteen wholesale distributors are listed in the 2012 directory – established wholesale distributors now marketing their capacity to distribute locally grown food – and new non-profit and for-profit distributors operated by farmers and other business entrepreneurs. Capturing the mediating role of wholesale distributors, the trade directory includes “distributors” as both a buyer category and supplier category – a buyer of food from local farms and a supplier of locally grown food to restaurants, grocery stores, and institutions. The kind of one-on-one sourcing assistance MFF provides to businesses includes connecting retailers and institutions with wholesale distributors and working with buyers’ existing wholesale suppliers to both identify what they currently source that is local and connect them to other local farms to increase their purchases of locally grown food.

Before it launched the Homegrown purchasing program, Southeast Foods required locally grown food to come through their central warehouse system. Organizer’s
early attempts to connect local farms to Southeast Foods were inhibited, in large measure, by an unwillingness to source product from multiple independent producers unable to meet warehouse volumes. The chain’s produce buyer was only willing to consider sourcing through an aggregator – a wholesale distributor or farmer group – and within that stipulation only from those able to provide product beyond a short window of time. An effort, for example, to connect a group of farmers growing an abundant supply of green peppers to the chain was thwarted because the seasonal window for green peppers was so short it was not, from the perspective of the buyer, worth the effort. As alluded to by Nick in relation to the importance of the farmer-buyer meetings at MFF’s annual farmer conference, with the day to day buying and merchandizing responsibilities of grocery store buyers, time is a key barrier to sourcing from local farms. Here, he suggests that lack of time is formidable enough to discourage large retailers from sourcing locally; he speculates it could be the basis for some retailers’ broad definitions of local:

   Building those relationships with local farms takes a lot of extra time and effort, which is why a lot of chains just don’t even mess with it and maybe that’s why they have these big broad definitions of local, because they don’t have the resources to go out there and find them. [MFF] has just really been able pull all of that together for us.

   Many of the region’s institutional food services rely on wholesale distributors to source locally grown food to overcome the volume and seasonality constraints of local farms and streamline procurement as well as to satisfy food service provider contracts and receive assurances of quality and food safety. James, the food service director for one of the region’s hospitals, explained that for many hospitals existing contracts with food service providers is a key concern. The majority of hospitals contract with an entity called a purchasing partner, a company that coordinates the sourcing of medical, food,
laboratory, and pharmaceutical supplies for multiple health care institutions. Through this coordination, purchasing partners consolidate supply needs and provide individual hospitals with purchasing power and, accordingly, cheaper costs. In this procurement structure, James is required to purchase a certain percentage of cafeteria supplies and food through National Food Distributors, the food service distribution company contracted with their purchasing partner. In this interview excerpt, James explains that while he wants to source food for the hospital cafeteria from local farms, for him, it has to happen through the hospital’s existing relationship with National Food Distributors, i.e., their “super provider.”

And so we’re asking [National Food Distributors], “How can we make this work?”...we do have certain agreements with our primary vendors whether it be [National Food Distributors] or if it’s anyone else for that matter that we purchase a certain percentage of our foods from them typically to get the best purchasing price, rebates, etcetera. And so we want to utilize them. And there’s a little bit of conflict in using local as compared to a super provider...so that’s a bit of a challenge and that’s what we’ve been working through for the past year, year and half is to see how again we can benefit both parties. Still keep our contractual agreements in regards to purchasing but still utilize local products as well. So many of the meetings that I’ve been to have had representation with [MFF] and [National Food Distributors] and other service lines as well. And then just expressing again that we have that need. We have a provider being the local farming community but how do you get that together so it’s still all working.

The decision to source locally grown food through their super provider is also grounded in the perception that the cafeteria food service lacks the capacity to make those connections themselves and in the “assurances” provided by their existing supplier on quality and food safety. For James, sourcing directly from local farms is not feasible in terms of the time and resources it would take to develop relationships and negotiate price; it is also risky from his perspective. Local farms are an unknown, and the food service does not have the capacity to inspect individual farms for food safety protocols and
quality. Sourcing through their existing supplier provides him with a sense of confidence.

National Food Distributors assumes the responsibility for the quality and safety of food procured locally.

And you know that’s one of the things we get with a large provider under contract is a lot of safe guards. You know typically they have to ensure that any provider that provides them usually has to provide an assurance that the products that they purchase are free from contaminants and so forth. So that kind of helps us out in that way that we know that we trust where our supply is coming from. Whereas if you simply purchase local straight off your back dock you really don’t know that. You have no idea how the food’s being handled, what contaminants may have been introduced. You don’t want to have the cabbage coming in the same truck as the manure was spread with. That’s one of the biggest concerns is to make sure that we protect our patients, our customers, and ourselves from all liabilities and that probably has been one of the bigger challenges. And someone who’s not concerned about that would be concerning to me.

Jason, the food service director for another hospital, described a similar sense of confidence procuring local produce through his locally based wholesale distributor.

Doug’s Produce was approved by their food service provider, also National Food Distributors. For him, this approval provides an assurance that they are safe to work with; National Food Distributors’ approval means that they are “certified,” “affiliated,” “bonafide.”

I find that in the institutional end of this line of work one of the great things about it is you, very seldom do you find people that are operating you know in a rogue sense, they’ve been certified, they’re affiliated, you know any of those words that you want to use, they’re bonafide. [Doug’s Produce] never would have been approved if they weren’t, if they were just some fly by night outfit there’s no way they ever would have been approved, and I did an onsite inspection.

Many of the region’s Child Nutrition Directors participating in Farm to School also choose to source locally grown produce through wholesale distribution companies.

On surveys conducted by MFF with Child Nutrition Directors in 2006 and again in 2008 and 2009 respondents with experience sourcing directly from farms describe the
difficulty of reconciling the seasonality and scale limitations with the needs of school districts – the extra time and effort needed to procure from local farms, the need to identify a “back-up source” to supplement inadequate product supply, and inconsistencies in product sizing. Here, Sue, the Child Nutrition Director for one of the region’s school systems, describes the conflict between the volume of product she needs to feed the students in her school district and the scale of farms in the region.

Most farmers couldn’t produce, one farm couldn’t produce the amount that we would need on a daily basis...we feed about 2,000, 2,200 lunches a day. Well multiple that by the number apples or the number of cucumbers or whatever you’re using a day or multiple that...if you do it twice a week or three times a week or however many times you menu it. That’s a lot of one product and most farms around here aren’t going to be able to do that. Then you talk about [the county school district], well [the county] is 25,000 students, so...even if they’re just feeding three-quarters of them for lunch, you’re talking huge amounts of food. So when people think well “buy locally” because the restaurants do it, well the restaurants are feeding 100 people a night. A hundred. We’re not doing that.

Child Nutrition Directors also are beholden to federal nutrition guidelines, ensuring that school lunches meet dietary specifications related to calories, sodium, saturated fat, and other factors. For fresh produce, size consistency is an important means of ensuring individual products meet the nutritional standard. Here Sue talks about the issue of product consistency with local food. When she assumed her current position, the school was sourcing ungraded local produce from a farmer group, a practice she stopped.

They have to be standardized, and they have to be graded so that we can look to make sure it meets our nutrition standards. So I know when I first got here, this was a while ago, and they were dealing with a [group of farmers], which was a conglomerate of some local farmers up there, and we were getting potatoes and apples from them, and I couldn’t, I had to stop because they were giving me teeny weenie baby apples, great big huge apples and I’m like, “No, they have to be graded, it has to be standardized.”
Like the buyers for large scale grocery stores and institutional food services, Child Nutrition Directors are also mediating between multiple obligations and cite the constraint of time. In the following passage, Sue describes that with the continued growth in the Farm to School movement there has been a concomitant intensifying of standards nutrition directors are required to meet. In this context, she feels greater pressure to participate in Farm to School but has less time with the increasing burden of accountability to state and federal requirements.

I think, the child nutrition program on a whole in the last 15 years has gotten way more accountable, and we are required to do a whole lot more documentation than we ever, ever had for everything. I sometimes sit here and think, “You know, if the USDA was running the Department of Defense, they wouldn’t be able to spend a penny without somebody knowing about it.” We are audited by numerous agencies every year. You’ve got your Department of Public Instruction audits of child nutrition and then you have the school finance auditors that come and do the school finance audits. They also audit child nutrition. You have USDA and Department of Agriculture coming and auditing you and so it’s like every time you turn around you’re getting audited by somebody so if you don’t have the documentation and paperwork that they are asking you for, you’re in trouble…I spend probably 75 percent of my time just doing that.

In addition to the constraints of production scale and federal nutritional guidelines, for schools price is a significant issue. While price is a mediating factor across market outlets, price for schools is especially acute. Child Nutrition Directors have $2.68 per plate to pay for food, labor, and overhead costs like electricity, janitorial services, and storage. In this excerpt, Ken, another Child Nutrition Director, explains in detail the price constraint nutrition directors are beholden to through the national school lunch program.

I have a budget…$2.68 is all I have to work with on feeding this child…And see out of that just like…the fine dining or fast food [establishments] everyone has what they call a food cost and then they have a labor cost…food costs can range from anywhere between 25 percent and 40 percent of that total…in the food [portion for schools], because that price is so low, it’s real hard to do any less than 40 percent. Forty percent is the food cost. Labor cost because of the benefits involved…it’s about 45 percent in labor cost…well that leaves you 15
percent...for miscellaneous things like garbage and supplies... overhead things. But when you apply that 40 percent to $2.68 you can see that you...have about a dollar, a dollar thirty to feed that child. And when you start taking off that 22 cents for milk and when you count that 12 cents for juice and when you take off that 10 cents for the bread...and everyone says, “Well, let’s give them a lot more fresh fruits and vegetables now.” Well the difference between a fresh fruit and vegetable and a canned fruit and vegetable...canned could be as cheap as 10 cents a serving. Fresh is always about 25 cents a serving...so you’re talking about 15 cents difference in fresh fruit...but we’re really being encouraged, I mean you hear it all the time, “We want fresh fruits and vegetables for our children.” That really only leaves you 40 cents left for your entrée...it’s a rock and hard place.

Furthermore, Child Nutrition Directors are mediating conflicting interpretations of food safety guidelines governing the procurement of locally grown food. In response to a question about GAP\textsuperscript{80} certification – do farms need to be GAP certified to sell produce to schools – Ken observed that “it’s really up in the air.” In meetings he has attended with officials from the Department of Public Instruction, the guidelines for sourcing locally grown food have changed.

It’s really up in the air. What we’re hearing from our state officials [in the Department of Public Instruction]...information disseminates down through their consultants throughout the different areas. And one of the meetings I went to...first thing they said was, “Don’t buy anything else unless it’s GAP certified.” Well then as we got into that discussion further and further, “Well, don’t buy anything unless they’re working toward GAP certification.” And then, discussion, discussion, discussion and finally the end result, “Well, it’s okay to buy from a small farmer if they come they come through your distributor,” so that that distributor is accepting the liability. So there’s a real question, what is really right, right now, and I don’t know what’s really right, right now.

As a means to mediate the demand for local fresh fruits and vegetables in school lunches with the constraints of price, volume and product consistency, time, and the uncertainty over the local food procurement guidelines, many Child Nutrition Directors choose to source locally grown produce through wholesale distribution companies.

\textsuperscript{80} GAPs stands for Good Agricultural Practices. GAPs define a set of protocols that govern the production and handling of produce to minimize the risk of food safety hazards. A GAPs certified farm has passed a GAPs food safety audit; the certification attests to a farm’s use of safe produce production practices.
Annually, Ken and Sue and other nutrition directors solicit fresh produce bids. With the allowance of geographic preference in the procurement of unprocessed agricultural products in the 2008 Farm Bill, nutrition directors have developed relationships with local or regionally based wholesale produce distributors. For Sue, this relationship provides the “best solution” – the wholesale distributor has the capacity to source locally grown produce in the quantities and with the qualities needed and, by sourcing local items that are in abundant supply, at a price Child Nutrition Directors can afford.

Sort of what we’re doing is working through your produce provider and getting them to buy locally as much as they can. Because you can’t do it on your own, well you could but it would be really hard… I’m working with [Upstate Produce], and they do an excellent job as produce providers, and they are very familiar with school business…[and] they do work with local farmers. You know, we had local apples out of Henderson County…through January we had enough to serve, every fresh apple we served was a local apple from August to then…[O]ur cabbage, cucumbers, green peppers, and a few other things were local when he could he could get it. Because what happens when you have a local distributor, because I don’t want to and I never want to deal individually with farmers and I’m pretty sure they don’t want to do deal with me individually, not because they don’t like me, I mean, but to try to explain school rules and federal rules and regulations and bids and all that and GAPs certification and liability insurance and on and on and on to a local farmer you know they starting going like [makes a face to show exasperation].

The impact of demand for local food from wholesale distributors and suppliers is evident in their responses to the demand. Locally or regionally based wholesale distributors serving public schools, colleges and universities, and restaurants are actively marketing the parts of their businesses that source from the region’s farms. In addition to using the Local Food Trade Directory, 26 wholesale distributors participated in the Appalachian Fresh program in 2012, and some distributors have developed “local food lines” to market to their customers. WNC Produce Wholesalers, which supplies many

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81 With geographic preference, Child Nutrition Directors are able to write in the contract language of the bid that geographic and price preference will be given.
area restaurants and institutions, worked with organizers to establish an Appalachian Fresh line of produce. The Appalachian Fresh produce line is identified on a weekly local list, distributed to customers weekly and promoted through a local ‘sell sheet’ that features profiles of Appalachian Fresh certified farms. Another wholesale distributor and packer, Fresh Produce Packers, also contacted organizers about the development of an Appalachian Fresh line of product that they could “pitch” to their customers. The wholesaler, which supplies broadline distributors, grocers, and restaurants, cited demand from their customer base that want to be able to “tap into the green market” and offer their customers locally grown food. In an interview, the manager of company explained:

There is a movement in retail to offer customers local options, and we already work with individual farms and packing houses here to get their products. We contacted [MFF] to help us develop a local line and offer it to our customers.

In 2009, National Food Distributors contacted MFF to talk about ways they might participate in the Appalachian Fresh program. In relation to MFF’s Farm to Hospital work, focused on assisting hospital food services source local food and promote it in relation to their health and wellness objectives, the food services for several of the region’s hospitals with National Food Distributors contracts asked the broadline distributor to help them source produce from the region’s farms. As participants in MFF’s Appalachian Fresh program, the hospital food services specifically requested produce grown within 100 miles so that they could use Appalachian Fresh materials to promote local purchasing. During the interview, the food service director James produced a “local availability sheet” provided to him by his National Food Distributors representative with farms and local wholesale distributors from which they were sourcing local product within the Appalachian Fresh region.
The Hybrid Systems of Retailers

To accommodate the qualities of local production, some of the region’s large scale retailers allow farmers to circumvent centralized warehouse procurement and distribution systems and supply product to individual stores. The Local Food Campaign’s largest retail partners, Sustainable Foods, Southeast Foods, and Eco Grocery, utilize dual purchasing programs. In addition to procuring and distributing through central warehouses, each company also allows some store level sourcing. The combination of store level and warehouse procurement continues to anchor grocer practices in the vertically integrated supply chains of the conventional food system while allowing some flexibility to accommodate the seasonality and scale of locally grown food – in the language of Eco Grocery, “to reflect the characteristics of the community.” Nevertheless, the perceptions and experiences of buyers suggest that the flexibility these hybrid systems are meant to create is stifled by the persistence of centralized decision making processes, which constrain the capacity of buyers to source from local farms.

In 2009, with increasing demand for locally grown food and a recognition of the limitations of the warehouse system for sourcing from the region’s farms, Southeast Foods implemented their store level purchasing program, Homegrown. In contrast to the hybrid purchasing programs of Eco Grocery and Sustainable Foods, the company’s produce managers make the decisions about what local farms can supply at the store level, not store produce managers. The top produce manager, Nick, meets individually with farmers, inspects farms for production practices and quality, and approves farms to sell to specific stores. Once a farm has been approved, store merchandisers coordinate
directly with farmers on volume and delivery. The degree of centralized decision making in Southeast Foods’ model is grounded, according to Nick, in the issue of quality control.

There’re some store produce buyers that have a really good sense of what is good quality and can maintain that quality control, but there’re a lot of buyers that will buy grade #2 yellow squash or corn that doesn’t look very good. It’s a quality control issue and so it goes through us. The [store level] produce managers don’t understand the quality specifications we’re looking for.

Despite the ability of farmers to supply product to individual stores, the highly centralized nature of the decision making process for Homegrown limits the capacity of the company to source food from local farms. Decisions ultimately lie with Nick, who is not only making corporate level decisions but minute day to day management decisions.

One of the region’s farmers, who sells to Southeast Foods through this program, described the challenge in these terms.

When I go into [Southeast Foods] and talk to the produce manager at an individual store he does not have the authority to move my produce or the authority to order more produce or authority to do anything other than put it on the shelf and answer questions about it and sweep the floor. Very, very centralized. It…makes it difficult to deal with them because the one person that has the authority to make those decisions is…[a top company executive]. I like him, but he’s making day to day detailed management decisions for 197 stores. I can send him 12 emails and never hear back from him, call him, “…[D]id you get my email?” “Um when’d you send it?” So it’s not that he’s ignoring me, it’s just that he’s so swamped.

According to two Sustainable Foods corporate level managers, individual stores have always had some autonomy to make independent purchasing decisions. The implementation of the Honestly Local local food purchasing and promotional program in 2010 did not increase store level autonomy, it only formalized the definition of local for individual stores. However, one of the company level buyers for Sustainable Foods, Sam, commented that at the store level, despite the ability of department managers to source independently from local farms, many choose to procure minimal quantities from local
farms or abstain altogether, relying primarily on the chain’s distribution warehouse. According to him, finding and dealing with local producers takes extra time and “they just don’t bother with it.”

The experience of Brian, the produce manager for Eco Grocery, expands on Sam’s assessment. Brian’s position as produce manager changed significantly when the independent grocery store was purchased by a national natural foods chain that has a local food focus. In his new corporate environment, Brian talked about the challenge of reconciling his desire to continue the kind of local purchasing he did in his previous position with the obligations in his new position. As produce manager for the independent Eco Grocery, Brian had complete autonomy – he had the authority and, in comparison to his current position, more time to dedicate to sourcing produce from local farms. As the produce department “team leader” for a store that is now part of a chain of stores, Brian has significantly less purchasing autonomy and his responsibilities have changed.

But my days can be like this, where I end up juggling a lot of different things that have nothing to do with selling produce, you know pushing food…It’s like my job has changed in some ways, I’ve become more of an administrator in some ways, and I’m doing less of the physical work, which some people might say, “Well hey that’s cool, you don’t have to bother with the,” but you know there’s some amount of that stuff that I like. I’ve always enjoyed working with the product and making nice looking displays and work with customers. I’ve done this work for so long in this town that I know a lot of people and so it’s like a very social experience for me that I enjoy that part of it too, but that is so distracting from all this administrative stuff I have to do…learning how to reconcile that…being available to my customers and also me being able to do all the work that’s expected of me as a produce team leader…that’s been challenging too because it’s hard to do all of that, it’s like, I’ve had a number of people say, “Oh man I wasn’t sure you still worked here,” because I’m not out on the floor as much as I used too or when I am, I’m like, “Hi, I’ve gotta go,” [because] I’m running off to a meeting and I don’t want to be late. But how all of this translates to our support of local…is one thing I’m very concerned about right now...
In addition to administrative duties, Brian must adhere to a strict inventory system and harmonize his local purchasing decisions with weekly and monthly purchasing and pricing plans defined at the regional corporate level. The natural foods conglomerate uses an 80/20 model – “80 percent core, 20 percent store.” Eighty percent of an individual store’s stock is procured from a regional warehouse. Department managers have the ability to source up to 20 percent outside the warehouse. In this corporate framework, even within the 20 percent Brian is not able to act independently. The regional corporate plan informs what he is able to procure locally. Brian describes the impact of product specials in particular – decisions at the regional level to put specific produce items on sale, which preclude his ability to source that item locally or compete in price with locally grown items already stocked. In this example, a decision to put collards on special at the regional level during the time of year when greens are abundant locally meant that Brian could not buy collards from local farms because they were unable to compete on price.

Are decisions that are being made on a regional level impacting what I might otherwise be doing locally? Then I would say yes, by like putting things on special. Really what that, without talking to me and sort of going ahead and making that decision for me and then telling me and then I’ve just got to deal with it… and then [to the farmer], “Listen I’m not going to bother with collards right now because it’s being put on sale on Wednesday and I have a bunch already,” but more like, “If I’m going to buy them from [you] then I’ve got to get it at much cheaper price.”

In addition to ensuring locally sourced product does not conflict with regional corporate plans, to buy product from local farms Brian has to ensure they are in the purchasing order system as approved vendors and that produce items are listed individually in the inventory. He also has to seek approval on price – price paid to the farmer and charged to the end consumer. Combined with his other obligations and
responsibilities, the “leg work” he has to perform to make local purchases becomes cumbersome and a disincentive to follow through.

It’s not that I can’t, it’s just harder. You get to a point of where you only have so much time in the day and you only have so much energy that you just end up doing some things and not others. You have to choose.

To illustrate the effect of this system on his purchasing practices Brian gave the example of a farmer, from whom he has sourced local organic apples for years, that had called the week before with a good offer on Fujis. In previous years, he would have made the purchase but with so many other obligations, he never called the farmer back.

It’s just that I’d have to do all that leg work to set up that deal… I don’t think that coordinators or the people at [the regional warehouse], I don’t think they’re sitting there going, “Whahahahaha. How can I make [Brian’s] life miserable?” I just think they have a certain way of doing things and it’s almost circumstantial…and the point now is a lot has occurred that’s distracted me and needless to say I haven’t called [the farmer] back. But in the past I probably would have already gone through those 20 cases of apples, they’d be gone.

Brian, reflecting on changes in how he sources produce from local farms, notes that the buyout of Eco Grocery by a major national retailer ushered in a new set of considerations for him in sourcing local product – volume, the capacity of farms to meet vendor criteria like liability insurance, stricter quality standards, as well his capacity to continue to source from multiple farmers producing relatively small amounts of produce. As the produce manager in an independent grocery store, Brian developed relationships with and bought from many farms in the region producing at small scales. To keep a particular local produce item stocked, Brian pooled the product of multiple producers, changing the farm source up to three times a day. As the produce manager for a corporately owned store, Brian’s procurement practices for locally grown produce have had to shift in response to his increased workload and in relation to the expectations of
his regional superiors – “weeding out” the much smaller farms unable, in Brian’s words, “to play ball” with the wholesale market.

There’s much less of that [purchasing small quantities of produce from multiple producers]…And that switching from source to source would probably be frowned upon, frowned upon from the standpoint of, “Well why are you bothering with all that?”…[they] tend to not to want to deal with a vendor or grower if they don’t have a reasonable amount of product to sort of run with. That doesn’t mean they wouldn’t pick something up, run it, and let run it out and then replace it with the California version. I mean I don’t think they’re that, you know, strict but…I think that you’ll see less and less of that [purchasing from farms with small quantities of product].

Brian predicted that in the new environment there would be more of a “regional sourcing influence and less and less of the really local people.” Visits to Eco Grocery in the months following the buyout to document procurement practices confirmed Brian’s prediction with large displays of produce sourced regionally. “Regional” for the corporation means within 7 hours of a store location – a distance that reaches south into Florida, north into Ohio, and west into Alabama. The store also continued to carry product from farms in Western North Carolina across departments – produce, meat, cheese, eggs – albeit a smaller pool of the “really local” farms. The produce of some farms regularly for sale in Eco Grocery prior to the buyout were absent from store shelves suggestive of Brian’s “weeding” out of the farms that did not have the capacity to meet the requirements of the wholesale market.

**The Mediating Factor of Price**

With the small scale of agriculture in the region, the price of local food is a mediating factor for buyers. Compared to industrial scale agriculture, the smaller scale of production means higher production costs for farmers and higher purchase costs for buyers and end consumers. One of the goals for movement organizers has been to not
only build demand for locally grown food but to instill in locally grown food a higher value, which translates into the willingness of consumers to pay more for it.

Over the years of the campaign, MFF has collected data from consumers and buyers that bear on the issue of the cost of locally grown food and the willingness to pay more for locally grown food. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, consumer surveys commissioned by MFF in 2000, 2004, and 2011 show an increasing percentage of consumers willing to pay “a little more” for locally grown food – 71 percent in 2000, 77 percent in 2004, and 83 percent in 2011. At the same time, however, survey results show that an increasing percentage of consumers identify cost as a potential barrier to the purchase of locally grown food. When asked why they would choose not to purchase locally grown food, seven percent of respondents identified expense in 2000. In 2004, 13 percent named expense and, in 2011, the percentage of consumers identifying cost as a potential barrier was 26 percent.

The results of buyer research also show this dual pattern. The combined results of surveys conducted by MFF with buyers across retail, restaurant, and institutional markets show that for many buyers price is perceived as a significant barrier to the purchase of locally grown food – concern about price is second to the issue of finding local product and coordinating purchase and delivery. Conversely, research also shows buyers currently or willing to pay more for locally grown food. In a 2006 survey designed to measure buyer interest in locally produced poultry, half of buyer respondents (n=40) indicated they would be willing to pay from 5 to 25 percent more than what they were currently paying for poultry products. In a 2010 survey of buyers participating in the Appalachian Fresh program, 85 percent (n=20) stated that they do pay more for locally
grown food. How much more varied considerably from 5 to 100 percent more and, according to respondents, depended completely on the product. Food items like meat and cheese are considerably more expensive in comparison to produce; meat in particular costs more because of the higher cost of small scale meat processing. One meat buyer stated that because the processing is so much more expensive for local producers, the price of locally raised meats is 10 to 20 percent higher on average than comparable non-local, naturally raised meats. For produce, however, buyers indicated that the degree of the difference between the value of local and nonlocal is mediated by the market.

“Absolutely, local is worth more,” stated Joel, an administrator for one of the region’s hospitals, “we do pay more but it’s marginal, it can’t be so much more.” In the following two excerpts, produce buyers for two of the region’s major retail chains cite the importance of supply and demand for mediating the value of local. Echoing Joel’s assessment, local has more value but the price of local has to be relatively close to the going market price.

It depends on the product. It can’t be a lot more. If there is considerable difference in price between local and non local, we can’t move it. And it doesn’t seem right now that customers will uniformly pay more for local food.

People are willing to pay more for local…The problem is that when local farmers have, when squash comes in season here, local farms have squash, but everyone else has squash and it’s hard to put a premium price on squash when the market is flooded with it.

Within the boundaries of supply and demand, Nick from Southeast Foods stated that they are able to pay local farmers a premium because of the savings on freight as well as overhead costs for product delivered directly to stores.

…items that are coming from California, it costs more for the truck than for the melons the truck is carrying. The [local] grower selling at market price gets more because of the savings on freight…For a product that’s coming to [Southeast
Foods], there’s the cost of the product, there’s the cost of the freight to here, then there’s the cost of warehousing it – the loading, the overhead of electricity – and then there’s the cost to ship it back out from the warehouse [to individual stores]. With the Homegrown Program all of that, there is a cost to the farmer, for the farmer to take it to the store, but…ideally, there’s a more minimal cost [to farmers].

For some buyers supply and demand is important for sourcing locally grown food at equivalent or, in some cases, at cheaper prices. This sentiment is particularly true for institutions – hospitals and public schools.

Nowhere is the higher price of locally grown food more of an issue than with public schools. As discussed earlier, Child Nutrition Directors have $2.68 per plate to pay for food as well as labor and overhead costs like electricity, janitorial services, delivery, and storage. Talking about the decision for her in choosing between canned and fresh fruits and vegetables, one Child Nutrition Director stated:

Fresh is more expensive. Local is even more expensive…And when you’re budgeting which one are you going to choose, when you don’t have any money?

Hospitals and colleges too are beholden to food budgets. Joel, the hospital administrator, explains that within his hospital’s food budget, food costs are tracked by the ounce; the hospital nutrition director has to keep the cost of food per ounce within a certain range – if the cost is too high, it is untenable because that extra cost is not typically passed on to the customer. The goal of their hospital café is to keep the food affordable for patrons so that an individual can buy a plate of “nutritious food” for five or six dollars.

For two of the region’s hospital food service directors, procuring locally grown produce at a price equal to market price is important. In this excerpt James talks about supply and demand from the perspective of procuring local products at a comparable or
even at a cheaper cost. In season and with savings on transportation, locally grown food should be competitive with non-local food.

But again most farmers I would assume [when] their crop comes in you have a limited window when you need to move that product. So typically it can be an advantage in that again when we have those same green peppers and it’s about a three week time frame all those are coming in at the same time basically so pricing should be very competitive. It won’t stay competitive but it should be during its peak time when we’re most interested in it. So I would expect that primarily we would see a competitive maybe even a better pricing for local…and since you would assume, we would assume that transportation costs may typically be less because it is it’s not going as far, that some of those overhead costs may be lower and because again it is in season at full volume that is typically a supply and demand issue. If there is a lot of it, it ought to be a little cheaper. So that would be an expectation I believe. We would look at that and see. If it wasn’t we’d question why. Why is it so much more expensive buying it local in prime season as compared to getting it from somewhere else?

For another food service director, in addition to quality, price was a mediating factor in choosing to source locally grown produce through a particular wholesale produce distributor. After being frustrated with quality of the produce through their food service provider, Jason, the food service director decided to source produce through a locally based wholesale distributor. Here, Jason names cost as one of the key criteria for choosing to work with Doug’s Produce.

That’s the first thing we did is, I did side by side price comparison. As far as quality, there is no, there is no competition, the local is always better for the most part, sometimes we get some stuff that’s really ripe but there’s no comparison. But cost wise that’s the first place we went before I even got samples or anything like that, you know how much am I going to pay for this apple compared to this apple? And apples to apples were very similar. Some things it would beat them on.

In sourcing locally grown food, Child Nutrition Directors depend on supply and demand to provide them with product at a comparable price, and nutrition directors choose to menu local produce that is abundant in season. Apples, cabbage, and potatoes
are a common offering on school menus because the region produces an ample supply of these products, and schools can source them for a relatively competitive price.

The decision by Child Nutrition Directors to limit locally grown food to particular abundant produce items highlights a strategy buyers use to mediate the higher price of locally grown food – restricting local procurement to produce. Public schools, hospitals, and universities have largely limited their procurement of local to fresh fruits and vegetables and not higher priced items like locally raised meats, eggs, or cheeses. Joel explains that for their cafeteria, there is a limit to what they are able to source locally because of the price of particular food categories. Locally raised eggs and meat are too expensive and, currently, cross the threshold for what is financially feasible.

Some things they can make it work and with some items they can’t. [The hospital food service director] said she can’t make it work with the eggs. They were too expensive, the price point was not sustainable within the budget…there is an extent to which they can buy local but they hope they can go further. Right now, it’s about establishing what they’re doing, hanging up the posters in the cafeteria, putting out the literature, and telling the story to the people. And if the eggs become financially sustainable, they will be able to buy local eggs.

In addition to food served in the cafeteria, the hospital Joes works for also has a “Gourmet to Go” business – complete meals staff and visitors can take out. Because this business operates outside the budget for the hospital food service, the food service director is able to charge more, which provides her with the means to source locally raised meats. Similarly, one of the region’s universities, which also limits its local procurement to locally grown produce, sources locally raised meats and cheeses for its catering business, which also operates outside the school food budget.
The Local Food and Farm Discourse of the Region’s Food Industry

Within a context of broad public support for the region’s farms, businesses use specific marketing strategies to promote their purchase of locally grown food and demonstrate their support of local farms. With ads and press releases, the use of promotional materials in stores, cafeterias, and restaurants, and through the coordination of local food and farm events and activities, businesses aim to create a positive public perception, appeal to the local farm and food sensibilities of the public, and access consumer demand. The importance of local food marketing activities is captured by the observation of one food service director who stated that “[it] doesn’t do much good if you buy the [local] products and no one knows about it.”

Commensurate with buyers’ private perspectives, publicly, businesses promote the desirable qualities of locally grown food and the value of local farms to the region. Business ads and press link local farms and food to the region’s character and place food at the center of community ties. Businesses promote their practices of purchasing locally grown food to both distinguish the food that they serve and sell and demonstrate their support of the region’s farms and communities.

Local Food and Community

The public discourse of businesses in ads and press releases focuses on the link between their support of local farms and their support of the local community: “supporting local farms, local products, and local people,” “bringing food and community together,” “community and local farmers are our livelihood,” “support your community, buy local.” The discourses of three entities, in particular, locate the process of community building in the act of eating food grown by the region’s farms. In the Spring
of 2012, one of the region’s largest hospitals hosted a special local food event – “how to build a local burger” – in their cafeteria with cooking stations using locally grown ingredients including local beef, vegetables, and cheeses. A press release promoting the event ties the hospital’s support of local farms, “our neighbors,” to an act that builds a “better” community. A hospital administrator was quoted:

People are paying closer attention to where their food comes from, both for economic and health reasons…[We are] committed to sustainability and supporting our neighbors, including local businesses. Sometimes building a better community can be as simple as building a better burger.

Similarly, in this ad excerpt, Asheville Independent Restaurants (AIR), an association of more than 70 independently owned restaurants in Asheville, food from the region’s farms is the unique element that binds community together.

In a Foodtopian Society, AIR is Essential. Asheville’s Foodtopian Society is all about embracing our community’s connectedness between farm, table, body, and spirit.

“Foodtopian Society” or “Foodtopia” is the title the Asheville Chamber of Commerce and the Asheville Convention and Visitors Bureau gave to Asheville with the launch of a 2008 ad campaign promoting Asheville as a tourist destination. As the name suggests, the Foodtopia campaign promotes an Asheville identity tied to local farms, local food, and unique regional cuisine. The Foodtopia website highlights farm to table dining, tailgate markets, and regional events focused on local food and farms. Like the AIR ad, the language from one of the campaign’s ads, which appeared in regional magazine, places locally grown food at the center of human experience – the region’s cuisine, made distinct by a “bounty” of locally grown food, is the catalyst for meaningful conversation, social change, and individual fulfillment.
Discover the world's only Foodtopian Society: Asheville, N.C. It's a place where we believe incredible food can fuel everything from soul-stirring conversation to social change. With a bounty of sumptuously natural produce, 17 farmers markets, 135 independent restaurants and a bevy of local breweries, Asheville is a culinary paradise where you're never short on chances to feed your hungry spirit. Get a taste of transcendence at foodtopiansociety.com.

In a related but distinct application of the food and community theme is retailers’ use of discourse to demonstrate their placement in the community and longtime support of local farms. To distinguish their statements of support for local farms from their competitors’, restaurants and retailers use language to convey a historical depth of support. One restaurant ad simply states, “Farm to table since 1979.” The ad of another restaurant, which sources and produces some of the food it serves, states: “Creating local soil, local produce, and local business since 2002.” These examples and those that follow claim greater legitimacy in their assertions by situating their practice of buying local food and supporting local farms in time.

After the purchase of the previously independent grocer by a major national retailer in 2010, the language in Eco Grocery ads tells readers that the grocer has always supported local farms. One ad in a popular print publication in 2010 proclaims: “Proudly supporting local for over 5 years,” and it includes a list of nearly 40 farms and local product manufacturers supported by the retailer. A full page ad in the 2012 Local Food Guide states: “Supporting local. Supporting [MFF] since opening our doors in 2004.” In both ads, the choice of language suggests a strategic effort to counter what was a negative public perception of the buyout and to demonstrate that, despite the change in ownership, Eco Grocery still supports the local community. Concern expressed by the produce manager over the public’s negative perception of the store’s purchase by a “mass marketing conglomerate” supports this interpretation. Interviewed just after the buyout,
he worried about the potential impact on the store’s customer base if it did not take action “to prove to Asheville” their commitment to local farms.

Two separate Southeast Foods’ Local Food Guide ads situate the origins of the grocery store chain in the region’s history. The first ad, a historical narrative centered on the store founder’s father, tells readers that buying from local farms has always been a part a Southeast Foods’ business practice to provide its customers with fresh, quality produce.

In the early mornings of 1922, [Alvin] would be up at 3 a.m. visiting the area farmers. He came looking for only the best, making sure he got the freshest produce for his small grocery store. This dedication to quality and commitment to local farmers has been passed down through the generations. Today, the store may be bigger but you’ll still find all the locally-grown produce seasonally available, and still the best around.

To differentiate themselves from their corporate competitors, the discourse of the second ad uses “local” to describe their support of farms and the company itself.

Southeast Foods buys local and is local. Southeast Foods not only buys from local farms, it is a local business and deep-seated member of the community.

…we’ve been your local, family-run grocery store since our first store opened in Asheville, NC in 1963. At [Southeast Foods] you’ll find …milk and eggs that are sourced from 150 miles of our…warehouse. [Southeast Foods] is committed to working with sustainable farms and local artisans like these local growers.

Southeast Foods’ also produces a podcast – interviews with community members around food and nutrition related topics that are played over store intercom systems. Over the past several years, local farms and locally grown food have been a regular topic including interviews with MFF staff on two occasions, interviews with at least five different farmers, the director of one of the region’s shared use kitchen facilities, as well other local food entrepreneurs and bakers. In the introduction to one show, which features
an interview with a farmer that sells produce to the chain, the podcast host talked about
the historical relationship between the store and local farms and new efforts to source
locally for all of its stores.

It is always fun for me to have local farmers on our show to talk about their
relationship with [our] markets, what they grow for [Southeast Foods], and sort
of, how that relationship started. And we’ve had some farmers in here that have
been working with [Southeast Foods] for years and years and years, like 20, 30, or
more years from the very beginning when [the founder] first started his stores.
And [back] then we really didn’t have much of an option except to source from
local farmers in order to have produce in the stores, and we have had stories of
farmers that had pulled up in pick-up trucks to our store[s]…unloaded things into
the, for the produce department... And we’ve kind of comeback full circle and
we’re working a lot more with some of the local farmers in this area in Western
North Carolina…

Similarly, this ad from one of the region’s historic landmarks, which operates
several restaurants on site, claims a historical legitimacy, a “heritage” of supporting
“sustainable” agriculture and a philosophy of cooking that revolves around fresh, local
ingredients.

Inspired by [our] heritage of fine dining and sustainable agriculture, our chefs
make the most of ingredients from our pastures, gardens, and vineyards combined
with the best from local farms and artisan producers.

**The Qualities of Locally Grown Food**

The public discourse of food businesses – printed in advertisements, press
releases, news stories, flyers, and circulars – aligns closely with the framing of movement
organizers. Local food is fresh and flavorful. It offers an alternative to the mass produced
food of industrialized agriculture. Phrases and adjectives like “seasonal offerings,”
“fresh,” “local,” “locally sourced,” “locally inspired”, and “homegrown” figure
prominently in the advertisements of food retailers and restaurants. “If we got any
fresher…you would have to slap us,” states the ad language of one Eco Grocery
advertisement for local food, and this excerpt from an ad placed by an independent
grocery store in the Local Food Guide:

When was the last time you strolled, fresh brewed coffee in hand, through aisles
where freshly picked organic produce still dripped with dew?

The language from the following Sustainable Foods ad, a two page spread in one
of the Local Food Guides with photographs of producers from five farms in the region,
touts the company’s relationship with local farmers to bring their customers locally
grown foods. Locally grown foods are defined by adjectives that suggest freshness and
the use of practices distinct from industrially produced foods.

Support Local. [Sustainable Foods] supports the farmers and producers in our
region, whether it’s free range eggs or crisp mountain apples; we work with local
farmers to forecast our needs so we can bring you the freshest local products in
season.

To emphasize their use of locally grown ingredients, the ads of independently
owned restaurants often describe their cuisine and businesses in terms of farm to table: “a
true farm-to-table restaurant,” “farm-to-table cuisine,” “farm to table dining,” “seasonal
farm to table menu,” “a farm to table southern comfort food experience.” The phrase
farm to table is intended to both connote cuisine that emphasizes extreme freshness –
and, accordingly, local and seasonally available ingredients – and signify restaurant
businesses that support and are connected meaningfully to the local community.

The discourse of retailers and institutions, in particular, tie local food to health.
Hospitals specifically promote locally grown food in terms of nutrition and health, and
the health and wellness objectives of hospitals have motivated actions to increase access
to locally grown food for hospital staff, patients, and visitors. In a press release to
promote the kick-off of a new tailgate market on the campus of one area hospital, the
director of the hospital’s wellness program talked about the responsibility of hospitals to not only treat the sick but to model healthy eating behaviors. The hospital tailgate market, part of the Farmers to Hospital program, provides the dual means to support local farms and create a healthy hospital food environment, to help create a “culture of wellness.”

We’re very excited about the Farmers to Hospitals program. We wanted to support a culture of wellness here as well as support area farmers and sustainability of our land.

The Local Food Trade Directory listing for one of the region’s hospitals uses locally grown food to distinguish the food served in its cafeteria from the perceived norm of hospital cafeteria food. Locally sourced ingredients are the cafeteria’s hallmark and the element that distinguishes it from “typical” cafeteria offerings. Using locally grown ingredients, the cafeteria offers food that is fresh, flavorful, wholesome, and healthy.

The first thing that guests notice about the [hospital café] is that the food does not resemble typical cafeteria food. Rather, the daily menu features a delicious array of gourmet offerings made with fresh, locally grown and gathered fruits, vegetables and organic, hormone-free meats. Two, culinary school-trained executive chefs, lead a team of culinary professionals in preparing fantastic soups, salads, entrees and numerous vegetarian options – all with a healthy, wholesome and gourmet flair.

For retailers, the health attributes of locally grown food lie in alternative production practices. Sam, the meat buyer for one of the region’s major grocery outlets, Sustainable Foods, talked about the alternative that local grass-fed beef provides to customers because of production practices that raise animals humanely and produce a healthier product. In one of its Local Food Guide listings, Sustainable Foods, which has branded itself as the “the healthy supermarket,” includes locally grown food in a list of “real” foods defined by freshness, flavor, and other qualities distinct from the mass produced foods of industrialized agriculture.
All [our] supermarkets provide customers with real food that tastes better: fresh, locally grown organic produce, artisan cheeses and specialty wines, traditional breads and pastries, antibiotic and hormone free meats and poultry, and sustainably harvested seafood.

Local Food Events

Participation in local food and farm events is another means by which businesses demonstrate and promote their support of local farms and local food. Food retailers, restaurants, schools, hospitals, and colleges variously host, organize, and participate in local food cooking demonstrations and tastings, tailgate markets, special local food meals, and other local food and farm events. Beyond the benefits for the participants of these events – the sales opportunities for farmers; the opportunities for participants to learn firsthand about farms, their products, and production practices; how to prepare seasonally available foods – these types of activities provide beneficial publicity for businesses.

In keeping with hospital health and wellness objectives focused on the promotion of fresh, locally grown foods, three of the region’s hospitals host and promote campus tailgate markets for staff and visitors; at least two others have plans to host tailgate markets in the future. Additionally, two of the region’s hospitals coordinate and promote CSAs for staff. Hospitals also host local food tastings and other special events focused

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82 Hospitals link local food and farm promotions to health and wellness objectives and to the Red Apple program of North Carolina Prevention Partners (NCPP). NCPP is a statewide nonprofit with a mission focused on preventing illness and early death caused by poor nutrition as well as tobacco use and physical inactivity. Commensurate with a growing Farm to Hospital movement nationwide, NCPP is focused on making hospitals models of health and wellness. Their Red Apple program publically rates hospitals on their implementation of the program’s core principles, which includes increasing access to healthy foods. Hospitals that meet the criteria of a “healthy food environment” receive a stamp of approval from NCPP and are acknowledged as a Center of Excellence (i.e., a Red Apple Hospital). To meet the Red Apple criteria focused on healthy foods, several hospitals in the region have developed action plans that include promotion of fresh, local food in hospital cafeterias and the coordination farmers markets, CSAs, and other special local food and farm events and activities.
on locally grown foods. For example, in the winter of 2009 one hospital hosted “healthy holiday tastings,” which featured local food and sent accompanying recipes home with participants. In the spring of 2012, another of the region’s hospitals hosted a special cooking demonstration – “how to build a local burger” – in the cafeteria with cooking stations using locally grown ingredients, local beef, vegetables, and cheese.

Food retailers also commonly host tailgate markets and food tastings. Since its opening, Eco Grocery has hosted a regular tailgate market on store grounds. For two years, in 2006 and 2007, it also organized “Local Food Fest.” Similar to a tailgate market, the event consisted of farmer vendors but also live music and local beer from local breweries. With the buyout, Eco Grocery began hosting Local Food Sundays – the store brings in local farmers and other local food entrepreneurs to sample and promote their products to shoppers. Sustainable Foods hosts in-store cooking demonstrations and food tastings with local farmers to mark new store openings, holidays, and seasons. Annually they hold a Fourth of July barbeque at one location that features locally raised meats. In 2011, Southeast Foods in partnership with MFF, began hosting “Taste of Local” events in different stores throughout the region where, as in other in-store events, farmers and other local food entrepreneurs sample and promote their products and meet directly with Southeast Foods shoppers. For Southeast Foods, the Taste of Local events marked a departure from the chain’s policy of only allowing professionally contracted companies to conduct in-store food tastings and sampling. Additionally two of the region’s food co-ops are also sites of weekly tailgate markets, and one also hosts food production classes with local farmers. One of the region’s small independent grocers hosted an annual local
food dinner and discussion panel with local experts on sustainable, local agriculture.

Another hosted a local honey festival in the summer of 2012.

Chefs from restaurants and hospital cafeterias participate in cooking demonstrations at tailgate markets, grocery stores, and in schools. Tailgate market managers invite local chefs to conduct cooking demonstrations as a means to create market appeal and teach shoppers how to prepare market foods. Chefs conduct cooking demonstrations with children in school cafeterias and classrooms as part of MFF’s Farm to School “School Cooking Program,” which links chefs with schools and lends cooking equipment and supplies.

As part of MFF’s Eat Local campaign, restaurants in the Asheville area develop special menus or dishes to showcase the month’s featured ingredient, e.g., special trout dishes in February, winter squash dishes in November, cheese plates and dishes in March, tomato dishes in August. Each month one restaurant, in collaboration with MFF, hosts a special Eat Local event centered on the month’s featured local food. On “Trout Tuesdays,” for example, one restaurant offered a special menu featuring trout dishes on Tuesdays during the month of February. Another restaurant hosted “In Celebration of Ramps,” a special four course dinner featuring local ramps. At the “Homegrown Tomato Contest,” hosted by a third restaurant, the public was invited to enter their tomatoes in a taste test and sample special tomato hors d’oeuvres and tomato-based cocktails.

Restaurants also organize local food and farm events independently. For example, since 2009, one restaurant has hosted an annual dinner to benefit MFF’s Farm to School program and, in honor of the occasion, creates an all local, Appalachian Fresh menu. Another restaurant, periodically hosts farmer dinners – a family style dinner for guests
that not only features locally grown ingredients but the farmers that produce them. Chefs and farmers also collaborate to organize farm to table dinners on local farms. This type of event has grown in popularity with the growth of the Local Food Movement; guests pay to eat an all local meal at a specific farm, interact with the farmers and chefs, and tour the farm. Two of the region’s colleges have also organized and catered special local food meals, one to mark the beginning of the school year for students and staff and the other a public affair organized for the wider community.

The Local Food Promotional Practices of the Region’s Food Industry

How and what businesses promote (and source) as “local” is directly tied to their definitions of local. Definitions may be indeterminate, internal to businesses (i.e., not publically shared) as is the case for many restaurants, for example, or, in the case of grocery retailers, publically stated and formalized into local food promotional programs. Some businesses have developed their own definitions and promotional materials; other businesses use the definitions and marketing materials created by outside programs including MFF’s Appalachian Fresh program but also others like the promotional programs of state departments of agriculture.

In Western North Carolina, a number of local food marketing initiatives are present – local food promotional programs specific to individual grocery retailers, labeling initiatives developed by farmer groups and county government, state wide branding initiatives, and initiatives developed by non-profit organizations like MFF. Across these programs, the geographic boundaries of local range from the “extremely” local, within the same county or adjacent counties, to the exceptionally broad, the entire southeast of the United States. In addition to Appalachian Fresh, two food retailer
marketing programs define the “local” in locally grown food as coming from farms within 100 miles – Sustainable Foods’ “100-mile commitment” logo and Quality Food’s “Grown ‘Round Here” logo. Three marketing programs define local by the state of North Carolina – NC Sustainable Agriculture’s “10%” campaign,” Food Mart’s “Fresh off the Farm” locally grown logo, and the state Department of Agriculture’s “Got to be NC” program. Several county level initiatives variously directed by a combination of farmers, county government, Cooperative Extension, and community-based nonprofits define local at smaller scales, by a single county or group of adjacent counties. Southeast Food’s Homegrown Program also defines local by county or by small groups of adjacent counties.

Businesses often use multiple strategies to promote and label locally grown food, combining the use of materials developed, for example, by MFF’s Appalachian Fresh program with materials developed by the business itself. This pattern is especially visible in grocery stores. In any one store, shoppers are likely to find several logos and, accordingly, more than one definition of local in use in the same retail outlet. Food retailers may simultaneously use their store local food marketing program, labeling locally grown food with their unique brand, and also participate in other established local food branding programs including Appalachian Fresh. This same retail outlet may also source local products labeled independently by the farmer, farmer group, or distributor, which may use their own unique labels potentially in combination with the labels of other branding programs in which they participate. County level branding initiatives that cooperate with MFF, for example, may label farmer products with the county local food logo and the Appalachian Fresh logo. Farmers that participate in the department of
agriculture’s branding program and Appalachian Fresh may label products with all three logos. Retailers in particular struggle to maintain consistent and accurate labeling of local products; this is especially the case with produce. Given the scale of production in the region, sources of products frequently fluctuate, requiring numerous label changes. This issue is discussed in greater detail in later in the chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Branding Initiative</th>
<th>Proprietor/Owner</th>
<th>Entity Type</th>
<th>“Local” Food Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appalachian Fresh</td>
<td>MFF</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>100 miles from Asheville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got to be NC</td>
<td>NCDA</td>
<td>State government</td>
<td>North Carolina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Grown ‘Round Here” and “Miles Fresher”</td>
<td>Quality Foods</td>
<td>Retailer</td>
<td>Grown ‘Round Here – 100 miles from each store; Miles Fresher – “not within a hundred miles, but much closer to you then the produce industry’s current main harvest region”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh off the Farm “locally grown” and “regionally grown”</td>
<td>Food Mart</td>
<td>Retailer</td>
<td>Locally grown – “fresh produce grown right in your own state”; regionally grown – “six or fewer hours from the farm to your [Food Mart]”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homegrown</td>
<td>Southeast Foods</td>
<td>Retailer</td>
<td>From the county and/or adjacent counties where the store is located</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter’s Local Produce</td>
<td>Food World</td>
<td>Retailer</td>
<td>Alternately the Southeast and the South</td>
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<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>NC Sustainable Agriculture</td>
<td>University</td>
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<tr>
<td>100-mile commitment</td>
<td>Sustainable Foods</td>
<td>Retailer</td>
<td>100 miles from each store</td>
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Restaurants, schools, and institutional cafeterias participating in movement activities largely utilize the definitions and materials developed by other local food branding initiatives. In 2012, 124 restaurants and 8 institutions participated in the Appalachian Fresh program, utilizing the Appalachian Fresh definition and Appalachian Fresh and Eat Local promotional materials. Participants in these programs utilize stock and custom materials created by organizers to publicize their participation in the program and label locally grown food. Restaurants and institutional cafeterias hang poster sized Eat Local calendars, farmer profiles, and produce seasonal availability charts, and display Eat Local decals (“Eat Local – Serving Appalachian Fresh”) on doors or windows. Restaurants use check stuffers, which display a miniature version of the Eat Local product calendar. A special series of Eat Local posters profile restaurant and food service chefs (e.g., “Eat Local with Chef Nick White at Mountain Bistro”). These hang in restaurants and cafeterias and also in schools where chefs conduct cooking demonstrations with students and staff. Cafeterias use Appalachian Fresh logo stickers to label product on the sneeze guards of salad bars and buffet lines. Restaurants use the Appalachian Fresh logo on menus to mark dishes with locally sourced ingredients and use special tags to label prepared foods in deli cases. School Nutrition Directors use specially created Eat Local monthly menu templates, which feature the Eat Local @ School monthly product and enable them to highlight school meals with locally sourced ingredients to students and parents. School cafeterias display special Eat Local @ School posters and staff distribute Eat Local recipe cards with recipes featuring the ingredient of the month. One hospital participant, one of the region’s largest hospitals, commissioned
MFF to create a series of Eat Local posters, which feature stunning photographs of fresh produce (Eat Local apples, Eat Local greens, Eat Local beans, and Eat Local tomatoes) to both promote the hospital’s practice of sourcing local food and adorn hospital corridors with pleasing artwork.

Institutions, sourcing through wholesale distributors – national as well as locally based distributors, also use the definitions of local used by their suppliers. Public schools participating in the North Carolina Farm to School program or the Department of Defense Fresh program also define local within a state definition. Restaurants and institutional cafeterias sourcing through National Food Distributors and its subsidiaries also participate in NC Sustainable Agriculture’s 10% campaign, which defines local by the state of North Carolina. Similarly, the food services of hospital cafeterias that are participants of the 10% campaign are also utilizing a statewide definition to define some local products.

Conversely, other hospitals and colleges sourcing food through broadline distributors or local wholesale distributors are dictating definitions of local upstream; several institutions have asked their produce providers to use MFF’s 100-mile definition. As noted earlier, in response some wholesale distribution companies, at least one locally based wholesale distributor and one national broadline distributor, have developed local availability lists to provide to their retail, restaurant, and institutional customers interested sourcing from Appalachian Fresh certified farms. WNC Produce Wholesalers, with assistance from MFF, developed an Appalachian Fresh line of produce, which it

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83 The North Carolina Farm to School program is a program of the North Carolina Department of Agriculture (NCDA). Under the program, North Carolina school systems across the state can order fresh produce from North Carolina farms; NCDA coordinates the delivery of product. The Department of Defense Fresh Program allows qualifying schools to use commodity entitlement funds to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables from farms in their state.
advertises to their customers through a weekly local availability list and “sell sheet,” which profiles the Appalachian Fresh farms from which they source. The sell sheet explains:

Supporting our local economy is important to us here at Mountain Food Products. That’s why we source [Appalachian Fresh] certified produce from local family farms. This certification, provided by [Mountain Family Farms], ensures that the produce was grown in the mountains within 100 miles of Asheville.


Statements on restaurant websites and menus emphasize an approach to food that, commensurate with the local food and farm business discourse outlined above, is based on using fresh, seasonal ingredients and is grounded in the support of the local community.

It’s all about community… Buying from your neighbors makes sense. You are able to help the local economy thrive and you know where your food comes from. Farm to table gives you both a feeling of belonging and the power of really knowing what you are eating.
There is a wealth of fresh fruits, vegetables, meats, and dairy, the majority of which we are able to source locally during the growing season. This creates the foundation for all of our ever-changing menus that update with almost every harvest.

Our menu is seasonal and changes on a daily basis. Our ingredients are sourced locally from small farms in our community.

We believe in the importance of working locally, not just using ingredients from our surrounding area, but also in our contribution to the community. The success of our restaurant has always been closely entwined with the health and progress of our community.

*The Promotional Practices of Grocery Stores*

Grocery retailers have the most developed local food marketing practices and promotional programs, and as shown in the above table, many have developed their own local food definitions and logos independently. Of the retailers with developed branding programs, definitions range from the county level definition of Southeast Food’s Homegrown Program to Food World’s South/Southeast definition. For several retailers, the definition of local is commensurate with the geographic distribution of store locations and accordingly with the food distribution logistics of self-distributing retailers. In a prior iteration of Sustainable Food’s local food marketing program, local was defined as “anywhere we do business.” Food World does not define the boundaries of their Southeast/South local food region; however, the US Census Bureau includes 16 states in the Southern United States, from Texas to Florida and north to Delaware. This region largely coincides with Food World’s geographic store footprint. Another retailer, Food Temple, uses the logos of the state marketing programs in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia to identify local food in their stores. Smaller food retailers in the region, the food co-ops and small independent grocery stores, define local narrowly often in accordance with MFF’s Appalachian Fresh program. Like their larger counterparts,
small food retailers employ combination of conventions to identify locally grown food in stores – the co-ops, for example, use a local food label produced by the National Cooperative Grocers Association, Appalachian Fresh labeling, and hand written signage.

As the Local Food Movement has matured and grown, retailers’ marketing programs have also evolved. Four retail chains have implemented more restricted definitions of local. Sustainable Foods’ definition changed from “anywhere we do business” to a 100 mile definition. Southeast Foods implemented a county level marketing and procurement program, Homegrown, where individual stores market food grown by farmers in the same county and/or adjacent counties. The marketing programs of Food Mart and Quality Foods evolved from the use of nondescript “local” labels with no obvious definition to clearly defined store marketing programs using graphically designed logos. Part of this evolution involves the implementation of marketing programs that utilize gradations of local – four retailers use a two-tiered approach that identifies food that is more and less local. After it was bought by a natural foods chain, Eco Grocery continued to utilize Appalachian Fresh’s 100 mile definition and adopted the conglomerate’s more expansive regional definition, products that have traveled less than a day – seven or fewer hours. Sustainable Foods’ Honestly Local program, implemented in 2010, also uses two logos. The “100-mile commitment” logo labels food grown within 100 miles of individual stores. The “family producer” logo identifies food grown by family farms but not necessarily within 100 miles. Food Mart also uses two logos – “locally grown” for produce grown in “your own state” and “regionally grown” for produce grown with six hours of individual stores. Quality Foods uses “Grown ‘Round Here” to mean 100 miles from each store. The definition of “Miles Fresher” is
somewhat ambiguous and is defined as produce grown in a region further than 100 miles “but much closer to you then the produce industry’s current main harvest region.”

In a marketing environment where “local” has become commonplace and more and more businesses are using “local food” to attract customers, retailers are developing distinct local food marketing programs to distinguish their programs from their competitors’ programs. Retailers are striving to create definitions commensurate with popular perceptions of what local means and that will be perceived as credible by consumers. The perceptions and accounts of the buyers for two of the region’s major grocery retailers support this supposition. Nick, explaining the impetus for the development of Southeast Food’s Homegrown Program, talked about the ubiquity of retailer marketing programs as an indication of consumer demand and to point to the use of meaningless definitions with expansive geographic boundaries.

The public has spoken, and the retailers are listening. However some of these retailers are calling local a 650 mile radius ...Homegrown is fresher, it’s delivered the same day, it’s as if you picked it in your backyard.

To paraphrase Nick, in contrast to retailer programs that label produce from Texas as local, Southeast Foods’ Homegrown Program has a quality of authenticity. Homegrown local is more local. In coming from local farms – from farms in the county where stores are located – Homegrown provides consumers with local produce that is truly local. The program supports farmers in the community and provides consumers with produce that is ultra fresh, in Nick’s word’s “super, super fresh.”

In his telling of the origin of the Honestly Local program, Sam at Sustainable Foods describes the desire of the company’s executives to develop a local food program that would be perceived by the public as having an authenticity lacking in competitors’
programs. Sam, who is a buyer at the corporate level, conducted research on local food definitions for the development of the new program. Eventually Sam’s research led him to the 100-mile diet and to marketing research indicating that the 100 mile definition resonated nationally with consumers. The company adopted the definition for their new Honestly Local program. In this excerpt, Sam recounts the findings of some of his research and the reaction by a company executive.

I don’t know if you’ve found the same thing with your research, but in my research I’ve found there is no accepted definition of local. I hit upon a day’s drive, and I was really looking for a definition that would be inclusive of the family farms that we have relationships with…I took the definition to [a company executive], and he didn’t go for it and said it was a bunch of BS. He said he wanted a no BS stand on local that called BS on everything else.

The reaction of the company executive to the day’s drive definition underscores the desire by this retailer to develop a program around a definition deemed to have integrity, a “no BS” definition of local to illuminate the disingenuousness of competitors’ programs. The language used to explain the program on company’s website depicts a program with integrity and, without being explicit, suggests the misuse of “local” by other retailers. With the Honestly Local program, consumers can trust that they are buying food grown by a local farm (emphasis in original).

The … 100 Mile Commitment is our promise to you that we will not label anything with the word “local” unless it actually comes from a distance no further than 100 miles from your home…store. That means that each of our stores will have a different local selection – which is how we believe it should be. When we say local, we mean it.

Put into practice, retailers use the marketing materials (and definitions) of their own programs in combination with the definitions and marketing materials of other programs to promote their support of local farms and to label locally grown foods.

Sustainable Foods has used several labeling strategies to identify locally grown food in
stores and store flyers. Stores utilize large format farmer profiles and posters. The chain has used Appalachian Fresh sporadically but most consistently in the promotion of local cheeses and meats. Four large Appalachian Fresh farmer profiles adorn the wall behind the meat case; a fifth profile adheres to the same format and style but lacks the Appalachian Fresh logo – it profiles a poultry producer that is not Appalachian Fresh certified. Smaller sepia tone Appalachian Fresh farmer profiles are periodically affixed to the outside of the meat case. Smaller Appalachian Fresh farmer profiles, created specifically for Sustainable Foods by MFF in sepia tone, have also been used to mark specific products in the cheese case and in the produce department.

The produce department has used large format posters that hang from the ceiling either promoting specific farms with farmer profiles or Sustainable Foods’ support of local farms in general. In the early part of 2009, five large farmer profiles hung in the department – store marketers utilized MFF photography and profile language to create these profiles without the Appalachian Fresh logo. In the fall, these posters were replaced with three different large farmer profiles with the header, “North Carolina Local.” Like the previous profiles, these also used MFF photography and language but lacked the Appalachian Fresh logo. A month later, these profiles were removed and replaced with three large format posters, each with the Sustainable Foods logo, depicting farm scenes in sepia tone to create an old-fashioned effect. In one photograph a man, perhaps in the role of a buyer, is examining a farmer’s crop of potatoes. In the second, two farmers are plowing a field using two horses and a plow. In the third, a farmer is using a hand tool, a hoe, to work a planted field. Each photograph is accompanied by one line of text, respectively “We read labels so you don’t have to,” “Our farmers wear overalls not lab
coats,” and “As close to the ground as it gets.” Also in the entrance to each produce department is a large chalk board hanging from the ceiling, and on any given day, tells shoppers how many items in the produce department are organic and how many are local.

In produce specifically Sustainable Foods stores have used several point of purchase labels to identify specific products – the small farmer profiles in sepia tone, a red tomato logo and a green colored logo for handwritten local designations, and the most recent “100-mile commitment” logo. Until the implementation of the 100-mile commitment, flyers often used the tomato logo to promote the availability of locally grown products. Flyers have also occasionally included short profiles of local farms detailing products, farm histories, and growing practices.

In Southeast Foods, large Appalachian Fresh farmer profiles hang in the produce departments, which feature farms from which they source product through the company’s warehouse. The Appalachian Fresh farmer profiles are customized with the Southeast Foods logo and the phrase “Southeast Foods supplier since” with the year the grocer began buying from farm profiled. Smaller Appalachian Fresh farmer profiles and labels designed to fit into shelf channels mark specific products. In the dairy departments of some stores hang large farmer profiles featuring dairy farmers in the region. Southeast Foods owns the only dairy processing facility based in the region, and these profiles promote the store brand of milk, which is largely sourced from dairy farms within 150 mile radius. Profile language asserts Southeast Foods’ support of local dairy farmers.

[Southeast Foods] is proud to support Western North Carolina dairy farmers. Our…milk uses 2,500,000 gallons of milk each month (21,500,000 lbs) from dairy farmers in Western North Carolina.
Southeast Foods also uses a combination of other local food labeling conventions in stores and in store flyers most commonly the Department of Agriculture’s Got to Be NC logo to mark North Carolina grown products and a starburst motif marked alternatively with the words “locally grown!” or “homegrown!” In stores, handwritten signs or signs designed to look handwritten are often used to demarcate displays of local produce delivered directly to stores as part of the Homegrown program. Handwritten signs are typically written on nondescript poster board. For the latter, a wooden sign with the script, “Fresh Produce,” marks local produce often displayed in wooden harvesting baskets.

In store flyers, the chain has variously used the star motif, the Department of Agriculture’s Got to Be NC logo, and Appalachian Fresh logo to highlight the availability of locally grown produce and has included farmer profiles on a couple of occasions. An October 2010 flyer promoted the corn maize of a local farm from which the grocer purchases produce. The maize design the farmer chose that year promoted Southeast Foods by having the words “[Southeast Foods] brings farm fresh produce to you” etched in the corn field; the flyer included a digital aerial image of the corn maze. In the summer of 2012, Southeast Foods began promoting local in its flyers more deliberately with a special flap devoted entirely to local produce. Produce items are labeled with the farm name, the location of the farm, and in some cases are marked with the Appalachian Fresh logo and/or farm logo. In one of the flyers the flap is headed with the language, “So local, we’ve got a farm in our backyard!” which refers to a farm located on land adjacent to the chain’s warehouse. In another, the flap header states, “At [Southeast Foods] we believe in locally grown!”
Eco Grocery, before it was purchased by a national retailer, worked closely with MFF on store labeling practices. For a time, shoppers entering the store encountered a chalk board in a wooden frame garnished with a carved Appalachian Fresh logo on the upper left corner. The chalk board listed “featured local farms,” but disappeared from the front window in late 2010 for reasons related to the variability of the availability of local product. Large Appalachian Fresh farmer profiles hang above a display of local cheeses in the cheese case. Local meats in the meat case are identified with small Appalachian Fresh farmer profiles affixed to the outside of the case. Inside the case, handwritten labels with farm name and county identify specific local meat products. The produce department uses a combination of Appalachian Fresh and handwritten signage. To give their promotional materials a unique look, the marketing staff – using the Appalachian Fresh logo, MFF photography, and profile language – created unique farmer profiles in 2010. These profiles have largely been replaced by handwritten signs that identify farm name, county, and state. In some cases these signs only identify the city, county, or region, for example, Weaverville or Madison County or WNC. In other cases, signs combine several locations onto a single label, WNC/FL/CAL for example, to designate that a product is going to be from Western North Carolina, Florida, or California. This strategy highlights the challenge of scale of food production in the region and the difficulty for retail personnel to keep up with frequent signage changes. With the purchase of Eco Grocery in 2010 by a national food chain, labeling practices remain largely unchanged. However, departments have also adopted two company logos to reflect the conglomerate’s approach to locally grown food – two different round green labels, one with the word “local,” the other with the word “regional.”
Farming in Western North Carolina: Perceptions and Practice

The belief that production for local markets provides farmers with a viable option to conventional markets is pervasive among farmers and agricultural professionals. Local markets provide farmers with a marketing advantage – more control over their markets, over the prices they receive for their products. Paralleling the perceptions of buyers, the difference is grounded in the potential for close connections with customers – intermediary customers like the buyers for grocery stores, institutions, and restaurants, as well as end consumers. In a context of perceived opportunity, farmers are producing for local customers, in some cases shifting from established conventional food supply chains, and they are adopting different marketing strategies to build the identity of their farm and farm products and establish a local customer base.

Broad Changes in Region’s Agriculture

Agricultural professionals, reflecting on changes to the region’s agriculture in relation to the tobacco buyout and movement activities, describe concurrent shifts in role of agricultural professionals and in the perceptions and practices of farmers. As note by more than one agricultural professional, the tobacco buyout has been the single greatest influence on agriculture in the region in the last decade. Stated by one, “…the loss of that tobacco allotment has forced people into directions they never thought they were going to go into.” Doug, an extension agent for 20 years in what had been one of the largest burley tobacco producing counties in the state, noted that early efforts to find alternatives to tobacco focused on identifying equivalent crops – crops that could replace the lost tobacco income, crops that could be grown and sold through the same wholesale commodity model, crops that utilized the knowledge and skill-set of farmers.
We were trying to find other wholesale type commodities to transition into because that much better matched [the] skill set for the farmers. The reality of it is after we went through the process is that the economics don’t match because any commodity that you can grow on our little 2 acre farm into wholesale is standing in competition with somebody on a 500 acre farm in the Piedmont and you just can’t compete, the dollars don’t add up. So the reality check was, okay, how do we grow this crop and sell it? Locally sell it, organically sell it, direct market sell it, and some other specialty type situation to make the $2000 per acre minimum that we kind of envision as needing. Ideally much more than that. But tobacco in its good times made close to $2000 [per acre].

The end of the federal tobacco program not only ended tobacco production, it ended a paradigm of agriculture for mountain farmers that enabled them to focus primarily on one product with a guaranteed market. In searching for alternatives to tobacco, farmers wanted to not only replace lost tobacco income but find crops that would fit within the same production and marketing model.

[Farmers] were lined up at the door “what else can I grow” everyday, three times a day. “What else can I grow, what else can I grow?” But they were asking that question within their paradigm, they were meaning, “What else can I grow that I can sell all in one day that has a guaranteed market that can store if I don’t sell it, I can sell it next year. That has all this research behind it, has extension agents in every county who know every disease, every bug with this product.” You know that’s what they were asking.

Explaining the implications of the loss of tobacco for the viability of the agricultural model farmers in the region relied upon and were accustomed to, Doug contrasts the marketing activities of farmers selling tobacco with the level of marketing that would be required to sell into local markets – a change that would require dramatic shifts to way they conducted their farming businesses. Doug uses the term “direct marketing” to distinguish local market channels from national market channels.

Tobacco was a very unique and special crop for what we needed up here, small acreage production and still be able to make some money. There is no replacing it. The average tobacco farmer, the biggest dilemma we’ve seen since then is the average tobacco farmer spent less than one percent of time and money marketing.
Way less than one. It was one trip to Asheville or wherever they sold their tobacco. It was probably a phone call and trip to the bank to cash a check. End of story. And when I am now trying to tell them you’re looking at a minimum of ten percent, mostly like 30 and possibly 50 percent of time and money spent on marketing to be successful in direct marketing, it’s way outside of their comprehension.

In this context – tobacco is no longer a viable crop and there is a movement afoot to build local markets for locally grown food – agricultural professionals have observed a palpable shift in the perceptions and practices of farmers. Reflecting on his observations of changes in agriculture in the region since 2001, Chris talks about the shift among traditional, multigenerational farmers – farmers whose families had grown tobacco and raised cattle and marketed through conventional supply chains. In this excerpt, Chris argues that this particular farming segment now believes that local markets provide them with a viable economic opportunity.

I think the biggest change has been an acceptance from multigenerational farmers that sustainable local triple bottom line farming is the future for their viability. When I first got up here almost every single person that was growing and calling themselves local weren’t locals. They were transplants. They were people that had gone to Warren Wilson⁸⁴ or people in their 30s…they were hippie farmers, and they decided they didn’t want to live whatever lifestyle they’d grown up with and they were trying to find another way to live. And that’s great, there is nothing wrong with that. But you go now and you see these folks that are born and raised in Western North Carolina, they may be conservative…but they see that they can grow sustainable local foods and sell it.

Chris’ distinction between “conservative” farmers – farmers from farming families, born and raised in the region – and “transplant” farmers from outside the region looking for alternative lifestyles – is also shared by one extension agent’s conclusion that up until very recently “a large amount of the energy in the local food movement [is] not local people.” Chris’ point is that with the growth and momentum of the movement this

⁸⁴ Warren Wilson is a local college with a sustainable agricultural focus.
pattern is beginning to change. His choice of words, “they may be conservative,” is intended to underscore the significance of the movement’s impact on agriculture in the region – the segment of farmers most resistant to change is changing. Chris further explains that the perceptual shift observed in conservative farmers is especially significant when understood in relation to the culture of farming in the region.

I think a lot of people who live in Asheville don’t know where they live. They don’t understand…the demographics of this region. It’s a conservative traditional place. Asheville is the anomaly sitting right in the middle of it. I think the traditional agricultural community has come around to understanding that they have been delinked from the national food supply system … and that they are not going to, there is not a production model out there, that’s going to reintegrate them into it…The only way they are going to compete is to…don’t compete, to play a different game.

In practice, this shift in thinking is manifest in changes in the production and marketing practices of traditional farmers. Describing the tangible changes in agriculture in Western North Carolina with increasing interest in local food, Chris points to the expansion of vegetable production; more significant, however, is the change among longtime cow-calf operators shifting their farm business model to produce meat for local customers.

There’s a lot more vegetable production, but there are people into…I mean [Mike’s] truck just went down the road. He was raising cattle for years, selling them at auction. Cow-calf operations going out to the Midwest. But…you know almost everybody growing cows here are growing them to be shipped out to the Midwest feedlots. So you’ve got a lot of these people who are like, “Whoa, I can make more money by having my cows grown out, slaughtered, and selling the beef than I can just you know having an excuse to have my present use valuation continued…”

Chris’ observation on changes in meat production is shared by Doug. As Doug explains, tobacco and cow-calf production are historically linked, and the decline of tobacco has been paralleled by a decline in the number of farms with cow-calf operations.
In the following excerpt, Doug, explaining the decline of cow-calf production in his county in the wake of the tobacco buyout, notes a recent increase in the number of farmers raising livestock for local customers.

The reason we have so many cows is because people were tobacco and beef cattle producers, generally speaking. The tobacco paid the bills. Beef cattle kept the land clean. And it was fun and you enjoyed it. When a tractor broke down and they bought a new one, they didn’t buy it with cattle money, they bought it with tobacco money. [They] may or may not have realized that until tobacco was gone. Then a tractor breaks down and all they’ve got’s cows. And they’re like, “How’d we buy that last tractor, because I can’t afford to buy one this time.” Tobacco bought that tractor. The cows didn’t because cows [sold through livestock auctions] don’t really make money… More recently we’re seeing …people are direct selling beef and hogs and turkeys and chickens and doing other livestock that they are selling to tailgate markets, restaurants, local food events, CSAs, etcetera. We’re dealing in that quite a bit… [though] it’s still small scale.

Similarly another extension agent, Mark, who has worked with apple producers since the 1980s, notes changes in production and markets within the region’s apple industry. In the mid 1980s apple growers grew varieties of apples specifically for wholesale buyers – who bought apples in bulk and resold the fruit at state farmers markets or fruit stands – and for regional processors who processed fruit for national brands of juice and apple sauce. Today, while apple producers still sell a proportion of their crop to processors now located in Pennsylvania and other states, a growing number of farmers produce fresh fruit for local consumers.

This shift, Mark argues, is significant in a crop industry historically dominated by the erroneous belief that the processing market for apples is the “salvation” for farmers. This is an industry, he explains, that does not provide a stable market from year to year and gives farmers little to no leverage on price, paying an average of seven to ten cents a pound. With more and more demand for local food, Mark notes increasing numbers of apple producers selling direct to consumers through u-picks, farm stores, and tailgate
markets, and through local farmer-packers who pool and distribute fresh fruit to retailers both in and outside the region. The growth in the number of farms direct marketing is especially telling; the direct marketing association he started for apple producers in the 80s, which cooperatively markets members’ farms and products, has grown from a handful of members to nearly 30. The growth in direct marketing among apple producers is the result of farmers’ observations that local markets, specifically selling direct to end consumers, provide them with greater economic opportunities.

They’ve seen, these growers…they saw what was going on and that they could cut out the middleman, the packer or broker, and sell direct to these folks…And here’s where [MFF] comes in. Buy local, that mantra it has stuck, I mean people believe that.

For apple producers, the shift from long distance wholesale to local markets has required a shift in production, from growing varieties suited for processing to varieties meant to be eaten as fresh fruit. In the 1980s the region’s apple varieties were limited largely to the mainstream “reds, goldens, and Romes” but today, Mark notes, “we have numerous, really good tasting varieties….the Gala, Ginger Golds, Honey Crisps, and many others.” In the following except Mark – differentiating production for fresh fruit from production for processing – directly links farmer production decisions to their ability to access the market for locally grown food and gain greater control over their markets. To compete in local markets, i.e., to compete for the dollars of local customers, farmers have to produce for quality and flavor.

Growing the fruit is only half of it, and the bottom line is quality. And if you don’t have quality, you just, you just don’t have anything. The quality [of fruit grown for processing] doesn’t have to be at the same level that fresh fruit does. Particularly with Romes. Just about anybody can grow Romes without too much effort, and they set a crop every year regardless of what the weather is. It’s very

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85 A farmer-packer is a farmer that both produces, packs, and distributes the product of other farms.
dependable, and it is easy. But, you know, are you growing it for yourself or are you growing it for a consumer? And obviously the answer is a consumer out there. When we have so many different [fresh fruit] varieties out there that are competing that’s not the apple you want to grow to compete with. But as far as a processing apple, it does fine. But when it comes to marketing, you don’t have an option when it comes to processing. You have no leverage, you can’t market it, you just take what they give you.

Changes in the Role of Cooperative Extension

With the end of the tobacco program and the emergence of the market for locally grown food, the types of services and assistance provided to farmers by Cooperative Extension have shifted in tandem. Paraphrasing one extension agent, the traditional production-based role of Extension is not as relevant in the developing local food economy; farmers today need to have more than production knowledge, they need to be savvy in business and marketing, and accordingly, Cooperative Extension agents have had to develop corresponding skills and knowledge. In this excerpt, Doug describes the shift; the marketing needs of farmers exceed their need for help with production.

It seems like almost everything we offer has changed. When I came on board 20 years ago the M.O. for extension was production based. Farmers had a need for a new variety and new chemicals and new fertilizers and new whatever. We let researchers at the university know that. They did the research, come up with a new practice. A year later we then have farm demonstrations and classes and teach farmers how to do that cultural practice on production and they increase yield, basically. That’s the cycle of the mission of extension. Marketing is not in our mission statement, per se…Up until recently we’ve… been able to say we don’t do marketing. However since the production has not been the issue anymore… marketing is the bottleneck, it’s where people get stuck…

The expansion of Extension’s role with the emergence of the market for locally grown food is also described by Chris in relation to the North Carolina Department of Agriculture (NCDA). Chris, who at one time worked as an agribusiness developer for NCDA, describes a change in the perspective of this institution in relation to what constitutes “legitimate agriculture” and a concomitant change in the department’s
services and programs. Commensurate with a model of large-scale industrialized agriculture, a model well-established in the eastern part of the state, the Department of Agriculture has what Chris describes as a “traditional and conservative” definition of agriculture. Prior to the emergence of locally grown food as a conspicuous market force, the department did not view production for local markets a valid form of agriculture.

…in their minds the idea of supporting farms from a marketing standpoint was to link farming to large consolidated distribution systems, to more firmly link them to the national distribution system. And that was successful to some degree but it just never occurred to them that there would be any viability for very, very small farms growing specialty vegetables that would have essentially a contained distribution system or infrastructure at a local food level. That just sounded preposterous to them. They have changed somewhat because they see the dollars. They see what makes money. I would say the department has moved forward in understanding people can make a living in local foods, but I also believe there is still a great deal of resistance toward putting a lot of energy and resources into supporting local foods.

In response to the growth in the market for locally grown food, the state Department of Agriculture has implemented services, programs, and policies that acknowledge the existence of a market for locally grown food and promote North Carolina agriculture. Some of the more recent programs implemented include a roadside stand program that certifies roadside markets as selling produce grown by North Carolina farms and the North Carolina Farm Fresh directory, an online database designed to connect consumers directly to North Carolina farms, farmers markets, roadside stands, and CSAs. One of the more recent actions taken by the department revolves around the on-farm slaughter regulations for poultry. Chris explains:

A perfect example is the change in the poultry slaughter regs on farm. They just lifted it from 1,000 birds per year to 20,000 per year. It’s huge. Part of it is because other states were doing it.
The Opportunities and Challenges in Local Markets

For farmers, local markets present opportunities and challenges. The idea that local markets offer farmers greater control over their markets, over the prices they receive for their products, is also held by farmers. The key is market proximity. In the following excerpt, one farmer, Will, characterizes the difference between local markets and conventional markets for farmers in terms of the difference between “price makers” and “price takers.” Price takers produce for impersonal markets; the price they earn for their products is based on supply and demand fluctuations in national or global markets. Price makers have more control over their markets. The difference lies in the direct or more immediate connection to farmers’ customer base, and in that connection, the capacity of farmers to know their market, to interact and develop relationships with their customers.

As described by Will, he and his wife Cathy are price makers, not necessarily because their farm products are superior, but because their marketing activities allow them to understand their customer base.

I think there are other [farmers] in our community who could do what we do but they lack the marketing piece. They lack the ability to know how to reach the consumer and know what they want and how to provide what they want. You know, I don’t think we’re special in that … we’ve been slightly successful with this because we’re that good a producer. No, it’s because we know how to market and that’s going to be critical. Without that, you’re selling bulk. You’re selling to whoever will buy it at the lowest price they can buy it for. The old saying is, if you do it that way, you’re a price taker. And you do it our way, we’re price makers.

At the same time, and consistent with the challenges identified by food industry buyers, farmers producing for local markets face barriers related to volume, the seasonality of locally grown food, price, infrastructural constraints, quality issues, and the ingrained expectations of buyers. In relation to these barriers, producers cite the problem
of developing sustainable relationships with buyers. One MFF organizer referring to this challenge in relation to a local business that had opened with a local food focus and then began dropping local suppliers stated, “this happens all the time…that these businesses are gung-ho for local and then they get into the reality of it and pull back.” In this particular instance, the business was a butcher shop, which opened in the Asheville area. The owners located their business in the region in part for the vibrancy of the Local Food Movement. Sourcing and offering its customers locally raised meats was part of their shop concept; its opening provided an indication of the strength of the movement in Asheville – the opening of a type of business that has largely disappeared under the weight of increasing industry consolidation. Several months after opening, however, the butcher shop began to shift away from local sourcing citing the difficulty of procuring adequate supply, in some instances consistent cuts of meat, the difficulty of keeping up with numerous producers, and price.

In relation to their experiences selling to restaurants, schools, grocers, and hospitals, farmers describe the challenge of “the Sysco thing.” This shared reference to the largest broadline distributor in North America refers to the entrenched nature of the conventional food system – buyers prefer the ease of sourcing through vertically integrated supply chains, because they can procure at the volumes, price, and quality they are accustomed to having and that their procurement and food preparation systems are structured around. Grounded in the systems and expectations conditioned by the conventional food system, sourcing locally grown food is simply more difficult. One farmer, John, describes this challenge in terms of the one-stop-shop model.

Yes, there’s a demand for it. I guess the biggest obstacle that I face or that I see is one-stop-shop... It’s easier with a click of a mouse to scroll down on that
computer and pull up Sysco’s website and click, click, click and you can get everything, everything. You know it’s “click, click, click” and three days later that truck backs up to your loading dock, and that’s been the hardest thing.

Here Jack, another farmer, describing his experience selling his farm’s pastured meats to local restaurants, talks about the conflicting motivations of buyers – they want to source locally, but they want to do it easily and for the same the price. Recognizing the price barrier of locally grown food for restaurants’ tight profit margins, he notes that unless buyers are truly motivated, they will revert back to established sourcing patterns that rely largely on the Sysco model.

What you see, and I don’t want to jump ahead, what you see is most places, there is desire here to carry local but when it comes down to the dollar we’ve got a few restaurants that are tried and true and make it work. Mostly I’ve found they don’t want to go to the trouble to make it work…it’s just easier again, it’s the Sysco thing, you know it’s easier to do, there’s a lot less work, you know it’s hard to support local, it’s hard to work with local…

Illustrating the challenge of buyer expectations, Jack and his wife Mary talked about a restaurant customer placing an order for lamb racks – the chef ordered 40 pounds and wanted it the following day. Given the scale of their operation, it was an order they could not possibly fill. The chef’s order illustrates the kind of expectations and presumptions conditioned by industrial scale production and Sysco type supply relationships, and a concomitant lack of understanding of small scale production. Jack and Mary frame the challenge as a communication issue between farmers and buyers, the absence of mutual understandings. Misunderstandings lead to frustration and the breakdown of the relationship.

Jack: I don’t know. I think it’s a misunderstanding on both ends. We don’t understand chefs. We don’t understand their business. You know how it is, you get disgusted or something doesn’t work you just, it’s just easier to drop it then to go into all the talking about it. And they obviously have no understanding of,
when I used to deal with [the Inn], they’d call me up, “Well I need 40 pounds of racks.” [And I’d say], “Well you do understand that that’s about 30 or 40 sheep”, you know come on.

Mary: And they wanted them the next day. And they could call their little Sysco guy and it would be right there.

Jack: I don’t have the money to keep that much inventory. Again they want to, but the understanding of how the little guy works is just not there. They just don’t get it. And of course I don’t get them, I don’t quite understand how their business works. I’ve never worked in a restaurant. They’ve never been farmer…[But] this can work, but without that negotiator in the middle there are all these miscommunications, there’s all these bad feelings, things happen wrong [and] well, hell I’m not doing this again you know, I got burned on whatever.

Farmers, reflecting on the difficulty for buyers to work with local food, point to the significance of a buyer’s personal motivation to overcome the challenges – the desire and enthusiasm of the chef, of the retail buyer, of the Child Nutrition Director, the food service chef at the hospital or college. Here, Cathy, who farms with her husband Will, notes that building personal relationships with buyers is significant to the development of this motivation.

...one of the things we’ve learned over the past five years is that a lot of people are interested in kind of token, in a token sense their interested and they say, “we support local food” but we’ve learned that it’s, it’s taken us a while to groom relationships to the point where people will actually start shelling out dollars….we’ve had to learn our customers and groom them essentially. It’s very relationship based.

At the same time, the relationship based nature of local food supply chains creates vulnerability within them. The sustainability of the business relationship with the restaurant, grocery store, school, hospital, or college cafeteria hinges on the presence of what some organizers have referred to as the local food “champion” – the individual within the business that sees the value in sourcing from local farms and is the driver of practices to procure and promote locally grown food. The loss of the champion is something MFF organizers have encountered particularly in their work with schools and
hospitals. Organizers devote significant time and resource to develop relationships with Child Nutrition Directors and food service directors, to connect them in meaningful ways to local farms and locally grown food, to engender an appreciation for local farms and food; when those individuals leave their positions, organizers find that they are “back to square one.”

In the next passage, Cathy, reflecting on an experience with a local restaurant, affirms the sometimes tenuous nature of local markets. Her experience points simultaneously to the significance of the buyer’s motivation to source locally and to the precariousness of supply relationships that pivot on that motivation. Cathy describes a relationship with a restaurant that ended when the chef left and the owner took over the cooking responsibilities. In her assessment, the chef marketed his excitement about their beef to restaurant customers with creative and attractive dishes. In contrast, the desire of the owner to source from local farms was not enough to motivate him to continue the relationship, and he began sourcing the restaurant’s beef through a broadline distributor, Fortune Foods. Cathy observes that the desire to source from local farms has to not only motivate buyers to make changes to their food procurement and preparation practices, it also has to motivate them to market locally grown food to their customers and motivate their customers to pay for it.

Well for example, we did have one restaurant that picked up our beef for probably 6 or 8 months I guess or maybe a year. The chef was really into, he was passionate about local stuff, using different cuts and being creative. When that chef left and the owner started cooking, the owner wanted to, was real interested but he said you know, “Bottom line, I got to pay the bills.” And so [Fortune Foods] can offer beef for a lot cheaper than we can and they can get it to him 10 pounds a week fresh versus buying 40 pounds a month from me frozen. It’s just easier. So it was, so whoever is making the decision on buying the product…has got to be willing to work with the limitations of the local producer, and they’ve
got to be really passionate about selling that, making it creative, making it attractive enough for the customers to want to buy it.

**Mediating the Opportunities and Challenges**

In the developing market for locally grown food, farmers have adopted strategies to mediate the opportunities and challenges. Farmers use a variety of marketing strategies to develop farm and product identity, to promote products and build their customer bases, and to mitigate the relative instability in the developing local food economy. Farmers use strategies to extend the season and to increase the value of their farm products and diversity of product offerings. To penetrate the supply chains of larger scale market outlets, farmers employ strategies to increase their productive capacity and create infrastructure.

**Extending the Season, Expanding Product Offerings**

To address the limitations of seasonality, scale, and customer and industry expectations and expand their prospects in local markets, farmers have taken actions to extend the season, to increase the value of their products and diversity offerings, and to creatively market their products. To extend the season, farmers have taken production measures, adding hoop houses or greenhouses to their operation to lengthen the growing season. Farms are offering extended season or winter CSAs with boxes of cold hardy produce into November and December. Tailgate markets, too, are extending their seasons beyond the common closing dates in September and October into November and December. Special holiday markets have emerged to tap into holiday food traditions and provide shoppers with local gift buying options, and an increasing number of winter markets are open for several weeks from January into March and April and leading into beginning of the regular tailgate market season.
Farmers create processed products – preserves, jams, sauces, cider, salsas, etc – to create income producing ventures during the off season months, to expand their offerings, and utilize products that would otherwise be unsuitable for sale. Apple producers selling direct to customers from their farms in addition to selling apples also produce ciders, butters, pies and other confections for sale. Adam, whose operation began with a focus on berries, started producing preserves as a means to create a year round income from his farm. One of the region’s trout producers, in addition to selling fillets, began producing smoked trout as a means to utilize trout fillets that had been bruised or nicked, pieces of fish that were edible but aesthetically not suitable for sale. They created a smoked trout dip as a means to utilize the unsalable bits and pieces of smoked trout.

Large animal meat producers are producing value-added products like bacon, sausage, salami, and prosciutto as a means to sell less desirable cuts of meat and increase the variety of their products. Large animal meat producers producing for local markets face a challenge peculiar to small scale meat production – “moving the whole animal.” Here, Cathy articulates the issue:

Partly too, it’s a challenge as a small local producer, like the filet mignon issue, everybody wants a whole tenderloin. Well, there are only two that come out of an animal. So if I’ve got a restaurant that wants me to consistently supply them with tenderloin I’ve got kill two animals a week and then I have to figure out what to do with the rest of it.

Small animal producers are contending with a global meat industry that provides food industry buyers and end consumers with a continuous supply of the most common and desirable cuts of meat. Small scale animal producers do not have the means to fulfill the expectations of customers conditioned by the industrialized meat industry. The story Jack and Mary told of a chef ordering 40 pounds of lamb rack for the following day
illustrates the challenge. Responding to a question about the relationship between supply and demand for locally raised meats – does demand outstrip supply – another farmer, Beth, who with her husband raises grass-fed and pastured meats, qualified her answer to highlight the growth in demand but the challenge of mediating customer expectations and established tastes for certain cuts of meat.

I mean we’ve gone from two pallets a week to four pallets a week to six pallets a week to eight pallets a week to sometimes 10 pallets a week… I mean it’s steadily increased. I mean, I don’t know…I would, yes for certain cuts but not as a whole, and that’s our challenge, not the whole animal, and we have to sell the whole animal to make any money. And that spurred us to do value added stuff, because we had all these cuts we weren’t moving, and we can’t just sit on these for you know a year because that doesn’t work.

To mitigate this challenge, farmers, in addition to producing value-added meat products, are operating seasonal meat CSAs or are selling meat directly from the farm in “boxes” or “packages.” Customers that purchase locally raised meat marketed in boxes or packages or through seasonal meat CSAs receive a mixture and diversity of cuts. Like traditional produce CSAs, customers are introduced to a variety they do not typically encounter in the conventional food system. As articulated on the site of one farm operating a meat CSA, “part of the fun of a CSA is learning to cook new cuts of meat and trying out new recipes.” Both strategies are designed to help farmers mitigate the whole animal challenge and provide customers, who are in essence buying in bulk, with a more economical way to purchase locally raised meats.

*Marketing Strategies – Branding and Direct-to-Consumer Marketing*

Key among the strategies utilized by farmers is marketing. Farmers engage in a variety of marketing activities – branding their products and their farms; promoting through websites, newsletters, and media advertising, and through MFF promotional
materials, the Local Food Guide and Local Food Trade Directory; interacting with the public and their potential customer base through tailgate markets, CSAs, in-store tastings and other local food and farm linked events, and through MFF events like the annual Farm Tour and CSA Fairs.

**Appalachian Fresh**

Branding – with the Appalachian Fresh logo, with a unique farm brand, or with brands developed in association with county level initiatives – has emerged as a significant marketing activity among farmers. In 2012, 500 farms were participating in the Appalachian Fresh program, up from 139 farms in 2007, the first full year of the program. Through the program farmers use the logo to brand their products and have access to specific Appalachian Fresh *swag* – labels for use on case boxes and product packaging, farmer profiles, twist ties, rubber bands, produce bags, etc. Farmers add one inch stickers to product labels, print Appalachian Fresh PLU stickers, create packaging and packing materials with the logo integrated into the design, use rubber bands and twist ties and produce bags to bundle greens, and display farmer profiles in conventional market settings to promote their products and tell the story of their farms.

The response rates to an annual survey disseminated to Appalachian Fresh certified farms since 2007 provides evidence of farmers’ perceptions of the logo and some indication of the level of active farmer participation. With the Appalachian Fresh registration and renewal process integrated into the Local Food Guide listing process, not all Appalachian Fresh certified farms are actively using the logo to brand their products.\(^{86}\)

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\(^{86}\) To streamline the annual registration and renewal process for Appalachian Fresh and further integrate the program’s definition of local across organization programs, organizers integrated Appalachian Fresh into the Local Food Guide listing process. Accordingly, the criteria for farms to list in the Local Food Guide
Annually, organizers disseminate a survey to Appalachian Fresh certified farms to measure levels of participation and gauge farmers’ perceptions of its value to their farm businesses. From 2007 to 2011 response rates have ranged from between 26 percent to 65 percent with a median of 43 percent. The results of the surveys demonstrate farmers’ belief that Appalachian Fresh branding benefits their farm (76 to 84 percent of respondents between 2007 and 2010) and has increased markets for their products (65 to 76 percent of respondents between 2007 and 2010). In the 2011 survey, 66 percent of respondents responded affirmatively to a new question – has Appalachian Fresh branding increased sales of your products?

Opinions expressed in interviews suggest that farmers have variable perceptions of Appalachian Fresh and different motivations for choosing to utilize or not utilize the brand. All of the farmers that were interviewed have been Appalachian Fresh certified and, to varying degrees, each has utilized the logo to market their products. Farmers differed in their opinions on the program’s definition of local and on the program’s value to their particular farm. For some farmers, certification is necessary in a marketing environment that is corrupting the meaning of local. Dave, who grows produce, noted that the 100 mile definition of Appalachian Fresh counteracts expansive definitions of local used by big retailers. Appalachian Fresh defines local for farms in the region.

Well…and I know this probably isn’t even a word, but it debroadens the traveling of the crop. If they see [MFF’s] logo, they’ll know it’s been grown in this region… So local has been redefined. And ya’ll have helped to do that.

were changed to match the criteria to participate in the Appalachian Fresh program – family farms producing food within the Appalachian Fresh region. All farms that list in the Local Food Guide are certified, though not all certified farms market their products with Appalachian Fresh marketing materials.
Paralleling Dave’s comments, another farmer of produce, David, having observed the indiscriminate use of local to label products in retail outlets, believes that a local certification program is necessary. With a dearth of consumer knowledge about agriculture and seasonality, consumers are unable to discern the veracity of “local” labels. For him, Appalachian Fresh provides the public with a trusted logo that verifies the origin of farm products from the region and adds authenticity to his products.

Yes, I think a third party certification is needed; it defines what is really local. I saw local watermelon in [Sustainable Foods] in March. Well obviously it came from South Florida or something. But a lot of consumers don’t know that and a lot of consumers are trusting – they don’t read labels, they don’t know the seasonality of food. If we have an organization like [MFF] that can provide a third party certification that can win the public trust that’s great…[it] seems like it carries as much weight as the USDA organic logo…anyway it’s widely recognized, [and] I think it helps my business to use the logo; it adds legitimacy plus it looks good.

Other farmers, while using the logo on their products, have not observed a direct benefit. Jack and Mary described the saturation of the marketplace with logos and the futility of using a logo in a sea of logos. Dawn noted that the local message is strong and ingrained in Asheville but that with so many logos certifying organic, animal welfare standards, environmental standards like river friendly, and local, shoppers are overwhelmed and are becoming increasingly skeptical of label claims.

And I think things are getting watered down. Like organic is watered down tremendously. What does organic mean? Now local… is it truly local or is it from out west, and they are still calling it local because the US is local? I mean you know. People are getting overwhelmed and then they’re going, “Well, do I really believe what they’re saying?” So the logos don’t mean as much.

In market environment crowded by logos Jack not only believes the Appalachian Fresh logo gets lost, its relative invisibility is compounded by retailer actions that do not fully embrace the program and promote it and what it means to their customers.
I think [MFF’s] a great organization. As for helping the farmer, I think they’re invaluable. As far as [the] logo, what I have noticed is that personally, for me, I don’t see a big distinction using the logo. I don’t see a big distinction using the animal welfare logo. I haven’t seen people latch onto those things. At the markets in Asheville, if you take Asheville…the [Thousands of Miles Fresher] bumper sticker… it’s more noticeable… But for all these emblems, river friendly, [animal] welfare, [Appalachian Fresh], I don’t see the stores, even [Eco Grocery], I don’t see them standing behind it, putting it in your face as much as I think they could and that’s just the truth.

Several farmers questioned the integrity of the logo or MFF’s ability to maintain its integrity without a more rigorous oversight process. As noted by one farmer, “I mean, I think it’s a good idea but it’s really an honor system, right?” Another farmer commenting on the fact that the program largely relies upon the integrity of its participants stated, “I’m okay with that so far, but at some point, but it’s only as good as your people are.” Examining the program from a supply and demand perspective, one farmer commented that because there is such much demand for locally grown food, the logo is vulnerable to misuse and is likely already being misused. Certification is necessary because most consumers, unfamiliar with the seasonality of food, are unable to discern the veracity of labels but without a process in place to ensure the authenticity of the label it will be used to market products that are not local.

[MFF’s] logo, I feel like, is being misused but it could become the standard if it was a well-done inspection and process. But I’m not sure that right now that that’s where it is… I think the local foods scene has developed, and it’s such an opportunity that people who don’t have, people who see money are jumping on the wagon, and they don’t care. They’re looking for low cost, cheap products that they can turn around and resell it to someone who will buy it. And I know there are people out there that are doing it.

Other farmers, perceiving particular types of limitations with the parameters of the program, question the value of it for their farms. For some, the definition of the region constrains their ability to the use brand; the definition of the region is too
restricted. Meat producers in particular have noted the conflict between their production models and the region’s geographic definition. To increase their productive capacity, some meat producers have developed partnerships with other farms located outside the region or have purchased additional land outside the region. With increasing demand for local grass-fed beef, Dylan and Beth were looking for ways to increase their production; they developed a relationship with a farm able to produce to their specifications. The relationship enabled them to increase their meat production and, because the farm is located in the Piedmont to the east of the mountains, incorporate seasonal grazing. In this excerpt, Dylan explains the incongruity of Appalachian Fresh with their production model.

And it [Appalachian Fresh] doesn’t quite work for farms that are supplying us outside the region. And it makes sense to have some seasonal production in different regions like in the Piedmont, [to] be able to truck cows 2.5 hours [away] to graze them in the winter, and we graze them in the summer. And I don’t want to let that brand limit what we are doing and need to do.

In this passage, Dylan explains why he sees less value in promoting his products with Appalachian Fresh than with his own farm brand. From his perspective, Appalachian Fresh does not go far enough – local is important but equally important are the systems of production farmers are using. He chooses to use and promote his farm’s brand because it stands for a system of meat production important to the identity of his family’s farm, to the products they produce, and the preferences of their customers for meat produced in ways that are humane and sustainable.

I feel like [MFF’s] approach has been spot-on – create the demand so that farmers can fill the gap…the only concern I have for [MFF] is that they are not putting values on production…it’s local, that’s all that matters. If we are going to move agriculture forward, production does matter. It’s not all marketing. I mean marketing does matter but at some point you’ve got to be able to say this is a better production system from a sustainability standpoint and this is why… [MFF]
has veered away from that, and I think to their benefit and to the benefit of the whole Local Food Movement, because it’s not seen as pressuring anybody in that direction. But at some point you have to…it’s trickier, it’s a much trickier conversation, it’s easy to push the marketing, it’s more difficult to talk about production without alienating people. From my standpoint, I don’t see a whole lot of value in using the Appalachian Fresh brand. I’d rather being using my brand and pushing our vision of agriculture to consumers.

Farm Branding

In addition to participating in Appalachian Fresh or in lieu of it, farmers are engaged in activities to brand their farms; after more than a decade of the Local Food Campaign, for the region’s farms, these types of activities have become increasingly more commonplace. To create greater public awareness of their farms and demand for the products that they produce, farmers develop unique identities for their farms and products with distinct farm names, logos, and taglines. Through the use of the Local Food Guide and social media, farmers tell the story of their farm and promote the values they support. In addition to listing the products they produce and where to buy them, farmers write farm descriptions for Local Food Guide readers with information variously related to farm histories and missions, production practices, and farm settings. Similarly farm websites tell readers farm stories, production philosophies, and places to buy their products. With newsletters, blogs, and Facebook pages, farmers keep readers and “fans” up to date on farm products and market outlets and provide them with recipes and insight into the day to day farm operations. Of the 550 farms in the 2012 Local Food Guide, 65 percent have a website or use Facebook to market their farms. Of the eleven farms that participated in interviews, nine have websites and Facebook pages, six have distinct farm logos, five distribute regular newsletters, and three have taglines. For comparison, in 2006, at the inception of the Appalachian Fresh program, it was not uncommon for farms
signing up to participate to not have a farm name and organizers, needing farm names for recordkeeping, named nameless farms for their owners.

Farm branding also includes activities designed to bring farmers and the public face to face – hosting agritourism activities like corn maizes and on-farm tours and demonstrations, participating in in-store tastings and other local food and farm events, selling through alternative market venues like tailgate markets, CSAs, on-farm through u-picks, stands, and stores. Sixty percent of the farms in the Local Food Guide market their farm as a place to visit and promote agritourism activities in their guide listings. Thirty percent have u-pick operations, twenty percent have CSAs, and thirty percent sell at tailgate markets. Nearly 50 promote their farms to teachers and parents specifically as a place to visit for school children. All the farmers interviewed, irrespective of age, number of years farming, farm size, or products produced, participate in direct-to-consumer marketing activities.

Farmers articulated the significance of direct public interaction to the viability of their farm operations. These types of activities provide farmers with sales venues and the means to interact directly with the public and build their customer base – end consumers as well as food industry buyers. Tailgate markets, farm tours and other agritourism activities, CSAs, local and farm events, etc create spaces for personal interaction between farmers and the public, between farming and the public. Customers interact personally with farmers and their farms; they learn firsthand about farm histories and production practices. Personal experiences with farmers and on farms build trust in the practices and products of farmers and create emotional connections that ultimately impact participants’ food choices.
Lisa, pondering the need – or not – to continue organic certification for her farm’s CSA, pointed to the value of the farmer-consumer connection in terms of trust. Reflecting on other CSAs in the region that no longer certify organic, she speculated that in a few years, the relationships they have established with their customers could also supplant their organic certification. The farmer to customer relationship is more important than the organic certification itself.

We thought our niche market for the CSA is that we’re certified organic because a lot of CSAs are not. Some of our customers, that’s why they come to us, “Well you’re certified organic and that’s what I want to know I’m getting.”...They trust that and they want to eat that way, but I think if we didn’t certify after a few years, we could still keep them because they know you. And that’s what a lot of CSAs around here have done. You know their clientele they’ve built up through the years. They don’t have to worry about certifying because they know their practices.

Echoing Lisa’s assessment on the significance of farmer-consumer interaction, Adam describes his direct to consumer marketing activities as his “local certification.” Adam relies on these types of activities to increase the visibility and competitiveness of his farm and his farm’s products in direct and non-direct market settings. Commenting on the value of the Appalachian Fresh logo, Adam notes that while it provides a useful and perhaps necessary proxy in retail outlets, for him nothing is as valuable as the direct relationship between him and his customers.

I think it’s a good program, I think it’s a good definition. I think it’s a definition that takes into account what we have here…I think that any kind of certification is damn near necessary for wholesale especially large scale wholesale. I’m thinking of [Southeast Foods], [Sustainable Foods]. I don’t think it’s necessary at all or useful at a tailgate market. I’m not bad mouthing [Appalachian Fresh]. This conversation is encompassing organic certification, humanely raised, any of these certifications. All of them at the end of day are a piece of paper. That piece of paper is really valuable when you don’t have the opportunity to meet the farmer yourself and certify personally how that stuff is grown. When you do, that piece of paper should become pretty useless, because I would much rather the conversation be, “please come out to my farm and see for yourself” rather than,
“please look at my piece of paper” that says that someone else has set up arbitrary, not arbitrary guidelines, but arbitrary to this customer… So that piece of paper has value in an environment where you can’t make those determinations for yourself. So my first emphasis is getting folks on the farm.

Following, Adam talk about the value of MFF’s Farm Tour. The Farm Tour provides the space for customers to certify his farm themselves – they meet him, they talk with him, they see his farm, they learn personally about his farming practices. Events like the Farm Tour not only provide him with an immediate sales venue, they are key to developing a base of returning customers who remember the experience and because of that connection continue to purchase his products.

So I like [Appalachian Fresh], but I’m a bigger fan of the Farm Tour. That’s my local certification. Let’s get folks out on these farms because it’s got multiple benefits. A, you’ve got folks certifying it themselves. B, while I’ve got them here, you think I can sell a jar of jam at market? You spend 45 minutes with me tromping around on the farm, I’ll send you home with a case. So it increases not only my immediate marketing ability – here’s what we’re going to sell today – but it increases my customer return rate. Those are the customers three years later are still calling me.

The perceived complementary relationship between direct and non-direct market outlets is consciously recognized by farmers. Articulated by Dylan, the combination of direct and non-direct sales “is a good mix because it emotionally connects people to your product.” That emotional connection, alluded to by Adam, creates a base of returning customers that also look and ask for their products in retail, restaurant, and institutional settings. All of the farmers interviewed combine direct-to-consumer sales – through tailgate markets, CSAs, on-farm stores, and agritourism – with sales in non-direct local market outlets at restaurants, grocery stores, and/or institutions. Data from the Local Food Guide document that 162 farms combine direct sales at farmers markets with sales
through non-direct means, and 80 farms combine CSA sales with sales through non-direct means.

Every fall, for the past several years, Dave has hosted a corn maize on his farm. While the event generates income, for Dave its importance lies in the experience of the participants. This single annual activity provides a venue for the people in his community to interact directly with him and with his farm. It creates community support for local agriculture in general and more specifically creates allies within his own community, which he believes translate into sales of his products at the local Southeast Foods store.

Farmers are getting in the public eye, people want to know. And I do the corn maize every year and meet all kinds of people and they’ll be somebody…a housewife that’s got three kids and she’ll start talking to me about my produce…and I’ll kind of get her educated and you can see that’s she just eating that up and …[I’m] kind of thinking well she’s going to be calling either my congressman or the grocery store chain on Monday morning…and say, “I want you to help these people out and start dealing with them more”…And when I unload produce in front of the [Southeast Foods] store [here], people watch me unload and ask if I have anything else coming in and I tell them and they say, “Well the next time you come over this way we want you to bring us some.” So…[the corn maize has] helped me all the way around.

Similarly, Adam talks specifically about the importance of direct customer relations in terms of increasing the visibility and competitiveness of his products in retail settings. Competing with dozens of other products on a grocery store shelf, putting his face and his story with his product is crucial to distinguishing it and generating demand and sales. Lamenting one grocery store chain’s practice of only allowing a contracted company to conduct product sampling in their stores, Adam explains the significance of the direct farmer connection.

What I need is for my face to be there beside the product and shake hands because that’s my back story…this is my farm, this is my history, this is my, you know.
We’re local. I’m not some guy out of New York, which is exactly what the sampling companies are going to sell.

Will and Cathy talked specifically about the relationship between direct and non-direct markets in relation to sales of their *wormy* sweet corn. Wormy sweet corn has corn earworms, a pest, noted by Will, that is “all but impossible to prevent” using organic methods. It took several years for them to establish a customer base for their corn.

Disgusted by the large corn earworms, consumers would not buy it in the local grocery store or at the tailgate market. They used the tailgate market to educate shoppers about the production attributes of wormy corn, and now at the tailgate and in their community’s grocery store “it’s what they go for.” To illustrate the change in customer demand, Will told the story of his experience one morning at the tailgate market.

And this year at the tailgate this lady pulled up with this beautiful truckload of corn, perfect ears, I mean, perfect. I had this washtub, you know a galvanized washtub, that was just full of corn that had worms in it. And I put up a big sign, it had a big worm on it, and it says “wormy corn.” We were sold out and she hadn’t sold the first ear. I kind of felt bad, she’s across the way going, “What?” And that goes back to the marketing. Now we’ve got people trained to say, “If I see a worm, I’ll just lop that off, and that means it’s healthy because it hasn’t been sprayed.” And so, you know, they were ready to buy wormy corn.

Elizabeth, whose family produces trout, talks about the advantage in local markets in terms of being able to interact directly with retail store personal. In this excerpt, she talks specifically about the benefit of conducting in-store tastings at local retail locations as a means to interact with and educate retail customers and, just as importantly, interact with and educate retail personnel and influence how they present their farm’s product to their retail customers.

I can go to these various markets on a regular basis…me personally …or one of my other employees who do demos. We do that a lot in [Eco Grocery] and all the [Sustainable Foods Stores]. Just try to go to one of them every other week and do...
a demo, so you establish customer relations with their people plus you can educate the seafood counter people. You know, [a customer asks], “Where did this trout come from? Is this frozen?” And then a dialogue ensues [between the customer and seafood counter people]. And in the best of stores, the seafood people in this country are not as educated [about the products] as I’m sure they would like to be. People just don’t have the funding, they don’t have the time, so if there’s going to be any education they rely on the vendor. And a classic example is a demo I was doing in [Sustainable Foods]…brand new store… probably six, eight weeks ago. They didn’t have room for me to do a demo out in the store because it was so incredibly slammed…so I went actually behind the seafood counter with those guys and so I heard everything that went on…and there was this great old guy next to me and there was sea bass in the counter and the customer said, “This says, on the tag it says Chilean sea bass but it’s a product of [Korea], how is that?” And he goes, “I don’t know.” Goodness….he had no idea, at least he didn’t try to make up some story. And I thought, “Wow, I hadn’t noticed that, Chilean sea bass from Korea, how does that work?” So, you know…they don’t know…but that’s not unusual at all. So I can at least change that for the trout… I can tell them about the trout.

Farmers also talked about the relationship between direct and non-direct markets in terms of a strategy to mediate the uncertainty in emerging markets for locally grown food. Elizabeth recounts the public outcry when her farm’s trout was dropped in 2009 by Southeast Foods in favor of a cheaper product from a distant region of the United States. Elizabeth recalls that if it were not for the public outcry, they would have closed their farm.

So with three weeks’ notice and that being a third of our income they were gone. Done. And so I created an exit strategy, because I was certain we were going to have to close. Absolutely certain. We’d been through so much already. Two hurricanes, a flood, drought, fire. I mean other things that had happened years before and each one of these just mounts on top of your financial profile that you go through. So couldn’t borrow anymore money, we’re tapped out. I just couldn’t see any way to survive and amazingly, well first of all, [Sustainable Foods] came almost at the same time wanting to go store wide. We’ve always sold to the local ones but not all the stores. So we went into all of them and, at the same time, we just started getting tons and tons of local calls. A lot of people heard about [Southeast Foods] and were angry. So that fueled a lot of people to say well I’m not going to buy from them.
Southeast Foods’ decision to drop their product produced a consumer backlash against the retailer. In individual stores, the public backlash was strong enough that the chain made the decision to allow sales of their product to individual stores in several counties, a practice that Southeast Foods did not allow at the time.

[T]he reason that [Southeast Foods] …allowed us to do that is because there was such a huge outcry from those stores when we pulled the product, and they supplanted [the other product] in its place. And even the seafood guys are going [to management]. “What are you doing? You know people won’t even come in the store anymore.”

The loss of Southeast Foods was just the latest in a string of lost accounts of major national retailers. In the wake of the Southeast Foods experience and the response from the local community, Elizabeth has transitioned her farm from a market base focused heavily on high profile national grocery chains to a market mix comprised of local restaurants, the local stores of national and regional retailers, and direct sales through multiple tailgate markets and most recently through their own store. For Elizabeth, this mix provides her farm with greater security in terms of a diversity of markets and greater control because it enables them to assume responsibility for building their customer base.

The perceived importance of having a diverse market base is evident in Dylan and Beth’s account of their farm’s changing markets over the ten years they have been farming. In essence, their market strategies have come full circle. They began with focus on direct to consumer sales – selling at tailgate markets and through their farm store, hosting on-farm activities including a corn maze and farm tours. As the market for locally grown food increased and their business grew, selling wholesale to local retailers began to comprise a greater proportion of their overall farm sales and market mix.
Reflecting on the singular importance of one retail customer to their farm business and the potential impact to their farm if they lost the account, Beth and Dylan made a deliberate decision to expand their direct sales focus. They added a u-pick blueberry operation and have developed plans to add additional crops for direct sale. Here, Dylan explains the feeling of vulnerability created by being too heavily invested in the wholesale grocery market; balancing it with a greater focus on direct sales provides a means to spread the risk and increase their sense of security.

…and that’s what we’ve been doing with [Sustainable Foods] this whole past year, and we’ve made some money on it so it’s been good, and I really thought this past fall, “Man what if we lost this account?” That would be really bad. And so what I said is “what we’ve really got is a farm” and so that’s what made me plant the blueberries too. You know we’ve got to double down and make this farm… this farm can sustain us you know and so I can take that money and sink it into the farm and plant blueberries and do all this creative stuff with the marketing and if we lose that account, big deal. I don’t really care, that’s not what our business plan is based on. I’m not going to sweat it.

Farmer Cooperation

To negotiate greater market access, farmers in the region have developed a variety of strategies to pool production, share equipment and distribution costs, and/or market cooperatively. To increase their productive capacity and achieve the volumes needed to supply some of the region’s larger retail outlets, farmers are developing relationships with other farmers willing to produce to their specifications and market under their farm brand. Jack and Mary work with a dozen other producers who raise grass-fed lamb and meet their specification of being animal welfare approved. The arrangement provides Jack and Mary with a means to increase production under their farm brand; partner farmers who “aren’t marketing type people” gain access to the Asheville market for locally grown food. Talking about their decision to source from another farmer to
increase their farm’s production of grass-fed beef, Beth describes a tipping point several years ago that gave them the incentive to find ways to increase their production. At that time they were selling primarily through direct markets; one of the region’s retailers expressed interest in buying significant quantities of their product, which would open the grocery wholesale market to them for the first time. To satisfy the demand, they would have to increase production.

At the time we knew the market for grass-fed beef was there, for local grass-fed beef. And we were looking for ways to raise more animals. We were looking for land to lease, looking to buy land. And we were trying to figure it out knowing that we had a really good market and if we didn’t do it someone else would. So, the relationship with [another producer of grass-fed beef] provided us with a way to meet the demand.

David, whose farming operation began as a hobby garden with his children and then transitioned to a working farm in 2007, began a produce distribution business as a means to increase his productive capacity and market access. Under his farm brand, he sources produce from certified organic farms in the region and from farms located in the greater Southeast. Describing his business model, David says that the combination enables him to overcome the challenges with local. Pooling the product from local farms, he can provide the variety and volumes of locally grown food desired by larger scale businesses; in sourcing from farms operating in warmer climates, he can provide his wholesale customers with year round product and secure greater market access. As he stated, “It’s a way to move a lot more product and we can bring stuff that we can’t grow. They are going to buy it anyway, they might as well buy it from us.”

Around CSAs specifically, farmers are pooling products to expand CSA offerings – operators of a vegetable CSA working with a farm that produces berries and other fruits or with a farm that produces pastured meats or eggs, for example. Data from the Local
Food Guide actually document a departure from the single farm CSA model and the emergence of multi-farm CSAs coordinated by a single farm or food hub. This kind of multi-farm collaboration enables farms to increase volume to serve more customers and/or provide customers with the range of product offerings they expect when they shop for food in more conventional outlets.

Farmers are also forming cooperative farmer groups to variously aggregate, distribute, and market products. In his interview, Dave, who has partnered with another farmer to pool and diversify their production, described the need for farmers to work cooperatively. Like many of the counties in the region, the county where Dave farms has lost much of processing, wholesale, and distribution infrastructure to food system consolidation, a loss that for farmers depending on those systems to access markets translates into fewer options and little control over price. He and his partner Joe, in response to increased demand for local organic produce, transitioned some their conventionally grown acreage to organic certified production, and they purchased a refrigerated truck to provide them with the means to extend the shelf-life of their products and distribute directly to local retail locations. This, Dave hopes, is the beginning of a farmer-owned business that will provide them with the infrastructure and market access of the county’s one remaining wholesale distributor and packer, which is in operation in the region only seasonally. In this excerpt, Dave talks about the current situation in his county and the vulnerability it creates for farmers. He and Joe are mediating these circumstances by pooling their resources.

In 1970 we had 75 tomato growers in [this county] and now there’s 5 or 6. And one of them is going out of business and another is cutting back to small scale…In 1970 when there were 75 tomato growers there were 5 packing houses, now there's just them [referring to the one remaining packing house]…right now,
we’re at their mercy. Right now we’re thinking about what we’re going to seed, and the starts will be ready sometime in March and [we’ll] get them ready for the month of May but there’s no guarantee, they may call up in early May and say, “It’s not worth it, we’re not coming back up this year.” What do you do? Well you do things like what me and [Joe] are doing…cutting that middleman out and selling direct to the store.

In addition to the partnership formed between Dave and Joe, several farmer groups, to fulfill the role of produce wholesale distributors and packers, have attained with the support of grant funding the equipment to wash, grade, pack, cool, and distribute produce to market outlets in refrigerated trucks. Several of these farmer groups are collaborations between farmers, Cooperative Extension, and county government. The majority have developed county level local food brands and market farmers’ products cooperatively under these brands.

Other cooperative efforts exist solely for marketing. Two apple grower direct marketing associations, for example, pool the resources of apple growers to promote their operations – u-picks, farm stands, and stores – directly to the public. A farmer tailgate market association, a group of producer only tailgate markets operating in several of the region’s counties, share marketing expenses and promote member markets collaboratively to the public. In another example, a group of cheese producers in the region recently formed a nonprofit association to focus on the promotion of local farmstead and artisan cheeses to residents and tourists.

Farmers have also developed collaborations to address the challenges associated with the dearth of meat processing infrastructure in the region. As noted by one farmer, “You’ll learn that the processing facilities are a weak link in our chain so we are at a disadvantage…we don’t run thousands through in a day and like anything else it is a numbers game.” In the context of increasing demand by consumers for meats produced
outside of the conventional meat industry, farmers, agricultural professionals, and
movement organizers have collaborated around the issue of regional meat processing.
The issues for farmers are interrelated: the cost to transport animals to processing
facilities located on the edges of the region, the limited capacity of these facilities – the
equipment, the skill of workers – to process in ways that meet the expectations of chefs,
retailers, and end consumers, and the expense of processing for small-scale operators.
Touching on the issue of processor capacity, Jack explained the frustration he had
working with a small scale processor that was not sealing the finished product properly
and was leading to spoilage.

I always assumed the processing facility…[when] you [get] something vacuum
sealed, it’s vacuum sealed. Well, guess what? They’re packing seal was horrible. They’re used to doing custom things for people. You take your little cow in there
and you pick up your meat. When you open the freezer or whatever you see that it
has a leak in it, you eat that first. And that was all there was to it. Nobody ever
held them to the gun, and said wait a minute, my stuff’s going out fresh and it’s
rotting in two days. It’s a got a seal. We’ve spent, we’re still, it’s still an issue.
And again, they don’t have the vacuum sealing, the $100,000 piece of equipment
that they have out west. So we’re dealing with spoilage problems.

Jack also pointed out that processing facilities in the region “don’t quite have that
artistic level of how to process.” Sam, a corporate level meat buyer for Sustainable
Foods, also talked about the issue of quality and the ability to source specific cuts of meat
from small scale producers. The processing facilities accessible to meat producers do not
have the experience, the experienced butchers, to get the cuts right and the packaging and
processing right to ensure finished products have adequate shelf life. As a meat buyer for
one of the region’s largest natural food stores, he has devoted considerable time to
educating producers and processors about the type and quality of cuts the company
desires. The retailer also purchases beef from a large operation located in the western part
of the country. Responding to a question about the difference between meat procured from there and meat procured from producers processing regionally, Sam said that the difference is scale and experience.

The beef from [the west] is getting processed in large facilities with experienced butchers that know how to cut and preserve meats…the butchering of meats is a lost art. Around here, in Tennessee, South Carolina, and in the Piedmont, the processing scale is much smaller, and they just don’t know what they’re doing.

In addition to quality, price is also a significant barrier to producing meats for local customers. Talking about the difference in price between grass-fed and grain-fed beef, Dylan note that the price difference between local grass-fed beef and conventionally produced grain-fed beef is not based on a difference in the cost between production systems, the difference lies in the processing.

It’s really not that much more expensive to do grass-fed than grain-fed. Where the real industry efficiencies lie is with the processing. We pay $300 to $400 a head for processing, because we have no large scale, large animal processing in the region. The feedlot farms are paying $30 to $50 a head for processing. That’s the biggest difference and that’s why we have to charge a premium for our product, because of the cost of processing. It has its advantages – it’s small scale and it’s cleaner. This is the next step in consumer education.

The expense for farmers to transport and process translates into higher costs for meats produced for local customers. Sam from Sustainable Foods noted that locally raised meats are on average between 10 to 20 percent more expensive than other naturally raised nonlocal meats. For the locally raised meats, the biggest seller at Sustainable Foods is the locally produced ground beef, which sells for $6.99 per pound. The difficulty is selling the steaks and roasts, which are considerably more expensive.

They don’t move very fast because they’re more expensive. Their more expensive in general than ground beef but they’re even more expensive because they’re locally produced and on a smaller scale. We’re talking $15 or $16 a pound for steak and so that’s very expensive and it’s hard to move those. But we can’t just take the ground beef, we have to take the other cuts as well.
For Sam the answer to the price barrier for locally raised meats is more vertical integration in the region – a regionally based processing facility: “that would bring costs down, that would really help local meat production…”

Two farmer groups have emerged in the region to address the challenges of meat processing for large and small animals – collaborations variously between producers, agricultural professionals, buyers, and movement organizers. One group, an association of small animal (e.g., poultry and rabbit) meat producers formed in 2006 primarily to explore the feasibility of developing a small-scale small animal processing facility in the region but also to provide training and technical assistance to small animal producers. The collaboration resulted in feasibility study and the subsequent completion of a small scale slaughter and processing facility for small animals in 2011. Another group comprised of large animal meat producers, chefs, agricultural professionals, and movement organizers developed a loosely defined collaboration specifically to discuss the deficiency of processing in the region for large animals. This collaboration provided MFF with the motivation to conduct an initial feasibility study to determine the financial viability of establishing a new large animal regional processing facility in the region.

*Changes in Agriculture in Western North Carolina*

This chapter has discussed the perceptions and practices of Western North Carolina consumers, buyers in food retail, restaurant, and institutional settings, and farmers in relation to movement activities. Combined the data show evidence of increasing demand for locally grown food – shifts in the practices of farmers and buyers to meet opportunities in the market for locally grown food and changes in consumer
purchasing practices. At the same time the data show that farmers and buyers are mediating between their desire to access market demand and challenges grounded in the contradictions between the qualities of “local” and entrenched systems of food procurement. This section summarizes material changes in the region’s agricultural base drawing from the USDA’s Agricultural Census and data collected by MFF.

Looking at data from the Census of Agriculture, changes in agriculture in Western North Carolina between 2002 and 2007 appear to continue a long standing pattern of farm loss and industry consolidation. While total farms sales in the region increased from $543 million to $738 million between 2002 and 2007, the census shows declines across multiple data points. The number of farms fell from 12,212 to 11,533. Farmland acreage decreased from just over one million acres to about 923,000 acres. Concurrent with these changes, the number of farm operators also fell from 17,187 to 16,954. Commensurate with the decline in the profitability of farming in general, the 2007 census data also show that more than half of principle farm operators (58 percent) in the region are part-time farmers, supplementing their farm income with off-farm sources of income. This figure is up from 46 percent in 2002. Furthermore, more than half of all farm operations reported net losses in 2002 (55 percent) and 2007 (63 percent).  

Other census data hint at the development of a counter trend – of a decentralized small scale agriculture to meet growing consumer interest in locally grown food. Mirroring agricultural statistics for the nation, the number of farms in the highest and lowest sales categories increased in Western North Carolina. While the increase in the

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87 As a measure of farm “profitability” the census’ net gain and net loss categories may not be an accurate measure. While this topic is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the figures in these categories do not include, for example, farms that qualify for present-use value, which by meeting certain criteria (e.g., acres of land in production), are taxed for the present-use value of the land, i.e., for the value of the land in its current use as agricultural land, and not the market value.
number of farms in the highest sales categories suggests the continuation of farm consolidation, the increase in the number of farms in the lowest sales category suggests the emergence of small-scale farming operations producing food for local customers. This statistic is related to another figure – the increase from 2002 to 2007 in the number of farm operators in the youngest age category, under 25 years of age. While a seemingly small increase, from 80 in 2002 to 95 in 2007, it is significant when viewed in relation to the average age of farmers in the region, which has been increasing since the 1970s to the current average age of 57 years, and in relation to the observation of movement organizers and agricultural professionals that farming is beginning to attract a new generation of farmers.

A look at the decline in tobacco production in relation to overall farm decline also suggests that in Western North Carolina the continuation of food industry consolidation is not the only dynamic affecting farming in the region. Between 2002 and 2007, the USDA Census of Agriculture shows dramatic losses in the number of farms producing tobacco and in tobacco sales. The number of tobacco producing farms declined by 87 percent – from 1,949 to 251. Tobacco sales decreased by 82 percent – from approximately $20 million in 2002 to $3.6 million in 2007. Nevertheless, a comparison between total farm loss and tobacco farm loss in Western North Carolina shows that while nearly 1,700 farms stopped producing tobacco between 2002 and 2007 only 679 farms stopped farming altogether. The difference between these two figures, 1000 farms, suggests that many former tobacco growers are continuing to farm, transitioning their production into different crops, and/or new farmers are taking their place.
Between 2002 and 2007, the census shows increases in the number of farms producing fruits and vegetables; grains, oilseeds, peas, and beans; poultry and eggs; hogs and pigs; and sheep and goats (Figure 10). Viewed in isolation, these statistics are difficult to interpret; changes in production cannot be assigned wholly to production for local or for distant markets. However, an increase in the value of agricultural products sold direct to consumers – from $3.1 million in 2002 to $4.9 million in 2007 – indicates that at least some of this production is for local markets.

Figure 10: Number of Farms Producing Food Products, 2002 and 2007 (USDA Census of Agriculture 2007c)
For poultry, the increase in the number of farms and significant growth in sales (Figure 11) are largely attributed to one particular county in the High Country which is the location of chicken hatcheries and processing facilities for one the largest processors and marketers of poultry in the world. In the case of fruits and vegetables, the increase in number of farms is accompanied by a decrease in sales. This pattern could be explained by a combination of farmers exiting fruit and vegetable production and an influx of farmers, some former tobacco growers, producing fresh fruits and vegetables at small scales for local markets. In an environment of transitioning tobacco farmers and new farmers, fruit and vegetable production requires the least investment in infrastructure by farmers compared to the infrastructure required for meat or dairy production.
Alone, the USDA’s Census of Agriculture provides a limited and inaccurate picture of changes in agriculture in Western North Carolina. With the launch of the Local Food Campaign in 2000 and the tobacco buyout in 2004, data from the two corresponding census years, 2002 and 2007, do not provide the time depth needed to judge the outcomes of campaign activities on agriculture or discern clear shifts in agricultural trends that have been in process for decades. Additionally, outside of the data collected on the value of agricultural products sold direct to consumers, which the census began collecting in 2002, the census does not collect data on marketing channels and cannot account for sales from farmers to businesses within particular geographic regions, i.e., sales to local markets. Finally, the agricultural census, while a key source of information on national agricultural trends, does not provide an accurate picture of changes in agriculture at small scales. Explained by one extension agent, who estimated that the 2007 census documents less than half of the farms in existence in the county he serves, small scale farming is largely “handled out of pocket…a lot of people don’t report what they do on the small scales.”

The farm data collected by MFF since 2002 with the production of the Local Food Guide is the most complete set of data that specifically bears on shifts in production for local markets in relation to movement activities. Over a ten year time period, consistent increases in the number of farm listings provide the clearest evidence of the growth in the market for locally grown food and in changes in the production and marketing practices of farmers attempting to access market demand. From 2002 to 2012, the number of farm listings in the Local Food Guide increased 1,428 percent, from 36 farms to 550 farms. The number of farms with CSAs increased 733 percent, from 12 CSAs in 2002 to 100
CSAs in 2012. The number tailgate markets increased 225 percent, from 28 in 2002 to 91 in 2012. In MFF’s Local Food Trade Directory, farm listings increased nearly 300 percent, from 28 producers in 2006 to 300 in 2012.

The increase in farm listings subsumes increased participation in movement activities by farms in counties outside the Asheville MSA, outside the immediate influence of campaign activities. The concentration of farm and direct market listings centers on the greater Asheville area, the largest urban center and market. However, over a decade of campaign activity, the guide data also show an increase in farm participation in more distant areas of the region. For the six far west counties of Western North Carolina – Graham, Cherokee, Clay, Swain, Macon, and Jackson – the 2002 guide lists three farms, two CSAs, and four tailgate markets. In 2012, the guide lists 40 farms, 8 CSAs, and 9 tailgate markets. For six counties in the High Country of Western North Carolina – Ashe, Alleghany, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, and Wilkes – the 2002 guide includes three farm and five tailgate market listings. The 2012 guide, lists 66 farms, 13 tailgate markets, and 14 CSAs.

An increase in the diversity of food grown by farmers for local markets has accompanied increases in the number of farm listings and the geographic expansion of farms participating in campaign activities. The range of locally grown food available has expanded somewhat dramatically over the past decade, from a nearly exclusive concentration on fresh fruit and vegetable production to the production of meats, cheeses, eggs, honey, herbs, processed products, and other products. Between 2002 and 2012, the number of farmers producing fresh fruits and vegetables for local consumption increased 20 fold, from 25 producer listings to over 500 producer listings. As the movement has
gained momentum, production of other food products have also increased. The 2002 Local Food Guide listed a handful producers raising grass-fed or pastured beef, chicken, pork, lamb, and rabbit; the 2012 guide lists 96 farms producing beef, 70 producing pork, 82 producing chicken, 3 producing bison, 36 producing lamb, and 25 producing rabbit. The number of cheese producers increased from three in 2002 to 22 in 2012. Egg producers increased from 3 to 180, and producers of honey from 2 to 100.

The census provides limited data bearing on the economic impacts of the Local Food Movement on agriculture in the region. As identified above, the only the data the census collects with regard to local food sales is the value of agricultural products sold direct to consumers, which increased from $3.1 million in 2002 to $4.9 million in 2007. Research conducted by MFF provides additional source of data. As discussed in Chapter Six, organizers, through research completed in 2007, quantified the demand for locally grown food across a variety of the region’s food industries. With the results, organizers estimated $452 million in unmet demand across direct and non direct market outlets in the region of Western North Carolina. Through the collection of local food sales data from farmers and businesses annually, organizers have estimated an increase in local food sales from a baseline of $17 million in 2007 to $62 million in 2010.

**Movement Organizers: Mediating Movement Goals and Industry Engagement**

This section examines Local Food Movement outcomes in relation to the conceptualization and evolution of organizers’ campaign strategies, focusing specifically on developments within the Appalachian Fresh program. The evolution of Appalachian Fresh documents a complicated mediation process for organizers. Couched with a larger dialectic – maintaining movement integrity, engaging the conventional food system –
organizer strategies have attended to an imperative to build brand identity and demand for Appalachian Fresh food, hold participants accountable to program definitions and rules, and allow flexibility to encourage participation and accommodate the challenges and realities of the region’s developing local food system.

Organizers acknowledged from the onset of the program the need to build in flexibility, to make room, as one organizer put it, “for all of the situations we can’t think to think of.” Organizers developed the initial parameters and rules of the Appalachian Fresh program based on current knowledge and understandings. The establishment of weekly Appalachian Fresh meetings provided the space to critically examine the workings of the program in relationship to new knowledge and the actions of farmers, food industry businesses, and consumers. Within this process, organizers have developed strategies to mediate between boundaries of inclusivity and exclusivity. As the movement in Western North Carolina has evolved, organizers have made decisions to contract and/or expand program definitions and participation rules and criteria to variously restrict or expand participation. Grounded in organizers’ market based theory of change, these decisions account for the emerging needs and expectations of buyers, famers, and consumers; new and emergent understandings of a developing local food system; and the capacity of organizers to maintain program standards and integrity.

**Farm Participation Criteria**

In response to production limitations in the region, Appalachian Fresh organizers have allowed variances to the criteria for farm participation. In a later iteration of the Appalachian Fresh Producer Certification and License Agreement, organizers added
language to allow for the possibility of exceptions to farm participation standards:

“Exceptions to any of the above criteria will be considered on a case by case basis.”

In one example, organizers certified a farm producing grass-fed beef six miles outside the Appalachian Fresh border. The farm outside the region produces beef for an Appalachian Fresh certified producer, whose grass-fed beef is widely available at area grocery stores, cooperatives, restaurants, and some institutions. With increasing demand for their product but limited by access to land and the ability expand production, Mountain Grass-fed Beef faced a supply deficit and developed a partnership with another farm to supplement their supply. The program exception allowed the certification of the farm outside the region and Mountain Grass-fed Beef to label their beef – a mixture of product from their farm and their partner’s farm – Appalachian Fresh.

The decision to allow the variance was accompanied by a deliberation process that, considering the particularity of the situation for Mountain Grass-fed Beef, defined a set of assessment criteria and identified a limitation facing the continued development of the region’s food system. Within the framework of the goals of the Appalachian Fresh program – to mainstream locally grown food, to protect the integrity of “local” and the market for locally grown food for the region’s farms, to build brand awareness and increase demand for Appalachian Fresh products, to develop the economic viability of non-direct market outlets for the region’s farms – organizers articulated a series of questions to help them assess the potential outcomes of this particular variance and future comparable variances.

- How would allowing this variance impact the goals of the program?
- Would the variance weaken the integrity of the logo?
- Is allowing this variance going to help or hurt other [Appalachian Fresh] farmers in this region?
• Where is the partner farm providing supplementary product located in relation to the [Appalachian Fresh] region? Is it located in a county that borders the [Appalachian Fresh] region?
• Where does the [Appalachian Fresh] farm sell their product? Is their main market in the region?
• How much is the Appalachian [Fresh] farm sourcing from the farm outside the region? Is primary production happening in the region? Is the partner farm providing supplementary product?
• What prevents other farmers in the border county from joining the [Appalachian Fresh] program?

The situation faced by Mountain Grass-fed Beef highlighted a challenge to the development of the region’s local food system – for some products, demand exceeds supply. In this context, organizers reflected that the boundaries of the Appalachian Fresh region may be inconsistent with the current reality of the region’s production capacity for particular products. In the case of Mountain Grass-fed Beef, the consent to allow the variance would provide the farm with the ability to satisfy the quantities of local product desired by larger scale markets and close the gap between demand and supply in the short term. In the context of developing local food supply chains the variance recognized the time it would take for supply to catch up with demand through the expansion of production by existing producers or new production by new farms. Organizers considered that strict enforcement of Appalachian Fresh could actually inhibit further development of the region’s food system. Without that allowance, larger scale market outlets may go further afield for “local” grass-fed beef to satisfy customer demand.

In another instance, organizers sanctioned a variance to established program rules that allowed a nursery operation with absentee owners to participate in the Appalachian Fresh program and market products with the logo. In 2010, the manager of a nursery contacted organizers about participating in Appalachian Fresh; the manager wanted to use greenhouse space to grow vegetables in the winter and promote a line of Appalachian
Fresh certified vegetables to the region’s retailers during the off-season. The manager had recently attended MFF’s annual farmer conference and while there met with and piqued the interest of three of the region’s retail grocery stores.

Because of the ownership structure, organizers discussed the request in Appalachian Fresh meetings. The nursery in question is owned by three brothers who live in a distant state. Appalachian Fresh farm certification criteria clearly states that farms must be family farms, “defined as one in which the family holds the financial responsibility, takes the risks, and provides the majority of the management decisions for the farm.” Nevertheless, organizers considered the variance in this case because having local vegetables available in the winter in major retail grocery outlets was appealing – like the previous example, expanding the availability of locally grown food and further developing the viability of larger scale market outlets. Organizers revisited the Producer Certification rules in Appalachian Fresh meetings. This short excerpt is emblematic of conversations in Appalachian Fresh meetings used to re-examine the rules and parameters of the program and question their appropriateness in relation to new information and emerging perspectives:

Jeff: What were we trying to prevent with that [farm] criteria?

Greg: We were thinking of entities like Tyson and grocers too, like Walmart, on the handler side. We were thinking that a company owned by someone in a distant location would be hard to communicate with easily. We were trying to anticipate a bad actor wanting to participate in the Appalachian Fresh program.

After collecting additional information from the nursery’s manager, organizers decided to allow the variance. They learned that the project to grow vegetables in the winter was the manager’s idea; he would be making the decisions in relation to the winter
operation and the profits, rather than leaving the region, would be used to pay the
nursery’s employees and keep the nursery operating during through the winter months.
The Appalachian Fresh program would be supporting a business that through its winter-
time operation would not only increase the visibility and availability of Appalachian
Fresh products in mainstream outlets during the winter, it would sustain jobs in the
agricultural sector. As expressed by one organizer, while the business does not meet the
definition of family farm, “[t]hey meet the spirit of [Appalachian Fresh]; it’s a business
we can all get behind.”

**Defining Local**

The Appalachian Fresh region is not a precise 100 mile radius around Asheville.
In some directions the distance is slightly more than 100 miles and in other directions
slightly less. The decision by organizers to define local in relation to Appalachia was
purposeful and strategic – it made sense to align a definition of local with the identity of a
recognized geographic and cultural region. With the initial launch of the program,
organizers largely began with the Appalachian Regional Commission’s (ARC) official
definition of Appalachia but over the life of the program have contracted and expanded
the region to the current delineation – 23 counties of Western North Carolina and 37
counties that border the region in the surrounding states of Georgia, South Carolina,
Tennessee, and Virginia.

Decisions to enlarge and restrict the boundaries of the region have been mediated
by a number of factors: the results of national consumer research, MFF research
comparing production and consumption of specific farm products in Western North
Carolina, the desire by organizers to maintain relationships with core movement
constituents, the capacity of organizers to manage the program and maintain its integrity, and the goals to build brand identity and demand for Appalachian Fresh products and demonstrate its value to larger scale buyers. National market research by entities like the Hartman Group – a firm that conducts consumer research – and the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture – an agricultural research and education center in Iowa – have shown that a 100-mile definition of locally grown food resonates with a majority of US consumers.\textsuperscript{88} Research conducted by MFF, which compared the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables, meats, and dairy produced by farms in Western North Carolina with resident consumption data of these products revealed to organizers the existence of a gap between supply and demand. The one million residents of the region consumed more of these products than was currently produced. For organizers, the implication of this finding was that to feed the population of Western North Carolina an area of production larger than boundaries of the region would be required.

At the same time organizers have struggled to balance the goal to mainstream locally grown food and preserve relationships with the farmers and markets that had been the core of movement activities. One of the key challenges for organizers in expanding the focus of the Local Food Campaign to larger scale, conventional markets has been to not alienate their established farm constituent base. Expansion meant the inclusion of larger scale market outlets like grocery store chains, and this required organizers to expand their outreach to larger scale farms – farms that had had the least connection with MFF because of the campaign’s focus on smaller and direct markets. Conducting

\textsuperscript{88} For example, see the Consumer Understanding of Buying Local (HartBeat 2008) and Food, Fuel and the Future: Consumer Perceptions of Local Food, Food Safety and Climate Change in the Context of Rising Prices (Pirog 2008).
outreach about the program to farmers, organizers met with resistance; some farmers felt the definition of local was too broad and created a definition that was not in their interests – putting their farm products and the products of more distant farms under the same local label infringed on their share of the market for locally grown food. This excerpt from my field notes summarizes a local berry producer’s opinion of the Appalachian Fresh definition of local. He had been asked by his customer, a local chef and restaurateur, to become Appalachian Fresh certified so that she could label her jams and jellies, made with his berries, in her restaurant with the Appalachian Fresh logo:

I told him that the geographic scope is the southern Appalachians…[h]e thinks it’s too broad. He explained that his market is in Asheville and [his farm] is less than one hour away from this market. Why would he want to use the same logo that a large producer in Virginia, for example, is using? From his perspective his product is much more local and yet the logo puts his product and a product from Virginia in the same category.

In its inception, the boundaries of the Appalachian Fresh region were loosely contiguous with Appalachia, the geographic region defined by the ARC, but excluded areas with characteristics considered to be inconsistent with the mountainous geography and heritage of Appalachia, i.e., “places that didn’t feel like Appalachia.” The program, however, was still largely in its conceptual stages and a few months into the program organizers drastically contracted the region, eliminating counties in North Carolina not included in boundaries of Western North Carolina and also the entire states of Maryland, Kentucky, and West Virginia – those states not immediately bordering North Carolina. With that modification, the region included the 23 counties of Western North Carolina and the immediate bordering counties in Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Remarking on reasons for the decision, one organizer noted that logistically a large area is difficult to deal with: “the region is defined in part by organizational
capacity to effectively outreach to the area.” The smaller geographic region, centered on one main market center – Asheville, would enable organizers to focus their activities and implement the program in a more deliberate manner. As articulated in the meeting minutes, however, organizers acknowledged that the chosen geographic area was open to re-negotiation in relation to specific requests by farmers on the region’s edges as well as new information related to the ways food is distributed throughout the region.

So we’ve chosen a geographic area and over time we will know more about the distribution infrastructure and that may take us into other areas.

In response to subsequent requests by farmers, farmer groups, and community-based institutions, the region has expanded to its current area – 60 counties in North Carolina, Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Organizers have considered requests to add counties on a case by case basis, using the criteria articulated through the Mountain Grass-fed Beef situation. In one instance, organizers decided to include additional counties in northeast Tennessee and southwest Virginia in relation to new information about a Virginia-based farmer group growing produce in these regions and distributing it to some of the region’s markets including Southeast Foods. This particular example reveals the complex set of issues organizers have negotiated in the development of the Appalachian Fresh program – the interest and perspectives of farmers, buyers, and consumers; the realities of supply and demand for locally grown food in the region; and the need to build brand awareness and demand.

For organizers, adding counties in Tennessee and Virginia to the Appalachian Fresh region would allow the certification of a farmer cooperative supplying product to Southeast Foods, and it would increase the quantity of branded product in Southeast Foods stores. To build brand awareness, organizers have simultaneously focused on
raising public awareness of the brand, directing consumers to specific outlets to find Appalachian Fresh, and ensuring branded products are available in the marketplace to purchase. Striking this balance has been crucial to organizers’ strategy of buyer engagement – prove the value of local. Help retailers identify the products they procure that are local and label them clearly for their customers with Appalachian Fresh branding. A positive customer response to the availability of Appalachian Fresh food will provide the economic incentive to expand local food purchases.

Enlarging the region would also be consistent with MFF’s research showing the disparity between the volume of food produced by the region’s farms and the volume of food consumed by the region’s residents. Furthermore, with addition of the counties in Tennessee and Virginia, local would encompass a more or less 100 mile distance from Asheville, a definition in keeping with national consumer research.

At the same time, however, enlarging the region would potentially alienate farmers in the more immediate Asheville area. In relation to challenges to the Appalachian Fresh definition of local by a core constituent of farmers, organizers considered the potential perceptions of adding counties in Tennessee and Virginia by “more local” farmers. What would long time campaign participant farmers say about a more expansive definition of local, one that put their “more local” product in the same category as a “less local” product? One organizer articulated this concern.

The marketing research tells us that at the far end consumers understand local to mean no more than 100 miles. But how will producers who are more local feel about our promotion of farmers who are less local? I don't see a favorable perception by our main constituency that we've helped 60 growers [in Virginia].

Organizers further realized that the Tennessee counties in question bordered another Tennessee county and the location of significant year round tomato production.
These tomatoes have a strong market presence in the region; Southeast Foods, for example, sources most of its tomatoes from the county. The volume and year round supply achieved through greenhouse production out-compete field tomato production by farmers in Western North Carolina who have the volume but not the year round supply nor the level of cooperation between farmers to pool their product and supply Southeast Foods as one entity.

The group of Tennessee counties reaches around the tomato producing county; on a map, its exclusion would create a conspicuous and discordant gap in the Appalachian Fresh region. Its inclusion would mean that tomatoes grown in the county could be labeled with Appalachian Fresh and compete equally in the market with tomatoes grown by farmers in Western North Carolina. Argued by one organizer, if the goal is to shift the procurement practices of retailers, making the region larger and including the county provides no incentive and makes it easier for them to promote local. By adding more counties, he asked:

Are we creating a situation that puts more local farms at a disadvantage? How would we respond to a farmer in our more immediate region that challenges our definition of local in the [Appalachian Fresh] program? Why are we working to promote farmers in [Tennessee and Virginia]?

Outside of this concern and the issue of enlarging the region, the decision for organizers was also mediated by the nature of the farmer group, whose aggregation and distribution system has for many years been supported by grant funding. Within MFF’s philosophy of market-based change, local production and distribution models that depend on grant funding to penetrate the market, in essence, reify a system of subsidies that favors big agriculture and exerts downward price pressure on farm products. One organizer, as documented in the meeting minutes, explained the issue using the example
of Four Generations Farm, a farm producing in Western North Carolina, who despite adequate volume and high quality standards, had been unable to develop a relationship with Southeast Foods. Jeff speculates that it is subsidized models that keep farms like Four Generations Farm out of the marketplace.

The fact is that [Four Generations Farm] can’t get into [Southeast Foods] because they are buying a subsidized product from [Virginia]. Their model subsidizes the price of their product; the truth is that [their] products would not be down here in these markets if they did not have subsidies that pay for shipping and cost of production. Without their subsidized product there might be more opportunities for [Four Generations Farm] to get into markets like [Southeast Foods]…how do we deal with questions from farmers that ask us why we are promoting subsidized products or why we aren’t seeking grants to subsidize the efforts of our constituent farmers?

Pointing out the existence of rural areas without any infrastructure for aggregation and distribution, another organizer asked why the subsidized model cannot work – there is a need for financial support to “get things off the ground.” In response, Jeff observed that there is a logic in providing initial support to farmers in regions that have lost the infrastructure needed for post-harvest handling activities and to pool and distribute product. There is difference, however, between initiatives that receive initial support and those dependent on continued support – projects that continue to rely on grant funding undermine the goals of the movement.

...at some point these projects have to transition out of funding into a self-sustaining business, otherwise you’re not competing on a level playing field and you’re undercutting the price for other farmers that can’t subsidize their costs. That’s not where we need to be.

This issue – the dependency on grant funding –ultimately informed organizers’ final decision. Organizers added the counties to the region but did not certify the farmer group; individual farms could become certified and use the Appalachian Fresh logo independently. After several weeks of conversation around the issue, the final meeting
minutes ask the question: “Do we want to work with [this farmer group] considering their product is subsidized and potentially undercuts other farmers?” The minutes continue with Jeff’s response:

> It would be to the detriment of our local growers that don’t have someone to sell and distribute their product for them. That just doesn’t feel very good to me. What if they distribute in [Eco Grocery] and [Sustainable Foods], and the co-op; do we owe something to the [farmer] who is getting no money to build a warehouse, to package and label, and distribute their product?

**Defining Handler Participation Criteria**

With the inception of the Appalachian Fresh program, organizers made the decision to restrict business participation to business entities headquartered in the Appalachian Fresh region. The decision to limit participation was related practically to the capacity of the organization to work with entities based outside of the region and a desire to maintain tight control over the brand and protect its integrity. Organizers acknowledged that they lacked the organizational capacity – the resources and time – to work with businesses based outside the region – entities like retail grocery chains with individual store locations in the region but headquartered elsewhere. The organization’s limited capacity translated in the minds of organizers into less control over the way the Appalachian Fresh logo would be put into practice and the inability to closely monitor the way companies were using the program and hold them accountable should they violate usage standards. One organizer articulated this line of thinking in this way:

> For example, if [Southeast Foods] is found to violate the use of [Appalachian Fresh] promotions, they are here in our region and we can address and work out these issues. But if a big entity that is outside our region is abusing the terms of agreement, then it becomes much more difficult for us to remedy the situation simply because of the extra burden of time and energy.
A focus on entities headquartered in the region narrowed the scope of MFF’s engagement to a few key retail outlets. In theory, this focus would enable organizers to implement the program more fully and intentionally in those businesses and create the conditions in stores need to demonstrate the value of local with Appalachian Fresh branding to businesses’ bottom lines.

Organizers also agreed that participation criteria limited to locally based businesses strengthened the validity of the program. To paraphrase the argument made by one organizer during an Appalachian Fresh meeting, Appalachian Fresh is more than just about local farms. To support a business not based locally, like a Walmart where profits are leaving the region, is not consistent with the values of local food. “Local just doesn’t have as much authenticity if the profit for businesses is leaving the region,” she argued. A commitment to working only with locally based businesses provided organizers with a program “selling point.” Appalachian Fresh provides local businesses with a competitive edge – a means to demonstrate the authenticity of their buy local programs – that other businesses are unable to access. A noteworthy example of the way organizers have used this selling point strategy was an effort to link a local egg producer to Southeast Foods. With the buyout of Eco Grocery, the prepared foods department dropped their local egg supplier in favor a cheaper processed, bagged egg. With loss of a significant account, Tim, the egg producer, asked MFF to help him develop a relationship with Southeast Foods. In an email to the Southeast Foods buyer, one organizer pitched the idea as an opportunity for Southeast Foods to distinguish themselves “in the mind of the ‘Locavore’ customer.”

To me this is a missed opportunity…if [Southeast Foods] could pick up [Tim’s] eggs on a delivery basis to some number of local stores... just like [Nick] does
with the "Homegrown produce" program, leaving them labeled as a local product, then you could really promote/celebrate [Tim’s] local farm as your source, in your local advertising and media, given what is happening with [Eco Grocery]. You could send “[Southeast Foods] carries local eggs” PR to the…media and I bet they would pick it up as a good off-season farm story…this kind of purchasing could really be highlighted in your Mountain Xpress ads. To date your full page MX ads have tended to focus on whatever organics are on sale, but these are most typically mainline global organic brands that can be found at [Cheap Goods], [Food Mart], and many other places, so I don't know how much that distinguishes you to the Mountain Xpress reader. I have never seen a local product highlighted in the [Southeast Foods] MountainX ad and I think it would really resonate with that reader. Especially something like [Tims’] eggs, given the [Eco Grocery] controversy.

Despite the initial decision to limit Appalachian Fresh participation to local businesses, over the life of the program organizers have continuously scrutinized the sensibility and practicality of this rule in relation to increasing interest in locally grown food by an increasing diversity of food industry players, to new information about existing systems of food distribution in the region, and to organizer’s premise that the economic viability of farms is first, i.e., do Appalachian Fresh rules help or hinder the ability of farms to continue farming? On the latter issue, some Appalachian Fresh farms, those with relatively larger operations, sell to non-local grocery store chains, and their products appear on the shelves of individual stores located within and outside the region. As participants in the Appalachian Fresh program, these farmers want their products promoted with the Appalachian Fresh logo, and their products have appeared on the shelves of these stores in the region identified with the logo – integrated on packaging and with small farmer profiles. For organizers, this situation raised two questions: does excluding these businesses hurt these farms, and how can organizers address the use of Appalachian Fresh promotional materials to market local in businesses not eligible to participate? The issue was articulated in an Appalachian Fresh meeting.
There are farmers that we work with that are selling product into outlets that we don't directly work with, and they want us to provide these other markets with promotional materials like profiles. What is our response to them?

Organizers, realizing they could not exert the level of control required to keep the program’s marketing materials out of these other businesses, reasoned that the use of Appalachian Fresh in these contexts was, in essence, an extension of farmers’ use of Appalachian Fresh marketing materials. Within this understanding, organizers made the decision to uphold the rule that excluded businesses based outside of the region. Organizers would not extend any direct marketing or sourcing support, but Appalachian Fresh farmers using the logo to brand their products in these stores could benefit from increased visibility.

Farmer experiences with businesses participating in the Appalachian Fresh program have also spurred organizers to re-examine their decision to limit engagement to locally based retailers. Several farmers complained directly to MFF staff about one particular retailer, citing the low prices paid to them for their products and an overall lack of transparency in their business dealings. The retailer in question openly advertised their interest in purchasing from local farms, initiated business relationships with farmers but, at least in reported cases, did not adhere to mutually agreed upon terms. This excerpt from my field notes summarizes the substance of farmer complaints.

In the [Appalachian Fresh] meeting today, [Michelle] brought up the fact that several growers have told her how difficult it is to work with [the retailer]. They are hard to get into. Then when [the produce buyer] says he will buy from them, he asks them to get up to speed in requirements, which costs money to attain, and either nothing ever comes of it or he tells them that he will bring them in at a certain price and then changes it to something lower. [Michelle] doesn’t want to refer local growers to them because they are dishonest with farmers and are not a good market.
In this retailer situation, organizers seriously questioned the market viability of this grocer for local farms and their responsibility to caution farmers about working with them. With the Appalachian Fresh rule that limits participation to locally based businesses, MFF works directly with three major grocery retailers; weak support by one major retailer left MFF staff with more limited market options to recommend to farmers. The buyout of one of the program’s other major retailer partners, Eco Grocery, by a national natural foods grocery store chain forced organizers to seriously re-examine the Appalachian Fresh handler rule.

Eco Grocery

In 2010, Eco Grocery became the Asheville location of a multi-store national natural foods chain. Since the store’s opening in 2004, it had been a Local Food Campaign partner and, with a strong focus on sourcing locally grown food, had provided a consistent market for the region’s farms. Organizers, contemplating the buyout, weighed the potential risks of working with a large corporate entity based outside the region in relation to the potential economic opportunities for the region’s farms, the potential implications of not continuing the relationship with Eco Grocery, the perceptions of other retail partners, and the effects on the Appalachian Fresh program if opened to businesses based outside the region. This excerpt from my field notes summarizes an initial discussion by organizers of the imminent Eco Grocery buyout.

It seems likely at this point that [Big Natural Foods] is buying [Eco Grocery]. We spent a long time today [in an Appalachian Fresh meeting] talking about/speculating about what this will mean for farmers in the region. Will [Big Natural Foods] honor the farmer relationships established by Eco-Grocery? What we know is that [Eco Grocery] has been an important [Appalachian Fresh] partner and a significant market for local farms. [Jeff] pointed out that they have been a significant market for some farms. [Big Natural Foods] offers the possibility of increased market options for the larger farms in our region too big for the [Eco
Grocery] single store location. If they are looking for farms to supply the warehouse and hence the [chain’s] southeast stores, it may mean the loss of an important market outlet for the smaller farms selling to [Eco Grocery]. [Big Natural Foods] uses a centralized, though regional, distribution hub. It serves their ‘southeast’ region and we know of at least two [Appalachian Fresh] farms selling their produce to their [regional] warehouse … [Michelle] has heard from both farms that they’re a good market for them; they pay a fair price and on time. She also said that the regional produce buyer [for Big Natural Foods] really takes time to work with farmers and help them understand what they are looking for, the standards that have to meet.

With the Eco Grocery buyout, the Asheville store would join twenty other Big Natural Foods stores in the southeast region. Eco Grocery was an independent grocer and department managers had the autonomy to purchase directly from the region’s farms. Big Natural Foods sources and distributes from a regional distribution hub for stores in Alabama, Georgia, North and South Carolina, and Tennessee. Despite Big Natural Foods publically stated support of local farms and locally grown food, organizers wondered how much room Big Natural Foods would make for Appalachian Fresh farms. As one organizer pointed out that Big Natural Foods southeast region has “a larger footprint than [Appalachian Fresh]…it’s going to be hard for them to have a separate local program.”

Would the department managers at the Asheville location still have the authority to source directly from local farms? The same organizer pointed out that Big Natural Foods already has established relationships with regional suppliers. With a definition of local that includes farm products from up to seven hours away, the sourcing region for the warehouse includes farms far outside the Appalachian Fresh region producing at a much larger scale and able to supply all of the southeast stores.

On the heels of the buyout, organizers debated the risks of working and not working with Big Natural Foods. With the appearance of a press release in a regional publication in which the company’s CEO and founder was quoted as saying that Big
Natural Foods would “expand opportunities for local producers to sell their
products,” one organizer, Greg, observed:

[Big Natural Foods] has been doing this kind of thing for 20 years. We might
think we’re special but this is how they grow – through acquisition. And they are
experts at keeping people from freaking out. They’ve developed a methodology
where they leave the name the same, the suppliers the same. They did this with [a
store over in the central part of the state] and gradually over a 5 year period it was
shifted to a standard [Big Natural Food’s] store after people had gotten used to it.

Considering Greg’s assessment and weighing the options, Jeff commented:

Our options are limited. We can treat them like a Walmart – a corporate store with
a branch in our community – or we can go in there and develop a different model
– outside of what we’ve already been doing…what are we afraid of, what are our
concerns if we open this up? And are we hurting farms by not [opening the
program to outside entities]? 

Responding to Jeff’s questions, Michelle and Greg argued that opening the program to
distant corporate entities devalued the program and belied the values of the Local Food
Movement.

Michelle: [Appalachian Fresh] is a program for local farms and local retailers. If
we open it up to everyone then it is not as valuable. People see [Southeast Foods]
as local in a way that other stores are not. [Cheap Goods] is not about local – they
hurt local businesses.

Greg: Yeah, I agree. [Appalachian Fresh] is more than just about local farms –
local just doesn’t have as much authenticity if the profit for the business is leaving
the region. And I don’t know that we could do that [open the program to outside
entities] without hurting our relationship with our local [retail] partners – we
assured them that we are not working with non-locally owned groceries.

At the same time, organizers considered the risks of not trying to engage [Big
Natural Foods] in the Appalachian Fresh program. Even after her statement about the
value of Appalachian Fresh as a program for locally based businesses, Michelle
concluded:

…it doesn’t make sense to reject [Big Natural Foods] when [Eco Grocery] has
been such an important part of farmers’ livelihoods… it seems like we have no
choice but to try and work with them. [Big Natural Foods] has a history of
working with community based organizations like ours and we can direct them to farms in our region.

Through direct engagement, organizers could connect the regional hub to Appalachian Fresh farms with the capacity to meet the volume and other market requirements and develop the [Big Natural Foods] market for farms in the region. Without that type of engagement, organizers feared farms would have less of a chance accessing that market and [Big Natural Foods] would have less reason to develop relationships with new suppliers in the Appalachian Fresh region. Concurrently, for organizers, working with [Big Natural Foods] would mean modifying or accepting a variance to the Appalachian Fresh rule of not working with retailers based outside the region. As articulated by organizers in the meeting minutes:

Is working with [Big Natural Foods/Eco Grocery] an exception to the rule or are we opening [Appalachian Fresh] to outside entities? If so, what is the process and what are the procedures for developing a relationship with a distant entity and maintaining the integrity of the logo/handling violations of logo use standards?

Deferring what organizers considered to be a significant decision and decision-making process, i.e., opening the program to outside entities, organizers opted to continue the relationship with Eco Grocery as rule exception. The relationship was, in essence, “grandfathered” in because of the historical, existing relationship.

National Food Distributors

In 2009 spurred by interest by a broadline distributor, National Food Distributors, in promoting a line of Appalachian Fresh produce to their customers in the region, organizers developed the Restricted Handler Agreement as a means to work engage businesses based outside of the region on a case by case basis. The Restricted Handler Agreement, which requires handlers participate in a training on the Appalachian Fresh
program, appoint a local contact responsible for communication with MFF, and provide MFF with the dollar value of Appalachian Fresh product purchased on an annual basis, was developed in the context of MFF’s Farm to Hospital program. Organizers, consulting with hospital cafeterias about sourcing locally grown food, learned that many food service directors, while wanting to develop Farm to Hospital programs, wanted to source local through existing channels of food procurement. National Food Distributors, organizers learned, was a significant food provider to hospitals in the region.

Prompted by the request of hospital customers, National Food Distributors representatives from a regional distribution hub contacted MFF to discuss participation in Appalachian Fresh. National Food Distributors has multiple distribution facilities across the United States; the regional facility serves customers in southeast region including Western North Carolina. In a conversation about the possibility of a National Food Distributors relationship, organizers simultaneously pointed out the liabilities – compromising control of the brand – and the necessity of working with a prominent link in the regional food supply chain.

Despite the risks, some staff asserted that MFF should try and work with National Food Distributors because, while there are hospital food services in the region that want to source and promote locally grown food with Appalachian Fresh, they have insisted that they be able to continue working through their existing suppliers. “The reality,” one organizer pointed out, “is that [National Food Distributors] has a big presence in the region supplying institutions as well as a lot of restaurants.” Furthermore organizers learned that National Food Distributors already sourced fresh produce through local wholesale produce distributors and packers and directly from some of the larger farms.
Examining a list of producers provided to MFF by National Food Distributors, organizers identified several Appalachian Fresh certified farms. Because National Food Distributors was already sourcing some local, the relationship could begin by helping the distributor identify the local they were already sourcing to their hospital customers and helping the hospitals promote it in their cafeterias with Appalachian Fresh promotional materials.

The National Food Distributors situation would enable organizers to demonstrate to hospitals the economic viability of locally grown food and provide them with the incentive “to do more.” One organizer, Alice, articulated the strategy.

We just need to take baby steps in working with hospitals. Start out slow, make it easy for them to participate. Help them identify [through National Food Distributors] what they are already serving from local farms. Overwhelming them with requests to source more local will only frustrate and overwhelm them.

Attempting to summarize the progression and outcome of the conversation and an emerging consensus among organizers that they had no choice but try and work with National Food Distributors, one organizer reasoned that fundamentally the decision would enable them to serve hospitals, which are locally based institutions. The alternative would enable National Food Distributors to dictate and define local to hospital customers.²⁸⁹

…we are trying to serve hospitals, which essentially is a single entity headquartered in our region and this is the only way we can see to work with them at this time. The other option, to not work with them, is to leave it to them to define and promote local. That’s not a very good option.

**Shifting Food Industry Practices**

With the conceptualization and launch of the Appalachian Fresh program, organizers were responding to the growth in the market for local food and anticipating

²⁸⁹ Ultimately, the regional National Food Distributors hub decided that the boundaries of the Appalachian Fresh region were too restrictive for them, and their local availability list expanded to include farms in the “Carolinas.”
movement co-optation. “Local” messaging was making its way into retailer advertisements and in-store promotions. How retailers were defining local was variable; large retailers defined local as broadly as the entire southeast or United States or vaguely in accordance with the geographic footprint of chain store locations. Appalachian Fresh for organizers provided the structure and mechanism to meet the dual goals of engaging the conventional food system and establishing a definition of local that protected the market for locally grown food for the region’s farms.

With the launch of the program organizers simultaneously engaged the public and the food industry. Local food promotions transitioned to certified local food promotions – from a general message to buy local food to a specific message to buy Appalachian Fresh branded food. Retailer engagement focused on sourcing assistance and the development of promotional materials for retailers to use in advertisements and in stores, cafeterias, and restaurants. In building the program, organizer activities endeavored to balance supply and demand for Appalachian Fresh – inciting participation by farmers and food retailers and building brand awareness and demand through public outreach. In the context of this endeavor, organizers articulated what has become a crucial strategy. Discussed in Chapter Six this strategy aims to help businesses identify and promote what they already and sometimes unknowingly purchase from local farms.

*Start Where You Are*

At the onset of the program, organizers found that larger scale market outlets wanted to participate in movement activities, wanted to buy locally grown food and use Appalachian Fresh in their promotions and advertisements, but did not want to make changes to their purchasing practices. Organizers encountered inertia – buyers unwilling
to go outside existing supply chains and established procurement practices, buyers fearful of a scenario of many individual farmers backing up to their loading docks with cases rather than pallets of produce, buyers accustomed to conventional food supply chains and wary of the time and resources to communicate and coordinate with multiple suppliers. In this excerpt from the meeting minutes, two organizers debate the motivations of food industry players. One organizer, Greg, countering the opinion of another organizer, Jeff, anticipates the inertia from food industry players and wonders what strategies MFF can use to shift industry practices.

[Greg] started a discussion about the supply chain infrastructure…he felt that we needed to articulate what steps would be needed to be taken in order to shift the existing infrastructure to deal with local food in terms of logistics. From his viewpoint, we can’t assume that retailers are going to take the steps themselves to get local food into their store or restaurant. They may see that to efficiently get local food products is going to taking changing the way they get other food products already, that they don’t have the time/man power to figure out the distribution logistics, and that it just isn’t worth it. We can’t assume that [Southeast Foods] is just going to shift their distribution infrastructure to incorporate more local food in their stores, and we’d be foolish to assume that.

[Jeff], coming from a different perspective, [argued] that we’re coming from the assumption that the demand for local is there; that local is a profitable market and because it is a profitable market, stores, restaurants, etc will take the steps needed to get local in their places of business. [Greg] countered that [Jeff’s] argument actually supported his caution; retailers can (and already are) shift their promotions to feature local foods without actually including any [Appalachian Fresh] foods. [Food World] and [Food Mart] feature “local” food from Florida, South Carolina, etc. But they didn’t change their buying practices, they were already stocking their stores with produce from these areas, but they are now labeling them as “local” to tap into the power of the market for local.

The beginning of the partnership with Southeast Foods provides one case study of the pattern of inertia organizers encountered with larger scale buyers. The excerpts below, taken from meeting minutes over a period of three months in 2007, follow a sustained conversation among organizers documenting the response of Southeast Foods’ producer buyer to organizers’ efforts to connect the retailer to local sources of tomatoes.
and peppers, products produced in relatively large quantities by farmers in the region. The progression of the conversation shows that while completely opposed from the beginning to local tomatoes, the buyer was at first willing to consider local peppers, because he would be able to source them through a local produce packing house that aggregated the product from multiple farms in the region. He later changed his mind citing that the relatively short window for local peppers hardly made sourcing from local farms worth the effort. Organizers realized that despite the professed interest in participating in the Appalachian Fresh program and supporting the region’s farms, at this point in time, the interest in local food was not enough to provide the buyer with a reason to change existing supplier relationships, which provided them with desired quantities of product from a handful of sources all year long.

[The produce manager] wouldn't consider it [sourcing tomatoes locally] because they are getting them from [a large supplier in Tennessee] but peppers he'll consider because they would come through [a local packing house]. What [the produce manager] doesn't want is to have to deal with lots of different growers who can't meet the volume [Southeast Foods] needs or be able to meet the [year round] availability.

[Southeast Foods] is not interested in [either] peppers or tomatoes. [They’re] already happy with the supply of peppers they’re getting from Florida and tomatoes from … Tennessee. [The] timeframe for local peppers is so brief it is not worth it for them.

[The produce manager] is always going to say no if it requires extra work. [Southeast Foods] doesn't want to have to change their procurement system(s) and do things differently. [They] only want to embrace local to the point that their systems don't have to change to accommodate local. [They have] established relationships with national streams of commerce. They get product year round, at price, quantity, and quality they want.

Informed by these experiences, organizers articulated and implemented a strategy that focused on helping businesses ‘start where they are’ – working with businesses to identify and promote the product they already and, in some cases, unwittingly source
from the region’s farms. As described in Chapter Six, with this strategy, businesses can participate in the program without making immediate changes to established procurement systems and without feeling overwhelmed by the prospect of changing long established practices and relationships. Organizers can promote Appalachian Fresh to the public and direct the public to particular outlets to find Appalachian Fresh product. To paraphrase the justification for this practice by one organizer, what this strategy does is to promote “that part” of their business that supports local farms. Consumer demand for Appalachian Fresh labeled product then provides businesses with the motivation to expand their purchases of local food.

Allowing Rule Flexibility: Working with Wholesale Distributors

As discussed in Chapter Six, organizers, understanding the constraints of volume and seasonality with the region’s agriculture, recognized the potentially significant role that produce wholesale distributors and packers could play in getting locally grown food into mainstream markets. As noted in the meeting minutes, the scale and seasonality of the region’s agriculture are two significant impediments to the mainstreaming of local food. This excerpt addresses scale specifically in relation to Southeast Foods.

One of the issues is that even if we are able to convince them the value of local, the farming community in our region can’t necessarily supply all 200 store outlets. If we are going to go forward with [Southeast Foods] and work with them to adapt their existing procurement and distribution system, we will have to address this scale issue. Scale and year round product availability in particular are two issues that have to be addressed.

The focus on larger scale markets – grocery stores as well as schools, hospitals, and other institutional markets – required organizers develop a better understanding of current systems of food procurement and distribution. Inadvertently, through a process of tracing food back from the point of sale to the farm, organizers identified, continue to
identify, a relatively hidden component of food distribution in the region, a multitude of locally based wholesale distributors and packers, a still extant piece of local infrastructure that during the growing season sources from the region’s farms and distributes to the region’s markets. Able to aggregate product from multiple sources, equipped with the infrastructure and knowledge to handle grading, cooling, packaging, and distribution, wholesale distributors and packers have the capacity to meet the market requirements of larger scale – desired volumes and quality and year round supply – and accordingly provide their retail and institutional customers with the “one stop shopping” service they are accustomed to having.

The prospect of working with wholesale distributors and packers, however, raised questions for organizers. Having heard anecdotal evidence from some farmers that broker systems are not profitable for them, organizers asked themselves, do wholesale distributors and packers support farm viability? From the meeting minutes:

Do we want to be working within a broker system where farmers may not be treated fairly and are not making any money? Several farmers in our region have said that the business practices of brokers are questionable.

Other farmers, however, contradicted this assessment and cited long standing fair relationships with local wholesalers and brokers. These farmers’ testimonies suggested to organizers that the wholesale produce market is not suitable to all farms; the ability to turn a profit depends in part on the size of the farm operation. Meeting with one of the region’s farmer/packers, a business that doubles as a farm and an aggregator of other farmers’ products, Greg concluded that wholesale packers have the potential to provide a benefit to some farmers in terms of providing market access and production education, for example on planting for multiple harvest times and in different locations to spread the
risk and avoid flooding the market and depressing product price. Nevertheless, Greg, in an email to Appalachian Fresh organizers, is still cautious.

…they are moving produce to buyers from whom the downward pressure on prices will always be strong. They do screen for quality and market viability at delivery, yet some of the time the produce doesn't sell or is returned for quality reasons and then the farmer has taken all the risk, and may only find out that he/she got nothing for the product 30-45 days later.

Even with the question of farm profitability, organizers wondered how they could avoid working with brokers, given their capacity to overcome the volume and seasonality constraints of local production and provide larger scale markets with the quality standards expected. In one particular meeting organizers discussed a potential advantage of working with brokers in relation to the “potato debacle” – an incident where a particular farmer sold a truck load of poor quality potatoes to a distributor serving public schools. Greg raised the question: “without the packing house is there a risk of lower quality like what happened with [those potatoes]? The advantage of the packing house is quality control.”

The question of profitability and quality control aside, organizers also wondered about the logistics of working with wholesale packers and distributors – distinguishing Appalachian Fresh products from non Appalachian Fresh products in a facility handling both. Wholesale distributors and packers would have to have the capability of segregating the Appalachian Fresh product and be able to maintain the identity of the product from the farm to their end customer.

In 2009, a wholesale produce packer, Fresh Produce Packers, contacted MFF about participating in the Appalachian Fresh program and developing an Appalachian Fresh local line to pitch to retail customers interested in tapping into the ‘green’
consumer market. Organizers, having met with representatives and having toured the facility, questioned MFF’s ability to provide adequate oversight and ensure the integrity of product labeled with the Appalachian Fresh brand moving through facilities handling product from potentially multiple locations. As noted by one organizer, Fresh Produce Packers is a large packer, with locations in five other states; the location in Western North Carolina sources from local farms but also from farms in the other states. What is the likelihood that they will pack local and nonlocal together? Reflecting on their tour of the facility, one staff member noted they can repack up to three times and Appalachian Fresh program staff, other than watching the seasonality of products, would have no way to verify the integrity of the Appalachian Fresh line.

Organizers learned from their meeting with Fresh Produce Packers representatives that the distributor already played a significant link between the region’s farms and larger scale market outlets – 60 percent of their business was with larger scale grocers including Southeast Foods and 40 percent with broadline distributors including National Food Distributors, which as noted above had also approached MFF about the Appalachian Fresh program in relation to its hospital customers. In this light, Custom Pak provided significant opportunities to both work with Southeast Foods and institutions in the region, to increase both the visibility of local product already distributed but not identified and the volume of locally grown food distributed.

As noted in Chapter Six, for wholesale distributors and packers to participate in the Appalachian Fresh program, organizers developed participation criteria that required businesses to both sign the Appalachian Fresh handler license agreement and to certify, or allow MFF to certify, the farms supplying them with product. The latter requirement
has been particularly challenging for organizers to uphold and, without full cooperation by some distribution businesses on this standard, organizers have not held all wholesale distributors and packers accountable to the rule. In 2010, with the appearance of blackberries labeled with the Appalachian Fresh logo in Southeast Foods from an unknown source, organizers attempted to address the wholesaler issue.

The berries in question came from a wholesale distributor participating in the program, Farm Fresh Distributors, but one that had not “been good about getting farms he’s sourcing from in the region certified.” Farm Fresh Distributors produces apples and vegetables and also sources them from other farms (located both within and outside of the region) under the Farm Fresh Distributors label. Blackberries were not an item they typically carried. Not knowing the source of the berries, organizers discussed the need to respond, to develop a way to deal with a potential breach in the use of the Appalachian Fresh logo. Organizers conceived of an audit form, an official looking document asking the distributor to affirm the origin of the product – an Appalachian Fresh farm, a local farm but not Appalachian Fresh certified. The significance of this event is in organizers’ articulation of the reason(s) why they gave this particular wholesaler distributor “a pass” on the farm certification rule.

There are a couple of handlers that we work with…that we have not been stringent with in applying our [Appalachian Fresh] rules. We’ve given them a pass, and we’re not sure we’ve gotten all their farmers certified, we don’t know all the farmers that supply them. The reason is because we’re excited about working with them because they have the ability to work with larger markets like [Southeast Foods] and can supply large amounts of product. This form would be a way to hold handlers like these accountable to the [Appalachian Fresh] program…

The strategy conceptualized by organizers to address Farm Fresh Distributors’ potential misuse of the Appalachian Fresh brand exhibits organizers’ struggle to balance
industry engagement and movement integrity. In this struggle organizers conceptualize and enact strategies that both institute rules to protect the integrity of local (and in essence make it harder for businesses to tap into the demand for local) and permit flexibility in the application of rules, allowing for a maturation of business perceptions and practices and the emergence of stronger commitments to sourcing and promoting food from local farms. One organizer, summarizing the substance of the dialogue surrounding the blackberry situation, stated, “We’re walking a tight rope between getting people excited about working with our systems and holding people accountable.”

*Increasing the Stringency of Participation Rules*

Moving in the opposite direction, increasing the stringency of standards, in 2010 organizers decided to make a change in the interview for businesses to list in the Local Food Guide. Businesses that list in the Local Food Guide also register or renew their participation in the Appalachian Fresh program. Beginning with the 2011 guide, businesses listing in the guide were required to name the farms from which they purchase product; previous guides had no such requirement. The decision emerged out of a discussion that occurred over a period of a year in Appalachian Fresh meetings. The discussion focused on constituent complaints, farmers and buyers, that some Appalachian Fresh business participants abused the program – purchasing such minimal amounts that their use of the logo and promotions was unfair to businesses committed to purchasing more substantial quantities from local farms. In one case, a farmer called to ask MFF to intervene with a restaurant on his behalf; the restaurant menu named his farm as their source of eggs but had not purchased his eggs in more than a year. In another instance, a different farmer, who having seen several restaurant ads in a local publication with the
Appalachian Fresh logo, expressed his frustration and suspicion that many of the businesses were minimally supportive of local farms and were simply taking advantage of the power of “local” in marketing. The restaurant ads were part of a local food advertorial, a special section of the publication combining stories highlighting local food and farms with advertisements placed by farms and by businesses promoting their purchase of food from local farms. MFF’s cost share program paid for half the cost of ads places by farms and food businesses that used the Appalachian Fresh logo.

Questioning the effect of the advertorial, one organizer asked, “Are we encouraging a degree of local washing through this advertorial project – we require nothing except that they use the [Appalachian Fresh] logo?” Another organizer, Michelle, concurred saying, “…restaurants can sign up to be [Appalachian Fresh] and not buy local.”

Over the course of this ongoing discussion, organizers explored possible courses of action to hold restaurants in particular accountable to their claimed support of local farms. Organizers discussed the possibility of requiring a minimal purchasing threshold to list in the Local Food Guide but from a practical standpoint wondered how they would verify restaurants’ achievements of any given threshold.

…we could develop some simple standards. We can’t however require $ amounts or percentages, we don’t have the capacity to do audits. Plus restaurants/chefs will make assumptions that everything they are getting from [WNC Produce Wholesalers] or other [wholesalers] is local…

Across the progression of these discussions, there is a shift from a focus on inclusivity, validated by the belief that businesses will act in accordance with positive customer responses to their claimed support of local farms, to a focus that requires businesses demonstrate more explicitly their support of local farms. Recognizing how difficult it would be for organizers to assess businesses’ attainment of certain percentages
or dollar thresholds, organizers compromised with a change to the Local Food Guide – businesses list the farms they purchase from and that information is made public. The excerpts that follow are from two Appalachian Fresh meetings spaced about one year apart.

…the whole idea is to make it easy for people to join and then the theory is that people will go into these restaurants and ask, “What’s local?” Presumably if they are not doing any or not much local, it would be too uncomfortable for them to continue to advertise that they do.

A discussion ensued about what could be done [to hold restaurants accountable]. Audit restaurants and grocers? Ask them to list who they purchase from? Ask farms who they are selling to and then make all of this information accessible to the public? We are at the point where we can be asking these questions; there’s a critical mass of consumer demand and places where they can exercise this demand. If we had asked them to do this before, they wouldn’t have wanted to do it. But now we can ask them to provide some veracity to their claims; it’s time to step up those efforts.

Operationalizing Appalachian Fresh Promotions

For the Appalachian Fresh program, organizers developed the structure of the program, recruited the participation of farms and businesses, created the logo and promotional materials to use to identify products in the marketplace, and directed the public through media outreach to find Appalachian Fresh local product. In this mix of program activities, consistent and accurate product labeling with the logo has been an ongoing struggle for organizers particularly with grocery retailers. The following selections, excerpted from meeting minutes over a period three years, document some of the challenges organizers have encountered.

[Eco Grocery] is using the profiles but not associating them with specific products. They are dedicated to [buying] local but so far have not been good at promoting it.

[Greg is] especially puzzled by the lack of retailer use of [Appalachian Fresh] promotional materials we’ve [created for] them with their input. [He noted] the
person that is stocking shelves doesn’t care that much about identifying local. If [the signage] doesn’t work at point of sale then can we make it work in another place?

[Sustainable Foods] has developed their own local label that they can use without having to look at a list to see if it’s eligible for an [Appalachian Fresh] label.

[There was a] general discussion of retailer use of [Appalachian Fresh] promotional materials. All of them to some degree have profiles in proximity to product that is not local or not grown by the farmer profiled. How can we resolve this issue?

…it we stopped at [Southeast Foods]…to check out the [Appalachian Fresh] signage; they had the [Appalachian Fresh] logo labeling cabbages from [a local farmer/packer] (not…certified) and also on [Farm Fresh Distributors’] apple preserves, which we cannot be sure are produced from all local products…

The question is how do we get more buy-in from retailers to use our program instead of creating their own? This comes out of [Michelle’s] report on retailers’ issues with the [Appalachian Fresh] program. That our program is difficult to use and it is easier for them to create their own logo that doesn’t use our standards.

From the inception of the program, Appalachian Fresh staff have worked individually with retailers to create promotional materials businesses wanted to use – to gain more retailer buy-in into the program. Staff created unique Appalachian Fresh promotional materials with company logos and designs to distinguish individual businesses’ promotional materials from their competitors and materials suitable for individual store lay-outs and particular types of display infrastructure. Nevertheless, staff found that promotional materials would go un-used and/or their use of the materials was inconsistent and inaccurate. Retailers were developing their own marketing materials to promote local and/or using Appalachian Fresh materials for a time before falling into disuse. Staff found Appalachian Fresh materials labeling nonlocal products or products grown by local farms not Appalachian Fresh certified. The feedback to organizers was that retailers were finding the program difficult to use. As noted by one organizer, “it’s
not about not wanting to do it [use Appalachian Fresh]; it’s about the logistics of operationalizing the labeling.”

One of the most formidable challenges is the fluctuation of local supply, particularly with produce. Given the small-scale of production in the region, retailers have to supplement local product with non-local product. When the local product runs out, retailers replace it with non-local product, but, while the origin of the product changes, the labeling seldom does as noted here in the minutes.

…there isn’t enough supply, so buyers will supplement with non local…. [Greg] has seen labels like NC/CA. [Southeast Foods] will put [Appalachian Fresh] on a product on an ad and then they will run out of local but the shelf tag is still local or [Appalachian Fresh] even though they are supplementing with non-local.

With the sources of produce constantly changing, busy store personnel find it difficult to keep up with signage changes and with distinctions between local product and Appalachian Fresh local product. The following excerpt from my field notes summarizes the feedback Michelle received from retailers on the difficulty of using the program – the constant fluctuation of produce makes it difficult to adhere to the logo standards of the program. “POP” represents point of purchase.

The feedback that [Michelle] is getting is that it is just too hard to keep up with local and [Appalachian Fresh]. The [manager at the co-op] says that she’d like to keep up with it but just can’t….They carry a lot of local but the issue is that it is not all local and when local runs out (…certified or not) they replace it with non-local product. So they are looking to keep up with a “putting up and taking down” of [Appalachian Fresh] POP materials as the product changes, which just isn’t practical with how often it can fluctuate and how busy the produce people are…[Brian] from [Eco Grocery] said the same thing. They’ll have the POP materials up on [Appalachian Fresh] certified product and then it runs out and what is left is product from California and then the POP signage doesn’t get taken down.

Furthermore store personnel assumed product coming from local wholesale distributors was always produced locally. The cabbage labeled in Southeast Foods, from
the above example, came from a local cabbage producer that also distributes cabbage from other growing regions in the United States. Southeast Foods store personnel presumed that all the cabbage from this producer/wholesale distributor was produced locally; however, organizers knew the cabbage was not local, because it was not the season for cabbage in the mountains.

In response to these challenges, organizers shifted their focus on labeling from the retailer to the farmer. In this strategy, organizers continue to work with retailers on more general store promotional materials – creating, for example, large farmer profiles to hang from produce department ceilings – but focused on working with farmers to label product directly. Argued by one organizer, “We need to get it on the product package so that we are not relying on store personnel to figure out who is [Appalachian Fresh] certified and who is not.” Another organizer noted that focusing on labeling at the level of the farm makes sense because “for the grocery store it’s not a priority, because local food only represents so much of their sales.” Focusing on the level of the farm, organizers, with feedback from farmers, created a suite of Appalachian Fresh swag for producers – stock materials like case labels, product stickers, rubber bands and produce ties for bundling stemmed produce, clear plastic bags, and custom materials like PLU stickers.

Organizers implemented a cost share program for farmers, as well as food businesses, as an incentive to market local food with Appalachian Fresh branding. The “goal of the cost share program,” note the meeting minutes, “is to get the logo out there.” Focused on farms, the purpose of the cost share program has been to encourage farmers to actively market their products, financially support their marketing efforts with Appalachian Fresh labeling, and implement organizers’ strategy – to get labeling on the
product at the farm and address the inconsistencies in retailers’ attempts to utilize the brand. For non-farm food businesses, the goal of cost sharing is to promote the part of the business sourcing from local farms, “to help,” as Greg articulated, “that aspect of their business that buys local to be thriving.” Retailer cost shares have focused on advertising and the development of promotional materials, not to label product directly but to promote the farms from which businesses regularly purchase and whose product would be labeled, in stores for example, with Appalachian Fresh on product packaging.

**Conclusions: Theorizing Changes in the Western North Carolina Food System**

In Western North Carolina, the actions of movement organizers to build markets for locally grown food have had a palpable effect on the region’s food system. If consumers are the key agent of change as theorized by organizers, then shifts in the food industry as well as in the production and marketing practices of farmers are indicative of changes in consumer perceptions and purchasing practices. Locally grown food is available across a wide range of market outlets – in direct market venues like tailgate markets and CSAs and across conventional market outlets in restaurants, small and large scale grocery stores, hospitals, colleges, and public schools. Farmers are producing for local customers, in some cases shifting from long-held production practices and conventional supply chains serving distant markets. Farmers producing for local markets are employing a range of marketing practices to brand their farms and products and develop personalized market relationships. They are forming cooperative relationships with other farms to increase their productive and marketing capacities and are devising ways to expand their product offerings. Buyers in restaurant, grocer, and institutional settings are developing local food supply chains for their businesses – sourcing locally
grown food directly from farmers and farmer groups and through regional and national wholesale distributors. To demonstrate their support of the region’s farms and access consumer interest in locally grown food, food industry businesses are promoting their purchases through their participation in campaign activities, advertising in public media, and use of local food labeling practices.

**The Hegemonic Process**

Across these manifestations of movement impacts on the region’s food system, movement organizers and participants are mediating between multiple and often conflicting motivations. Farmers and buyers across a range of market outlets mediate between their desire to participate in movement activities and the contradictions between the qualities of locally grown food and the conventional food industry. Organizers, in their efforts to mainstream locally grown food, struggle to balance actions that engage the food industry in movement activities and actions that hold the industry accountable to movement goals and definitions. Like farmers and buyers, the strategies enacted by movement organizers negotiate the contradictions between the meanings, ideas, and practices of the dominant food industry and the emerging local food system.

The challenges that arise in relation to these contradictions are inherent to the hegemonic process. They are, in essence, an outcome of the encounter between the cultural politics enacted by movement organizers and participants and the entrenched meanings and practices of the conventional food industry. At the intersection of these disparate meanings and practices, movement organizers and participants employ a variety of strategies to further movement goals and/or participate in and benefit from movement activities. These strategies evolve in relation to the unfolding of the movement and to
shifting circumstances – to the continued emergence of local food and farm sensibilities and the growth in the number of movement supporters, to increasing public pressure on the food industry in the region to support the region’s farms, to *movements* in the perceptions and practices of organizers, farmers, consumers, and food industry personnel.

In this encounter, the region’s emerging local food system exists alongside and through the conventional food system. Within the region, alternative market venues have proliferated over the past decade indicating that increasing numbers of consumers are buying (at least some of) their food outside conventional market channels. Within the food industry, buyers use different sourcing strategies to negotiate the perceived limitations and challenges related to scale and seasonality, price, the desire for third party quality and food safety assurances, and buyers’ senses of their capacities to develop new relationships and supply chains. Across these challenges, buyers make decisions to limit or expand their purchases of locally grown food. Buyers develop direct relationships with farmers and farmer groups. Buyers ask their existing suppliers – regional and national wholesale distribution companies – to source local product for them and exert pressure on upstream supply relationships. These strategies are not mutually exclusive, and the hybrid purchasing systems of large scale grocers are a clear manifestation of a dual strategy. The dual procurement systems of large retailers continue to anchor grocer practices firmly in the vertically integrated supply chains of the conventional food system but allow store level sourcing to accommodate the scale and seasonality of locally grown food.

In the retail environment, local food marketing and promotions reflect the proliferation of local food branding programs of movement organizers, farmers, farmer groups, retailers, government entities, and institutes of higher education. The proliferation
reflects the traction of the market for locally grown food; the varied definitions of local used by these entities reveals the struggle to define local in accordance with their respective goals and interests.

Buyers’ promotional practices further signify their attempts to negotiate market demand and the entrenched systems, practices, and expectations within the conventional food industry. Local food and local farms are central to industry marketing messages that aim to appeal to a growing public sentiment of support for the region’s farms and capture consumer demand for locally grown food. Concomitant with the campaign’s shift from the promotion of a general concept of local food to the promotion of local food with a clear definition, the broad and vague promotional programs of some retailers have shifted to programs with more clearly and narrowly delineated local food definitions. Several retailers have conceptualized and employed a two-tiered approach to the definition of local, using two separate logos to identify food coming from places that are more and less local. As a strategy, the two-tiered approach signals retailers’ attempts to achieve a perception of authenticity in their local food labeling programs and their effort to maintain established supply relationships and/or broaden “local” regions so that they are able to source food from agriculture produced at larger scales.

In response to increasing interest in locally grown food by end and intermediate consumers, farmers have conceptualized and enacted an array production and marketing based strategies. Farmers engage in activities to brand their products and farms; farmers are using Appalachian Fresh branding and/or are developing farm specific brands to create unique farm identities. Many of the region’s farmers combine a mixture of market channels, selling direct to the public through tailgate markets, CSAs, and other alternative
market venues and into conventional markets, directly or through a distributor. Farmers use this combination to gain access to the advantages possible in local markets and mitigate the uncertainties in developing local food supply chains. Alternative direct markets work synergistically with conventional outlets – direct market venues provide the space for farmers to interact with the public, to educate consumers about their farms and products, to develop personal relationships and a sense of trust with consumers, and build a market base for their products. These farmer to consumer interactions and experiences increase the visibility of their farms within the community and create demand for their products across market outlets.

As the movement for locally grown food has gained more energy in the region, farmers have devised strategies to negotiate greater market access. With increasing movement momentum, the season of locally grown food has lengthened – farmers are taking measures to expand the production season with hoop and green houses and are offering winter CSAs and organizing winter tailgate markets. Farmers are producing processed products to expand product offerings and income producing ventures and, for meat producers specifically, to mitigate the challenge of the “whole animal.” To mitigate the challenges related to seasonality, scale, and infrastructure, farmers are working together. Some farmers are also becoming buyers, supplementing their product with the product of other farms producing to their specifications and standards, and distributing under their farm brand. Other farmers are developing cooperative relationships, pooling and distributing their products under a shared local food label. Through personal investment or with the support of grant funding, farmers and farmer groups are
collaborating to attain the infrastructure to process, aggregate, and distribute to larger scale markets.

Across the strategies of buyers and farmers, organizers mediate between actions that variously promote movement inclusion and exclusion, between actions designed to incite and restrict participation. Nowhere is this process more apparent than within Appalachian Fresh and the efforts of organizers to mainstream locally grown food. Organizers, acting from a processual understanding of social change, negotiate a line between holding farmers and buyers firmly to program parameters and definitions and allowing flexibility. Within the context of this program, organizers have instituted rules and protocols to protect the integrity of “local” and the market for locally grown food for the region’s farms and accommodate a developing local food system – to accommodate gaps between supply and demand, the actions and perceptions of buyers within the food industry, and extant systems of food distribution and the need to demonstrate the value of local food and build a perception of value in Appalachian Fresh branding. MFF organizers strive to accommodate the hegemonic process and the encounter between the movement and industry disparities; strategies make allowances that recognize a continued trajectory of change and maturing of the region’s food system – continued growth in demand for locally grown food, increasing production for local markets, further development of local food supply chains, and a loosening of entrenched industry practices and ideas.

Across their actions, farmers and buyers and consumers are contributing to the place-making processes of movement organizers. Buyers invoke the cultural politics of movement discourse. Food grown by local farms has qualities distinct from food
produced for the conventional food industry. Local farms not only make the region unique, eating and buying the food that farms grow are acts that build and bind community together; farms and local food are at the center of community ties. Businesses use food and farm discourse to demonstrate their support of local farms and their emplacement within community. Through marketing activities that bring them in direct contact with the public, farmers increase the visibility not only of their farms but of farming and food production in the region. Public interactions with farmers and farming at tailgate markets, through CSAs, on farms, and through social media locate farms and farmers in participants’ communities, in the places participants live.

The actions of buyers to source food from local farms, of farmers to produce for and sell to local customers, of consumers to seek out and purchase locally grown food across alternative and conventional market channels too are acts of place-making in their embodiment of new ideas and meanings. Within the hegemonic process, these acts are developing new social practices, new webs of interaction around the processes of food production, procurement, preparation, and eating. Following Clemens, collectively these acts undermine the stability of established food system relationships and are changing the food system in Western North Carolina.
Chapter Eight:

Cultivating Local: Rebuilding a Local Food System in Western North Carolina

This dissertation theorizes the process of social change through the study of a movement to localize food production and consumption. My research and the theories utilized to interpret my data have been guided by a key question: How do particular political-economic systems come into being, and how can we challenge and change them? Key to understanding the process of social change is the idea of hegemony, and the core of the concept of hegemony is the relationship between ideas and action, between meanings and practice. Hegemony is a configuration of power, a form of leadership, attained and reproduced through the enactment of widely accepted ideas and meanings. Ideas, meanings, and practices, dialectically intertwined, organize the lived social reality of particular hegemonic formations. The mundane day to day actions of individuals sanction and embody hegemonic ideas and meanings. Collectively, these actions and the configurations of relationships these actions structure give stability to hegemonic systems.

Despite its dominance, hegemony is never absolute or static; counter or alternative hegemonies exist simultaneously, challenging the legitimacy of dominant practices and normative ideas. In this context, the ideas and meanings that arise from and organize the lived social process are constituted through struggle between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic formations, between dominant and subversive ideologies and the social practices these ideologies strive to legitimize and institutionalize; social
movements are an integral part of this dialectical process. Social movements challenge the status quo and engage in cultural politics to undermine collectively held perceptions and invoke alternative meanings and practices to promote different material outcomes. Within this process, the lived realms of daily life are the spaces from which movements emerge. These spaces are grounded in particular locations with distinct histories and social, economic, and ecological conditions. They are the spaces from which individuals observe and collectively interpret extant conditions and imagine and enact alternative ways of living and being. Organizers of the Local Food Movement in Western North Carolina, in challenging the hegemony of the global agri-food system, have invoked different ideas and practices related to food and agriculture, civic participation, health promotion, economy and economic development and aim to establish different economic practices that support the development of local food production and provision and the economic viability of the region’s farms.

The global food system is grounded in neoliberalism – a political and economic doctrine and set of practices that characterize the most recent stage of capitalism and favor the consolidation of power by big agri-business – and is legitimized by a discourse of scarcity and population growth and a particular notion of sustainable agriculture. To feed the world, to increase agricultural yields, to minimize pressure on natural resources, the production of food is structured in accordance with the principle of comparative advantage and by the policies and practices of multinational corporations and multinational governance organizations enforcing “free market” economics. The policies and practices enacted have structured global patterns of food production, commerce, and consumption. In Western North Carolina the impacts of this system are evident in a long
trajectory of farm and farmland loss and in the corresponding practices of the region’s food industry, which is deeply embedded in and dependent on industrialized, global markets.

In this system, production and consumption lie at opposite ends of a protracted chain of middlemen and marketers, and food production lies largely outside the social consciousness of consumers. Participants in this system are global neoliberal subjects in the sense that they participate in a largely opaque and compartmentalized economy. They make decisions about food largely within an instrumental rationality. They lack knowledge about the processes and practices of food production and provision in the global food industry, and they do not recognize their role in its creation and reproduction.

The strategies of MFF organizers begin from this reality – from the market and from recognition that the market is the dominant organizing framework in modern life, that the role of the “consumer” is the chief means individuals (have come to) interact with the world around them. Within this framework, “local food” is a strategy in and of itself; it is the means to engage the public with farms and with place and through their economic transactions affect change on the market and on the region’s agricultural base.

Actions designed to invoke engagement with and participation in the particularities of place are the foundation of organizer strategies. Movement organizers are engaged in processes of place-making. Through strategies designed to build participants experiences of agriculture and food production, to create conceptual connections between economic decisions and their material impacts, to instill a sense of place and an appreciation for the region’s farms, organizers are engaged in a project intended to cultivate different economic subjectivities. MFF has invoked a cultural
politics that links a particular notion of place to place-based conceptions of economy, economic development, food production, civic engagement, and health promotion. In campaign discourse, the region of Western North Carolina is defined fundamentally by a heritage of agriculture that today is still imprinted on a landscape of farm and forest, in surviving food traditions, and in a region comprised largely of rural communities. The region’s small scale agriculture of family farms provides residents with an alternative to food produced for the industrialized, global food system. Farms are important to the region’s economy and are a source of regionally directed economic development. The connections to food afforded by the presence of the region’s agricultural base are the path toward creating more sustainable systems food production – economically, socially, and environmentally – and healthier individuals.

Campaign discourse links explicitly for consumers the relationship between their decisions about food and the qualities and characteristics of the food they consume and of the places they inhabit. Consumer demand is a significant mechanism of change; consumer economic decisions have material impacts – collectively they have the capacity to maintain the economic viability of the region’s farms (and the benefits farms provide) and directly inform the nature of food production.

Actions designed to ground movement participants and observers in concrete local food and farm experiences are significant to organizer place-making strategies. Tailgate markets, farm tours, CSAs, in-store tastings and cooking demonstrations, farmer-buyer meetings, and other events that bring movement participants in direct contact are central to movement activities. These are the spaces that “put a face on food,” that (re)introduce the processes of food production into awareness, that build participants’
familiarity with the region’s agriculture, that build participants’ sense of place and community, that engender a public sentiment of support for the region’s farms, and ultimately effect economic decisions.

From a perspective informed by social capital and theories about the development of social consciousness, these venues are vital to the goals of movement organizers. They are channels for the dissemination and collective evaluation of movement discourse and the development of social relations around food production and provision. In these venues place-making becomes the purview of all participants. Farmers, consumers, movement organizers, individuals within the food industry are co-creators of these experiences, and through them participants simultaneously develop and perform different subjectivities and establish new practices around food and agriculture. For organizers, these experiences are also important, because they transcend the boundaries of personal experience; participants impact the perspectives and practices of others by sharing experiences across their social networks – with co-workers, family, friends, etc – and through their embodiment of different perspectives across their private and public lives. This supposition is the basis of strategies intended to engage food industry personnel with the region’s farms, farmers, and locally grown food. Positive experiences affect their performances in their professional capacities as buyers, as chefs, as the retail and cafeteria staff interacting directly with customers, etc.

In their efforts to affect change in the region’s conventional food industry through the Appalachian Fresh program, MFF organizers have mediated between strategies that are designed to variously broaden and restrict participation in movement activities. Within their theory of change, the transformation of the food system is going to be an
incremental and long-term process. The economic viability of the region’s farms – the key to sustaining farms – is the foundation of this process. Organizers’ Local Food Campaign is inclusive of all family farms in the region irrespective of practices. In their market-based theory of change, farms that are economically viable have longevity and will be able to transition their farming practices and produce food in ways commensurate with the demands of an engaged customer base. Farmers that are unable to attain financial sustainability will be unable to continue farming and, accordingly, will not have opportunities to shift their production to more environmentally and socially sustainable ways; working farmland lost to development is lost forever.

This market-based tenet underlies organizers’ strategies for engaging food industry stakeholders in movement activities and an approach that allows industry businesses to benefit from campaign activities without making immediate or radical changes to their procurement systems and practices. A strategy that allows businesses to start where they are enables organizers to demonstrate the value of locally grown food with Appalachian Fresh branding to business bottom lines. With this strategy, market demand is the mechanism that drives businesses to make changes to procurement systems and expand their purchases of locally grown food.

More than a decade after the launch of the Local Food Campaign, “local food” is a palpable market force in the region. The efforts of organizers to engage the food industry, of farmers to penetrate the supply chains of conventional market outlets, of food industry buyers to source food from the region’s farms document the dialectical interplay of the hegemonic process – the encounter and interaction between the practices and meanings of the conventional food industry and those invoked within the Local Food
Movement. In this encounter, movement organizers and participants have developed strategies to mediate the contradictions and to variously benefit from movement activities and further movement goals. The outcome is an interaction that is affecting the industry and the movement. Movement organizers and participants are implementing strategies to both affect established practices and perceptions within the food industry and accommodate them. Farmers are using marketing based practices to develop personalized market relationships and drive demand for their products. To both fulfill and shift consumer needs and desires related to food, farmers are implementing production and marketing based strategies to lengthen the growing season, expand product offerings, and broaden consumer expectations. To achieve greater volumes, overcome the constraints of seasonality and infrastructure, and adjust to the expectations of the food industry, farmers are developing cooperative relationships to pool products and resources and attain infrastructure.

Buyers for the food industry are developing local food supply chains, in some cases purchasing locally grown food outside of existing supply relationships and in others through them. Recognizing the contradiction between centralized procurement and distribution systems and locally grown food, some of the region’s grocery store chains allow farmers to circumvent warehouses and supply product at the store level. Institutional buyers, in an effort to maintain existing supply relationships, are exerting pressure on upstream suppliers to change their procurement practices and source food from the region’s farms for them.

At the intersection of the demand for locally grown food, the reality of current food production and supply in the region, and the systems and expectations of the
conventional food industry, MFF organizers mediate between actions that are designed to hold participants accountable to the goals and definitions of the Appalachian Fresh program and actions that allow flexibility with them. Organizers recognize a need to allow movements in the perceptions and practices of food system participants across consumers, producers, and businesses within the food industry – a deepening sentiment of support for the region’s agriculture, an increasing number of consumers that want to buy food from local farms, a growing number of farmers that perceive the viability in producing food for local markets, an increasing number of farmers implementing practices to sell food to local customers, an increasing number of food industry buyers that believe in the viability of the market for locally grown food and make changes to their systems of procurement and distribution to accommodate the qualities of locally grown food. Stringency in the application of program parameters and rules will alienate movement participants and observers and stifle movement progress.

Within the hegemonic process, the proliferation of local food brands marks the struggle to define the meaning of local. With increasing market demand for locally grown food, how local is defined has real material consequences; it demarcates who is and is not included, who does and does not benefit from movement activities. For organizers, how local is defined ties directly to movement goals. MFF organizers launched the Appalachian Fresh program as a means to engage the food industry and instill a widely accepted definition of local that holds the food industry accountable to a definition that supports the region’s farms. For the food industry, how local is defined relates directly to procurement practices and their capacity to access consumer demand. Broad or vague definitions of local allow grocery stores to claim support for local farms without making
procurement changes, to engage in what organizers term “local washing.” The emergence of tiered local food promotional programs demonstrates the efforts of retailers to mediate between desires to meet demand, maintain centralized procurement systems, and match consumer expectations about the meaning of local. From the varied positions and perspectives of farmers, local food definitions not only mediate their market access, they mediate the access of their competitors. Definitions that variously adhere to stricter or broader geographical parameters can simultaneously include or exclude farmers from movement activities and potential benefits. They can create or reduce the competition between farmers that are “more local” with farmers that are “less local.”

**Study Relevance for Anthropological Theory**

This study contributes to the development of anthropological scholarship across theories of political economy, practice, discourse, and social movements. This section treats each of these scholarly areas separately for the purposes of discussion; however none of them are mutually exclusive and the discussion of the contributions to one area necessarily entails the discussion of others. As my dissertation shows, these theories are deeply intertwined and inform one another. For example, a political economic perspective that attends to structure and agency requires a practice perspective. A practice perspective, with its focus on human agency, entails discourse, which itself a social practice and also emerges from social practice. A focus then on discourse provides a means to concretely examine human practice and promote an agency-centered perspective. Each of these areas informs the study of social movements.
Political Economy

Following the findings of anthropologists Escobar, Nash, Kirsch, Lewellen, and others, this study reveals the significance of place to modern social movements. Place is the position from which movements arise; it is the point of intersection between structure and agency – the site where actors observe and encounter disparities between lived experiences and broadly accepted ideas and meanings. Movements use place to challenge the policies, practices, and universalizing notions of economic globalization. In relation to the hegemony of an anonymous system of global food production, Local Food Movement organizers use place to reveal the relationship between structure and agency, between our actions as consumers and the worlds we inhabit.

Following Lewellen’s (2002) observation that the paradox of globalization is that it is creating a world “that is more localized,” the strategies and actions of movements and their imagined alternatives emerge from a groundedness in place. The movement in Western North Carolina emerged from this kind of grounded perspective, from the observed and experienced material impacts of economic globalization on the region’s agricultural base, from organizers’ collective evaluation of extant conditions and conceptualization of an alternative. This groundedness gave rise to a place-based economic strategy as a means to protect the region’s farms – to subvert the dominance of impersonal global markets and wrest some independence from the hegemony of the global agri-food system. To challenge the instrumental rationality of the global consumer and embed decisions about food in personalized market relationships, movement organizers use place-making. They have invoked a cultural politics that challenges the precepts and practices of global economic development and promotes an alternative
place-based notion of economy. They organize activities that build relationships around the economy of local food production and provision. A particular conception of activism and citizenship explicitly links structure and agency and connects for movement participants and observers the relationship between food consumption choices, systems of food production, and the qualities and characteristics of place.

Within a political economic framework, the concept of hegemony provides a means to theorize the nature of the encounter between the hegemonic agri-food system and the ideas and practices advocated by Local Food Movement organizers and supporters. The encounter embodies the tension between structure and agency – between entrenched food industry systems, practices, and expectations and the contradictory ideas and practices of the movement. The strategies and actions of organizers and participants arise from and mediate this tension, simultaneously accommodating and shifting the relationships and practices that comprise the food industry.

**Practice**

Beginning from a political economic framework and from the idea of hegemony, a practice perspective is crucial to the study of social movements. The practice perspective used in this study, through a focus on discourse, reveals the complexity of the hegemonic process, the strategies and actions devised and enacted at the intersection of hegemony and counter-hegemony. From a methodological standpoint, human agency has to be a focal point of social movement research; without it, scholarship remains abstract and insubstantial.

Hegemonic formations are comprised of – to build on the ideas of Clemens – the entrenched practices of our daily lives, the webs of relationships these practices
configure, and the ideas, beliefs, and expectations these practices embody and reproduce. At the same time, disruptions in established practices and webs of interaction provide the means to subvert and alter the existing order. This understanding has enormous implications for understanding the relationship between structure and agency and for apprehending the significance of movement strategies that focus on individual choice as a source of social change. Applying Gibson and Graham’s analysis of second wave feminism to the movement in Western North Carolina, shifts in the food purchasing and eating practices of individuals collectively can (and are) produce new patterns of interaction and the motivation for individuals positioned within the conventional food industry to shift their practices in favor of movement goals. Practice, in this sense, is a catalyst of change – both in the transformation of place and particular social orders through the collective enactment of new social practices and equally, as discussed below, in the development of new subjectivities of the self.

Discourse

Discourse is a key human practice and accordingly, discourse and theories of discourse are central to this study – to the research methods used, to the interpretation of study data. This study locates discourse at the heart of movement strategies and actions and in relation specifically to place-making. If, as Escobar (2001, 2008) argues, place-making is central to the ideological and material goals of modern movements, then discourse, in its practical and ideological senses, is the means by which movements achieve them. Discourse is the means by which movements frame problems and solutions and invoke cultural politics; discourse is also practice and the means by which movement supporters and potential supporters, through communicative and other social practices,
enact movement ideas and meanings and develop new rationalities and understandings through this enactment.

MFF has developed and invoked a discourse, an ideology, of local food and farms to define the detriments of the global food system and the negative consequences of farm loss for the region and its residents and to construct a conception of place fundamentally defined by agriculture. Through their use of public media, movement organizers use discourse, communicatively, to articulate and legitimize movement goals and strategies and to frame the solution and specific nature of action. Organizers strive to engage the public with their local food and farm discourse by creating spaces of engagement centered on the processes of local food production and provision.

Following Voloshinov’s and Vygotsky’s theorization on the relational nature of social consciousness, local food and farm linked activities and events that bring movement supporters (and potential supporters) in direct contact are spaces of interpersonal interaction where participants collectively participate in and enact practices centered on local food and farms. These spaces facilitate the collective interpretation of shared experience, the dissemination of ideas, the evaluation of movement ideas, the formation of shared understandings and meanings, and the development of social linkages or capital among and between movement participants. For organizers, they are the foundation of perceptual and material shifts – the development of local food and farm advocates that through their material support of the region’s farms enact different economic subjectivities.
Social Movements

In addition to the contributions of political economy and of practice and discourse theories to the study of social movements, one of the key contributions of this study to social movements scholarship is a process-oriented perspective. Hegemony, to use a descriptor employed by Gibson and Graham (2006a, 2006b), is always in the process of becoming. The idea of the hegemonic struggle describes a productive and mutually constitutive process between an established configuration of power and its detractors. The dynamic and emergent dimensions of place and self are subsumed within this framework. Accordingly, the scholarship of social movements must attend to process – to the interaction between hegemonies and counter hegemonies, to the relationship between this encounter to the strategies and actions of dominant institutions and of movement organizers and activists to variously further and/or benefit from movement activities. In the context of struggle, movement organizers and participants engage in praxis – they conceptualize ideas, put them into practice, assess their outcomes, and modify and imagine new strategies in relation to new knowledge, understandings, and developments. Novel understandings, perspectives, and strategies emerge out of this iterative and processual framework and inform subsequent strategic action. This understanding is enormously important not just for apprehending movements and their impacts but for the capacity of scholarship to reveal the complexity of movement action and contribute valid analyses and perspectives with applied relevance.

Study Relevance for Engaged Scholarship

One of the findings of my dissertation is that much of the scholarship focused on the Local Food Movement lacks a situated perspective, one grounded in the unique
geographies, histories, and ecologies of place and in the struggles and efforts of movement organizers. Without this perspective, scholarly work provides a thin assessment of movement goals, strategies, and outcomes. Critiques focused on what the movement is not achieving fail to recognize the dynamic, emergent, and evolving nature of movement activity in relation to the hegemonic encounter and the changes emerging at this intersection.

As discussed above, one of the contributions of this dissertation is a process oriented perspective. Within and outside of academia, anthropological scholarship, informed by a process oriented perspective, has the opportunity to substantively inform organizer praxis and the development of strategies to engender the positive economic, environmental, and social impacts Local Food Movement activists hypothesize are possible. This kind of engaged scholarship demands meaningful participation – investment and integration with movement activities, the pursuit of knowledge informed by meaningful collaborations between scholars and practitioners, and a commitment to make analyses broadly accessible. As a movement that is in the making, organizers and activists need thoughtful critique to inform reflexive processes, to guide the development of strategic action, to move toward the positive outcomes imagined. Ideas and perspectives developed in this dissertation have relevance for the way movement organizers conceptualize and measure change in relation to strategic action. The notions of embeddedness, place, and social capital, for example, have informed, are informing, MFF’s theorizations about transparency – what this concept means for them in the development of local food systems, how to create transparency, and how transparency can create larger economic, environmental, and social change. These ideas are also
informing a concentrated effort to develop meaningful indicators of food system change, to both measure the impacts of movement activities and inform ongoing strategic action.

**Further Research**

A key line of research with enormous implications for the continued development of the Local Food Movement as well as other efforts focused on struggles around issues of “sustainability” revolves around the nature of the effect of the movement on neoliberal subjectivities. At the heart of organizer efforts are strategies to create human and conceptual connections – to address the compartmentalization of the global economy, to reintroduce into consumer awareness the impacts of their economic choices on the places in which they live. With its basis in place-making, in grounding consumers in the relationships and particularities of place, the impacts of the Local Food Movement have the potential to move beyond economic transactions and beyond the focus on food and agriculture. Departing from organizers’ theory of change, economic transactions are the initial means of acting on movement messages – the “buy local” message engages consumers from where they are in their perspectives as consumers and in the ways they are accustomed to interacting with the world. This market-based framework depends upon a more engaged public to guide the development of local food systems that are not only economically sustainable but environmentally and socially sustainable through the vehicle of the market. Beyond economic decisions, however, how do place-making strategies affect the subjectivities of participants? If as suggested by Spinosa et al (1999) that active engagement with place is the basis of democratizing efforts and collective action, how will a more civically engaged public transform future movement strategies and actions? What are the possibilities within a more civically engaged public for the
creation of holistically sustainable systems of food production and provision, and beyond? Will meaningful engagement with systems of food production spillover into other aspects of life as suggested by the research of Kerton and Sinclair (2010) in their exploration of transformational learning? The Local Food Movement provides a rich ground for scholars to engage in the issues and questions that surround the struggles to create and define sustainability.

Too, like Guthman (2008:1181), I am intrigued by Bondi and Laurie’s (2005) suggestion that the “self-governing” neoliberal subject may actually provide the ground for the development of subjectivities that act contrary to the self-interested individual. Bondi and Laurie (2005:399) point out that neoliberalism is “a constructed social terrain” – the self-interested individual is not inevitable. Bondi (2005:499) observes that the autonomous, self-directed, decision maker identified with neoliberalism is a source of resistance to the status quo, and it is this aspect of the neoliberal subject that movement organizers draw upon to develop collective identity and mobilize collective action. In this sense, movement activists aim to use and transform the configuration of meanings and ideas that comprise the social consciousness of neoliberal subjects.
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