Small Farmer Entrepreneurs and Direct Markets: Negotiating Structure and Agency at City Markets in Asunción, Paraguay

by

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This thesis investigates Paraguayan small farmer entrepreneurs (SFEs) who sell their products at city markets throughout Asunción, Paraguay and the actions that SFEs take to increase their presence throughout these markets. Engaging with anthropological theories of agency and structure and exploring conceptual frameworks of political ecology, it examines broader political, economic, social, and environmental structures in which Paraguayan SFEs are embedded. By examining roles that more powerful actors play in the everyday lives of SFEs, I show how, despite powerful actors, farmers are still able to demonstrate agency, power, and economic rational over their own production. Through semi-structured interviews with SFEs at three city markets throughout Asunción, this thesis investigates the ways that SFEs demonstrate agency through four main avenues – alternative agriculture, niche markets, specialty products, and social capital to strengthen their farming businesses.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated in memory of my mum, who loved well and was well loved
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Chapter 1

Introduction

In this thesis I explore issues that influence the ability of Paraguayan small-scale farmers to access direct-marketing initiatives in the capital city of Asunción. Due to the entrepreneurial activities that I observed small farmers taking part in, I use the term Small Farmer Entrepreneurs (SFEs)\(^1\) to refer to the farmers that I met at city markets throughout Asunción. I ask the following questions: (1) How are small farmer entrepreneurs (SFEs), in an agricultural production system that is heavily based in import and export agriculture, engaging in direct marketing opportunities, what barriers and issues are farmers experiencing with direct marketing opportunities, and how do these opportunities affect their livelihood capabilities? (2) What types of relationships exist between SFEs and the government, and how do participants perceive these relationships and how do they perceive structural inequality in the agricultural sector? And finally (3) In what ways do SFEs demonstrate agency, how are they agents of their own production, and what steps are they taking to acquire more power and control over their production and sale? In exploring these questions, I argue that a politicized environment, embedded in a history of structural inequality, has pushed SFEs into an environment that favors larger scale producers and wholesale businesses. I present an actor-oriented approach where I identify and discuss the actors that farmers indicated as influencing their everyday experiences as producers. Additionally, I show that in spite of the structural inequalities and politicized environment, SFEs are still able to demonstrate agency and power. Furthermore, I show

\(^1\) SFEs are still small-scale farmers, but I use this label to differentiate the farmers I spoke with from other kinds of small-scale farmers in the country. This is to separate these
how participants are using adaptive and innovative ideas to counteract the structural inequalities that they face. Finally, I argue that niche markets and other types of farmers’ markets can play an important role in providing space for farmers to exercise and assert their own power and agency over their production.

**Research Locations**

My thesis stems from the experiences and stories of farmers and vendors that I spoke with at three main food markets in Asunción, the capital of Paraguay. The first was Agroshopping, a smaller and upscale farmers’ market that caters to wealthier customers and boasts the best quality of fruit and vegetables and specialty items in the city. Agroshopping is a limited market in terms of consumer base and farmer access. That is, it is only accessed by SFEs who have the money and time to rent tables and the customer base is limited to wealthy Paraguayans and foreigners who are able to afford the higher prices. The second is Mercado de Abasto, a relatively informal and open-air market covering 11 hectares, mostly consisting of wholesalers and where customers can buy produce in bulk and other food and non-food items. The third is Abasto Norte, a new market and more formal than Mercado de Abasto, but with a significant amount of wholesale and bulk produce for sale. I consider the farmers that I spoke with at these markets to be engaging with direct marketing relationships with their consumers. These markets were chosen after discussions with faculty members at the Universidad Nacional de Asunción where it was indicated that the other major market, Mercado No. 4, housed vendors who were re-sellers and not farmers. The three markets in my study were the most popular produce markets in the city and were chosen as the best options to locate
farmers who sold their products directly to customers. I approached the examination of these three markets as cross section analysis, attempting to gather a holistic understanding of farmers’ experiences as vendors. While analyzing my data, it was clear that the farmers I spoke with had similar experiences, but that those who sold at Agroshopping were in a more secure position due to the nature of this market. This is highlighted further in Chapter 5.

Chapter Breakdown

In Chapter 2, I present an overview of current literature that examines the agricultural, political, social, historical and economic environments in Paraguay. Next, I address the theoretical literature of agency and structure, using the sub-discipline of political ecology to understand farmers’ experiences and positions within the agricultural sector in Paraguay. I address the agency of SFEs within broader market and government structures that influence the actions of farmers in their daily lives. I include government agricultural policy and actions, the presence of imported produce and wholesale produce in the markets, and the growth and expansion of supermarkets in Paraguay in order to set up the analysis of Chapter 4 and 5.

In Chapter 3, I explain the choice of methods that I have employed while conducting my fieldwork, provide more detail about my three research sites, and present the important geographical and demographic details.

In Chapter 4, I consider the above-mentioned structures in more detail and situate participants within a politicized environment in Paraguay. I show how actors affect power structures in the agriculture sectors and how these structures are influencing the
actions of SFEs in Paraguay. I use the stories of participants to show how farmers acknowledge the existence of and influence of structural constraints in their daily lives.

In Chapter 5, I show how farmers are, in spite of structural constraints on marketing their products, exercising levels of agency through niche markets, adaptation and adoption of alternative forms of agricultural production, direct-marketing sales, and through social capital networks. I rely on the work of Ortner (2001; 2006), which examines the relationships between people and the social, cultural, and historical structures in which humans are enmeshed. Finally, in Chapter 6, I conclude this thesis, and examine the limitations of my research and address areas of future research that still need to be considered.

I approached my research goals with an open and flexible framework, keeping in mind the limitations and realities of my work. I sought to be reflexive in my daily actions, and engage as best I could by immersing myself into Paraguayan culture, specifically food and farming culture. Through this, and the relationships I formed with participants, I have been able to make connections between small-to-medium scale farming and market atmospheres as well as engage with broader political, social, and economic structures that farmers are experiencing in their everyday lives.

Chapter 2

Literature Review
In this chapter I provide a discussion of key literature necessary to situate my research. I begin by contextualizing participants by discussing agricultural zones, a historical and present day summary of rural land use, the impact of the Stroessner dictatorship, changes in agricultural production and export markets, a brief overview of agricultural production in Latin American, highlighting the situation in Paraguay, and finally a brief discussion of farmers’ markets. Then I examine supermarkets, market access, and direct marketing initiatives for Paraguayan farmers to highlight the structures that farmers indicated affected their daily lives. I provide this overview in order to show the social, environmental, political, and historical influences that my participants face and I use this chapter as a tool to show broader structures that impact agricultural production in Paraguay on a local and global scale. After providing this background information I move into a discussion of political ecology, specifically using Bryant and Bailey's (1997) actor-oriented approach. I then introduce concepts of agency, concentrating on Ortner’s work, as an introduction to my discussion of farmer agency in Chapter 5.

**Paraguay’s Agricultural Zones**

Paraguay has the largest percentage of the rural population directly or indirectly engaged with small-scale farming and is the most rural country in Latin America (Berry, 2010:61; Vasquez-Leon, 2010). In 2002, 43 percent of the population was residing in rural areas (DGEEC, 2003 as sited in Berry, 2010), most are engaged in subsistence level or small and medium scale agriculture (Berry, 2010:61). The majority of agricultural production occurs east of the Paraguayan river in the eastern part of Paraguay and is defined by three main agricultural zones (DGEEC, 2003 as cited in Berry, 2010:63). These zones, the
Minifundia (Smallholding) zone, the Colonization zone, and the Frontier zone, all hold unique “agroecological and sociohistoric characteristics” (Berry, 2010:64) and differ based on geographical location, land holding allocation, and agricultural production (Carter and Galeano, 1995 as cited by Berry, 2010:64; Fletschner and Zepeda, 2002:558).

Land in the Minifundia zone, for example, is characterized by small plots and has relatively low soil fertility due to years of overuse. This area boasts the largest network of roads and is the closest proximity to the city food markets of Asunción (Berry, 2010:64; Fletschner and Zepeda, 2002:558). Many farmers here produce vegetables, fruit, and some cotton on a small-to-medium scale. The participants of this research study were located in the Minifundia zone.

The second zone, the Colonization zone is located northeast of Asunción and was established during the times of agricultural expansion in the 1960s (Berry, 2010:64; Fletschner and Zepeda, 2002:558; see also Nickson, 1981). The Colonization zone boasts better soil quality than the minifundias, but lacks adequate roadways, has poor infrastructure, is sparsely populated, and is not as well integrated as the other zones (Berry, 2010:64; Fletschner and Zepeda, 2002:558).

The third agricultural zone in Paraguay is the Frontier Zone, located in the eastern most part of Paraguay along the southeastern border between Brazil and Paraguay. The Frontier Zone is characterized by highly technical farms, is dedicated to larger-scale production of soy, good soil quality and high levels of rainfall, and much of the land is foreign owned (Berry, 2010:64; Fletschner and Zepeda, 2002:558).
Rural Land Use and Distribution in Paraguay: An Historical Overview

Rural growth and agricultural export have been the focus of Paraguayan economic development since the 1950s (Nagel, 1999; Weiskoff, 1992). The *latifundia* (privately owned large parcels of land used for agricultural production) system occupied much of the eastern part of Paraguay during the early years of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century (Richards, 2011:349) and specialized in the extraction of *Yerba Mate* (a type of herb used in popular Latin American drinks) from the forests (Nickson, 1981: 113). Three major landowners, La Industria Paraguaya, Domingo Barthe, and La Matte Larangeira (also known by other names Isnardi, Alves & Co.), occupied most of the relatively uninhabited eastern area of Paraguay until the collapse of the yerba economy in the 1940s. The land in the east was left unused (Nickson, 1981:113) until the explosion in production of soy in the 1970s.

In 1970, maize and cassava (the two most prominent crops at the time) made up 21 percent of the cultivated crops in Paraguay (Richards, 2010: 569). However, by 1980 maize and cassava cultivation had fallen to 10 percent (Richards, 2010:569) and crops that could be sold for cash (soy, wheat, and cotton) became more significant in the Paraguayan agricultural economy, but not without major land changes. The transformation of the agricultural economy in Paraguay and the rise of export oriented crops, specifically soy production from agroindustry corporations, has challenged and changed the landscape of the country (see Berry, 2010; Fletschner and Zepeda, 2002; Galeano, 2012; Hetherington, 2009; Masterson and Rao, 1999; Nagel, 1999; Richards, 2010; 2011). Deforestation has become a major issue in the eastern areas where the Atlantic Forest, which at one point reached North to the State Rio Grande do Norte in Brazil, up to the northeastern area of Argentina, and into central Paraguay, has lost
significant forest cover since 1945 (Saatchi et al, 2009:867; Richards, 2011: 343-344). Only 10 percent (Richards, 2011:344) of its original forest size of 1.3 million km$^2$ remains today, only 1 percent of which is in protected reserves (Laurence, 2009:1137). The land that has been deforested has been strongly linked to a booming export agriculture economy that is strongly linked to soy production.

Soybean production tripled in five years between 1975 and 1980 and then doubled again by 1990 (Richards, 2010:569). By 1995 there were approximately 800,000 hectares dedicated to soy production, by 2003 soy was being grown on 2 million hectares (Brown and Weisberg, 2007:5). Today, Paraguay is the fourth largest exporter and the sixth largest producer of soy in the world (Brown and Weisberg, 2007:5; Richards, 2011: 355). The influence of strong soy production yields in the agricultural economy led to a 15 percent GDP growth in 2010, which has since slowed down to 3.8 percent in 2011 and is expected to further contract in 2012 as many crops were affected by the drought of 2011/2012 (IMF, 2012). Intensive soy production and large agribusiness, in addition to deforestation and lack of ability to purchase land, are some of the most common reasons that farmers and campesinos (peasant/rural farmers) are being pushed off their land (Richards, 2011). The struggle for land access is ongoing throughout Paraguay, especially in the eastern part of the country where recent land clashes led to the deaths of 9 farmers and 6 police officers, and ultimately the impeachment of the president (Lambert and Nickson, 2013: 451).\(^2\)

\(^2\) Various web based news sources cite differing results regarding the official death toll of these land clashes. The BBC cites that six police officers and eleven landless peasants were killed – see: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-20750543
The expansion of agricultural-economic development, the rapid growth of land dedicated to products such as soybeans, large commercial agricultural producers, the colonization of land and historical exclusion of small-farmer organizations, and increased land prices have been the cause of the dismantling of campesino farming traditions (Galeano, 2010:102). Furthermore, the rapid economic change to an export-dominant agricultural system “symbolizes a model of national development dependent on the capital-intensive production agricultural-exports” (Tucker, 2012:5), and leaves small farmers to compete against large-scale producers. Farmers today are situated in these historical and present day structures that both directly and indirectly affect their ability to grow produce and access markets.

As the economy focuses on export-driven crop production and larger scale production methods, smaller-scale farmers face a number of consequences. Richards argues that in addition to the environmental problems that are associated with industrial models of agriculture in the Third World (decrease in genetic diversity, susceptibility to pests, and wide-scale soil degradation) there are also a large number of social impacts (2010:567). Farmers who are restricted to areas with poorer soil fertility may become more “susceptible to income losses due to instability in international commodity prices and/or unemployment” (Richards, 2010:567). I will discuss these consequences, and subsequent reactions, in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

The Stroessner Regime: A Brief History of Farmers’ Struggle with Land

Alfredo Stroessner took power in Paraguay through a coup in 1954 that led to a 35-year dictatorship (Folch, 2013; Hetherington, 2009; Nagel, 1999). During his time in power,
Stroessner influenced various colonization programs intended to develop the Eastern Frontier. The development of the Frontier favored the elite and family and friends of Stroessner and “exacerbated the maldistribution of land” (Nagel, 1999:152). This ill-distributed land, referred to as tierras malhabidas (ill-gotten land), totaled 8 million hectares and today makes up 1/3 of the total cultivated land in Paraguay (Lambert and Nickson, 2013:453).

During the 1950s, the Central Department was home to 46 percent of the total number of farms in eastern Paraguay, of which 64 percent were comprised of 5 hectares or less (Nickson, 1981:114). Clashes between large land holders and small land holders stemmed from unequal distribution of land, decreasing quality of soil as more demand for food production increased with the growing population of Asunción, and disagreements over land rights and boundaries (Nickson, 1981:115). In 1963, and in response to these clashes and the formation of peasant groups el Instituto de Bienestar Rural (IBR) was formed (see Hetherington, 2011; Nagel, 1999; Nickson, 1981). Its purpose was to re-locate squatters and peasant farmers from the Central Zone to the east and northern parts of Paraguay, create new colonies within relatively uninhabited lands in Paraguay and increase economic activities in the Eastern Frontier through land distribution systems that should have favored small farmers (Nickson, 1981:115, Nagel, 1999:152). Stroessner’s strategies, according to Nagel (1999), were twofold. On the one side was the intention of increasing export-oriented agriculture to strengthen the Paraguayan economy, and on the other were strategies intended to populate the uninhabited Eastern Frontier (Nagel, 1999:152). These growth strategies within Paraguay were responsible for a move away from traditional crop production to plantation crops, and contributed to non-agricultural
growth strategies such as the development of the Itaipú hydroelectric dam (Weiskoff, 1992:1531; see also Folch, 2013). However land distribution to small farmers was not well executed, and only the goal of expanding the economic production of the Eastern Frontier was ever achieved (Nickson, 1981).

Stroessner’s agricultural expansion strategies greatly impacted the Paraguayan agricultural landscape. Between 1956-1988 the amount of land dedicated to crop production expanded by more than six times while permanent pasture for livestock grew by 57 percent (Weiskoff, 1992:1532). During the same time, agricultural participation by the population increased from 835,000 to 2 million (Weiskoff, 1992:1532). As land changes continued and land in the eastern region became more accessible, state owned land that was part of the colonization program and intended for redistribution to small farmers decreased significantly (Galeano, 1994 as cited in Carter et al, 1996, p54). The extension of roads into the Frontier further provided access to the area within Paraguay and into Brazil, allowing for many foreigners to access and immigrate to the area. During the same time period many Brazilian nationals began to purchase land in Paraguay (Nickson, 1981:154). Increased land purchased by foreign buyers pushed land prices up, making land even more inaccessible to poor Paraguayans and further increasing the inequality gaps between land and non-land owners.

Although much can be written about this time in Paraguay’s history, for the purposes of my research it is important to understand the structural inequalities that small-farmers have been faced with since the early 1950s. Indeed, the favoring of large land holders and agribusinesses has been a common occurrence in Paraguay, and that programs and agencies (such as IBR) which were established to increase access to land
for smaller farmers, have in actuality been used to increase capitalist agriculture by a few large landholders (Nickson, 1981:131).

**Agricultural Production in Latin America: Small Farmer Entrepreneurs**

The current global agrifood system is a reflection of the “interconnected processes of agricultural industrialization, globalization, trade liberalization, advances in technology and consumer and policy concerns regarding food quality, safety and the environment” (Blandon, Henson, and Islam, 2009:251). Processes of complex agroindustrial development have occurred in both industrialized and developing countries, albeit at different rates and times. Latin America countries specifically, and in particular Paraguay, have seen the development of larger scale, industrialized, and highly mechanized agriculture at a rapid rate in the past two decades (see Blandon, Henson, and Islam, 2009; Berdegué, Balsevich, Flores, and Reardon, 2005; Reardon and Barrett, 2000). Vertical markets and procurement strategies of food production and transaction are increasingly replacing opportunities for smaller farmers to sell directly to consumers and sometimes restricting smaller scale farmers from selling to the buyers on the market altogether (Blandon, Henson, and Islam, 2009) Accompanying this move from traditional to more contemporary agrifood systems is the emerging presence of retailers who sell a wide variety of food and non-food items, and increasingly larger producers who are using contracts to secure shelf space for their products in these food retail institutions (Blandon, Henson, and Islam, 2009; Reardon and Berdegué, 2002; Reardon, Timmer, and Berdegué, 2004). Blandon, Henson, and Islam (2009) suggest that small-to-medium scale farmers are unable to participate in vertically coordinated agrifood markets, because the
high transaction costs that inhibit their participation. I will discuss these exclusionary processes, and how they relate to the experiences of participants, in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

Food production in Latin America is affected by both global and local forces that collectively challenge the historical understanding of agricultural production methods (Altieri and Toledo, 2011:593). The contrasting dual landscape of agricultural production in Latin America has redefined the significance of the role of agriculture. Export-oriented, highly competitive, and specialized agriculture is an important aspect of the growth of national economies. The focus on export-oriented crops, however, also brings with it economic, social, and environmental problems and is detrimental to traditional rural livelihoods (Altieri and Toledo, 2011:593). On the other end of the landscape, they argue, are the small-scale farmers whose population in Latin America makes up approximately 65 million (Altieri and Toledo, 2011:593). This group is made up of campesino farmers who produce for subsistence, and semi-commercial or commercial farms that are linked to local, national, and even international markets (Altieri and Toledo, 2011:594). Indeed, being a smaller-scale farmer does not restrict people to subsistence farming; commercial networks, although difficult to infiltrate, are an important part of the small-to-medium scale agricultural production line.

Farmers who are able to participate in localized marketing avenues are actively reducing the centralization and specialization (changing to one crop production methods, for example) of the trends of the agro-food system (La Tobe, 2001:182). The use of
localized markets, such as community share agriculture (CSA) or “100-mile”\(^3\) farmers’ markets, is mostly seen in North American and European countries, but the adoption of such ideologies would benefit small-to-medium throughout Latin America. The initiation of such projects, however, would require a specific environment that would support such endeavors, which would take time to establish. I will provide further discussion on the use of direct marketing in Chapter 5.

**Small-to-Medium Scale Farms in Paraguay**

In the 1980s, crop production in Paraguay was characterized by two extremes. On the one side was the large-scale and highly modernized cattle and soy bean industry, on the other was the small-to-medium scale sector that continued with traditional production methods and provided diversified crops for both home consumption and sale (Berry, 2010:66). Today, argues Berry, the structure has allowed for a “truly dual agricultural economy” with one side consisting of the few but very large landholders and producers of soy and cattle and on the other are small-producers who are hardly able to meet subsistence income levels (2010:67). In the middle of these two dualistic extremes are the smaller-to-medium scale producers who continue to be the principal producers of fruit and vegetables for both home consumption and sale (Berry, 2010:67).

In 2010, 30 percent of the active labor force in Paraguay was family oriented and characterized as small-scale agriculture (Galeano, 2010:101). While there is much potential for small-to-medium scale production in Paraguay, there are important factors

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3 In 2007 the book *The Hundred Mile Diet: a year of local eating* was published. Its authors restricted their diets to foods that were grown within 100-mile radius of their household. Since then, a wave of “100-mile” or locally based markets and food choices has become available.
that hinder the success and efficiency of small-producers throughout the country. These include: inadequate access to city market spaces, ineffective use of winter crops, ineffective fostering of entrepreneurial activities and cooperative action (Berry, 2010:80-81).

In the Central Department where most of the project participants live, apiculture, horticulture\(^4\), and fish farming are the dominant production activities (Galeano, 2010:11). The relative success of farmers who are located in this area can be attributed to good road access and markets in the city that provide some farmers a space to sell their products directly to customers or wholesalers, a benefit that is not available to many farmers who are located in more rural areas (see Finnis and Candia, 2011). Additionally, in the Central Department plot sizes are generally family run which allows for greater social capital and ensures a supply of workers (Galeano, 2010:120). I will elaborate on this in Chapter 4.

**Market Access for Small- and Medium-Scale Farmers**

The opportunity for SFEs to access the local and global markets is becoming more difficult. As traditional roles in the household change and purchasing power increases, the demand for processed and higher-value foods grows (Markelova et al, 2009:1, Reardon et al, 2004). For example, when women work outside of the home their time in the house becomes less, and the convenience of one stop shopping becomes more desirable. Additionally, self-storage units for these items, such as refrigerators, have also become a common occurrence throughout the homes of Latin America (Reardon et al, 2004).

\(^4\) For the purposes of this thesis horticulture refers to fruit and vegetable production.
2002), no doubt allowing for a switch from everyday shopping to weekly or bi-weekly shopping trips for consumers.

Changes in food purchase preferences, packaging, and retail sales have also been noted as a reason for the exclusion of small-scale farmers. Kristen and Sartorius (2002:504), in their work on small-scale farmers and participation in agribusiness, argue that changes to food distribution and production, such as food safety standards, handling, packaging, and storing techniques (such as refrigeration), are too costly for small and medium scale farmers to invest in and thus are at a disadvantage. Strict food regulations and the impacts that they can have on small producers from accessing mainstream markets are not exclusive to developing countries. Leitch, in an ethnographic study on lardo (cured fat) producers in Italy, noted similar exclusionary and restrictive actions cited as food safety regulations (2003:445-446). The rewards are significant for those small and medium-scale farmers who are able to participate in these networked marketing chains, as will be shown in Chapter 4 and 5.

Research by Finnis et al (2012) has examined small-scale subsistence farmers in the Piribebuy region of Paraguay who have cited difficulties as small-scale and primarily subsistence producers. Finnis et al’s (2012) preliminary analysis has shown that farmers’ production decisions and access to food stuffs are being affected by three main factors. The first is environmental change and how farmers’ perceive these changes as affecting how they make decisions in regard to what they plant. The second that is household food consumption and diets are shaped by the presence of food from urban areas. This is dietary delocalization (see Pelto and Pelto, 1983), a phenomenon that occurs when food consumption patterns change from locally produced food to food that is brought in from
elsewhere. The third factor is the ages of farmers, and the changing abilities of older farmers to produce in the same ways as they use to. Crops that are more labor intensive may not be continually planted if farmers are not able to keep up with the labor demands. Furthermore, community inaccessibility, combined with unpredictable weather patterns has made selling crops a challenge for some of the very small-to-medium farmers who are further from the main cities. I will further discuss the lack of market access for farmers in Chapters 4 and 5.

Farmers’ Markets and Direct Marketing Opportunities

Direct marketing, specifically farmers’ markets, provide an access point for small-farmers who have been left out of the agroindustry by supermarkets that are unwilling to sign contracts with small producers (Griffin and Frongillo, 2003:192). Farmers’ markets, defined as “the selling of foods and other items directly to the customer by the person who grew, reared, or produce the good” (La Trobe, 2010:182) can provide many beneficial opportunities to SFEs, participation in which can mean survival through the changes of the agro-food industry. Farmers’ markets can also provide a space for farmers to sell directly to the consumer, thereby avoiding middlemen who buy products at a cheaper rate then sell it at a higher price (Griffin and Frongillo, 2003:189). Furthermore, they allow farmers to meet the demands of their clientele by changing their production methods within a relatively short amount of time (Hunt, 2007:64). This benefits not only the farmer, but also ensures that the land that is used for the production of items sold at farmers’ markets is being controlled and managed by a different set of market forces than land that is used to produce for longer-supply chains (Hunt, 2007:64). Farmers who are
able to control a shorter supply-chain have more freedom to innovate and adopt practices
to meet the demands of their customers (Hunt, 2007:63). Similar findings were presented
by Smithers, Lamarche, and Joseph (2008), in their study on farmers’ markets throughout
Ontario where they explored the shared benefits that farmers and customers have, allowing farmers to retain control over the prices of their products and consumers to know where their food is coming from.

Hunt’s (2007) work on consumer and vendor interactions at eight farmers’ markets in Maine, USA, examined local identity and direct marketing characteristics of farmers’ markets. Hunt argued that food that is sold at farmers’ markets reflects a local identity that is not met by any other means (2007:54). Farmers’ markets can add value to farm sales through a short supply chain that can benefit small and localized farmers, as well as provide the potential to “generate social and environmental benefits for the community” (Hunt, 2007:54).

As a social space, farmers’ markets provide an alternative to smaller farmers who are often pushed out of the market by international trade agreements and wholesalers who prove to be relatively unprofitable to smaller producers (Stephens, 2008:134). The systematic nature of farmers’ markets, as outlined by Stephens, provides a constant state of change whereby different parts of the system are constantly reacting to the changes between both the operators of the market and also external influences, such as imported foods, climate, the local and international economy, and social preferences (2008:134). Additionally, Hunt’s work shows that the desire for vendors to sell at markets is motivated by the opportunity to interact directly with the consumer, the ability to make a higher profit, and the opportunity to control their own business transactions (2007:59).
Face-to-face encounters between producers and consumers are the basis of direct agricultural markets. Markets that provide agricultural producers with the opportunity to engage with their customers presents a counterpoint to the large-scale agroindustrial of food production and distribution that have infiltrated the global food economy (Hinrichs, 2000:295). In more industrial countries, farmers’ markets have grown exponentially in previous years and have provided a space for farmers and consumers to form reciprocal relationships. In developing countries, however, the increase in agricultural production for export has not allowed for the trend of direct marketing and thus the role for direct-marketing initiatives. This is especially true in Paraguay where there are not many opportunities that provide small farmers with the ability to sell their products.

A significant limitation in the current literature is the minimal research that has been done on “farmers’ markets” in Latin America. One reason is the difference in language and understanding of what a farmers’ market in North America looks like and what a farmers’ market in Latin America looks like. My experience in Paraguay has led me to believe that farmers’ markets as I understood them (as an alternative to shopping at a grocery story) was restricted to Agroshopping. Open-air markets, on the other hand, sell more than just farmers’ produce and are more common throughout the city of Asunción.

**Mercosur: The Common Market of the South**

In March 1991, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay followed established *Mercado Común del Sur* (the Common Market of the South), or Mercosur. With this they established free trade zones that had zero tariffs and non-tariff barriers, a common external tariff, and integrated economies (Manzetti, 1994:102). Berry suggests that
Paraguay is suffering from, “Dutch Disease Syndrome due to its combination of openness, strong comparative advantage in few exportables, and the very low employment creation in most of the export sector” (Berry, 2010:2). The size of the export sector, he argues, allows for an increased flow of imports, which leaves domestic production in competition with imported items (Berry, 2010:4). This particularly impacts smaller scale farmers who are not large enough to be part of the export market, and who rely on local markets to support their production. The decisions that farmers make, then, are dependent on rational economies of scale that make it somewhat profitable to be producing. In Chapter 4 and 5 I will examine farmers' attempts to increase economic profitability and secure their place in the market via product specialization, accessing niche markets, ensuring quality of product, engaging in alternative forms of agriculture, and working with cooperatives, family units, and building relations with neighboring farmers.

**Conceptual Frameworks**

I situate my participants within multiple structures that they have identified as influencing their daily lives as SFEs. More specifically I use Bryant and Bailey's (1997) actor-oriented approach within sub-discipline of political ecology “in order to understand how the behavior of actors operating in a variety of scales influence local interaction with resources” (Bury, 2008:308). That is, I examine the actors that influence the structures that SFEs are enmeshed and that further influence their actions with environment and non-environmental resources. As noted in the Introduction, I address farmer agency within broader market and government policy and their actions around farming, the
presence of imported and wholesale produce at the market, and the expansion and growth of supermarkets in Paraguay.

**Political Ecology as a Conceptual Framework**

Political ecology emerged in reaction to the 1960s and 1970s human ecology/ecological anthropology and the inadequate consideration of a political aspect of the human and environmental relationships that were being studied (Vayda and Walters, 1999). As defined by Blaikie and Brookfield, it “combines the concerns of ecology and a broadly defined political economy. Together this encompasses the constantly shifting dialects between society and land-based resources, and also within classes and groups within society itself” (1987:17). Those who write about and use political ecology as an approach to human-environment relations commonly cite this working definition. There are three main waves of changes in the approaches of political ecologists that I wish to highlight here.

In the 1980s political ecologists worked to show how environmental problems originated in social, political, and economic scales, and that human-environment relations are of “an iterative, dialectical and contradictory nature” (Bohle and Funfgeld, 2007:667). In its early stages, political ecologists focused mostly on vulnerable and marginalized populations in the Global South. The first wave was critiqued for not having a strong sense of politics and being too “radically pluralist” (Bohle and Funfgeld, 2007:667). Basset, for example, in a discussion of peasant-herder conflicts in the Ivory Coast, argued for “more rigorous analyses which link local level production processes and decision making with the larger political economy to explain these different experiences”
While Basset’s (1988) work is specific to herders and pastoralists of the Ivory Coast, the acknowledgement of the necessity of making these links can be adopted to multiple geographical areas where human-environment relations are politically influenced.

The second wave in the 1990s allowed for a more holistic approach to politics and incorporated analysis of power relations, institutions of civil society, and the social roles in regulation of and access to resources (Bohle and Funfgeld, 2007:667). It was during this time that Bryant and Bailey (1997) published their works that examined politicized environments, examining how conflicts over environmental resources are actually the result of power relations. Bryant and Bailey (1997) presented five approaches that can be used to address human-environment relations. While each of these approaches can be used alone, they can also be used together.

The first approach reflects more traditional studies of geography. In this approach, traditional examinations from human geography are used to understand how the physical environment is impacted by human actions (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:20).

The second approach focuses on the links between the political and the ecological aspects of research questions. In this approach, research examines how discourses within society are sometimes dominant over others, and how these power influences impact various actors in human-environment relationships (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:21).

The third approach is referred to as ‘regional’ political ecology and the “inter-linked political and ecological problems within the context of a specific geographical region” (1997:21). This approach allows for the consideration of variability, both in the environment and location, and the differing levels of resilience and sensitivity of the land.
The fourth approach explores “political-ecological questions in the light of socio-economic characteristics such as class, ethnicity, or gender” (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:23). In this approach explores local conflicts through the explanation of the presence of “capitalistic relations of production and class conflict” (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:24).

The fifth approach calls for the examination and inclusion of “interests, characteristics, and actions of different types of actors in understanding political ecology conflicts” (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:24). This is more broadly referred to as actor-oriented approach, and seeks to examine how various actors interact on different levels and who have differing aims and interests in a specific resource. Incorporating various actors provides a better understanding of struggles and the barriers to control that actors who are at lower scales of power have in securing human-environment relations that reflect their interests. Additionally, it allows us to address in depth the complexities that come along with these struggles and the differentiation in various localities and regions (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:24).

The third wave in the 2000s and to present day pushed for consideration of politicized environments and the emergence of liberation ecologies and violence in the struggle for environmental resource (Bohle and Funfgeld, 2007; Peet and Watts, 2004). Basset and Zimmerer (2003) called for a balanced approach to addressing political dimensions and environmental issues (ecology versus politics has been widely debated – see Vayada and Walter, 1997; Walker, 2005, 2007), an expansion into new environmental scales (that of urban and industrial spaces) and a move away from the previously common rural and developing settings, a more in depth approach into how the
“scales of social and ecological processes and their interactive effects on environmental problems and policies” (2003:1), and a continued discussion on methodological approaches in political ecology research. Today, however, Robbins (2011), asserts that the need for political ecology is greater than previous years, citing the increasing occurrence of environmental concerns are in need of political ecology attention. He calls for a focus on political ecology not as a method or theory, but rather as an “urgent kind of argument or text (or book, or mural, or movie, or blog) that examines winners and losers, is narrated using dialectics, begins and/or ends in a contradiction, and surveys both status of nature and stories about the status of nature” (2011:viii).

My plan for this thesis work was to work from the ground-up in order to tell the stories of the farmers I spoke with in Paraguay. I do this by using their stories and experiences as the voices and the narrative of my analysis. The actor-oriented approach that Bryant and Bailey (1997) present serves to ensure that the focus is on the farmers, and I use it to guide farmers’ voices to bring larger meaning and a broader picture to their stories. Furthermore, it allows me to show how actors shape structures. That is, I examine how market and government policy, imported and wholesale produce, and expansion of supermarkets are influencing the social, political, and economic environments of SFEs. After establishing these relationships, I explore how SFEs are acting in response to structures, specifically through niche markets and direct marketing initiatives, adaptations to production techniques, the use of specialized products and alternative forms of agriculture, and the use of cooperatives and social networks to strengthen the position of farmers within structures. These are further presented in Chapter 5.
**Actor-oriented Approach: Who are the actors?**

Bryant and Bailey (1997) identify five actors that play roles in environmental struggle, human-environment relations, resource access and control and environment related conflicts in the Third World. They are (1) The state, (2) Multilateral Institutions, (3) Businesses, (4) Environmental and Non-governmental Organizations, and (5) Grassroots Actors. Multiple actors can be acting simultaneously to gain or maintain control over various aspects of the environment.

**The State:** The actor-oriented approach asserts that actors pursue their own interests, and thus contribute to environmental change, but that the state has played the most significant role in determining how other actors are able to interact with the environment (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:46). In some cases the state acts as a control mechanism to protect the environment from individuals who are acting in their own interests but potentially causing harm for the greater good. That is, the origin of the state was an outcome of the “perceived failure” of individuals to act in socially acceptable and responsible ways (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:46). Of course this consideration of power and the discourse of determining what is socially acceptable or responsible, or even what is an appropriate use of the environment, is determined by those who are already in power. Bryant and Bailey point out that environmental management has often been obstructed by corruption within senior political leaders (1997:59).

**Environmental and Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGOs):** ENGOs emerge in response to the concerns of civic society surrounding human-environment relations

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5 I prefer the use of the words developed and under-developed or Global North and Global South when referring to “Third World” countries. However, in staying in line with the writings of Bryant and Bailey (1997), I will continue with the use of Third World for this specific discussion.
This, they say, is a reflection of the role that civil society has taken, and their interests in, the management of social and environmental health and wellbeing (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:125). The increasing role of civil-society is in response to the state’s declining ability to ensure the wellbeing of society and the environment. Although some ENGOs do exist in Paraguay (Fundación Paraguaya, for example) they were not identified as contributors to the decisions of my participants.  

**Multilateral Institutions and Businesses:** Multilateral institutions provide key contributions to the global capitalist economy and furthering its development in the early 20th century. Furthermore, it has contributed to the promotion of social and economic development via the use of technical and financial assistance (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:72). Businesses too have played a significant role in creating a politicized environment within the Third World (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:98) and thus can contribute to environmental change and the decisions that are made surrounding land use. The power and political ties that businesses have today are linked to globalized capitalist systems and the complex connections that have come with globalization processes. Due to these capitalistic tendencies, businesses are not always going to act in the interests of the environment, and rather will participate and contribute to systems that have potential to further environmental degradation and social inequality (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:98).  

The examination of Businesses and Multilateral Institutions could be used to analyze environmental change, resource use, and land distribution in Paraguay. The strong connections between the Rural Association of Paraguay (mostly representing large 

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6 Fundación Paraguaya – An organization that is working with farmers in Paraguay to “develop and implement practical, innovative and sustainable solutions which eliminate poverty and create decent living conditions for every family” - http://www.fundacionparaguaya.org.py/
cattle ranchers), the Paraguayan Soybean Association (representing 50 thousand commercial farmers who make up and control most of Paraguay’s soybean production) and the state (Lambert and Nickson, 2013:453) has meant that businesses related to agricultural exports and larger-scale production in Paraguay are going to act in their own interests for economic gain.

**Grassroots Actors:** Grassroots actors are systematically oppressed by those who are stronger or hold more power, such as businesses or the state and are identified as being “shifting cultivators, small-scale farmers, nomadic pastoralists, hunter-gatherers, poor urban dwellers [and] fishers” (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:151). In my own analysis, I am expanding on this definition to include SFEs. By doing this I recognize that although SFEs have higher levels of power than the landless peasants or subsistence agricultural producers of the more remote countryside, they are still in a position of marginality and vulnerability that is dictated by structural and power inequalities to market access and resource use. My analysis will examine how socio-economic restrictions have impacted the relationships of small and medium scale farmers with the environment and their adaptations to the exclusionary environment in which they are embedded.

The reaction and action of farmers in response to these structures is where I draw on the themes of agency and agents. Arguing that in spite and in light of these structures that actions that SFEs take is allowing them to employ a sense of power and control over their production methods and market access. With the complexities that come with localizing grassroots actors, it is essential to understand how adaptations are affecting livelihoods. In some circumstances, adaptation can increase workloads and time spent ensuring needs are met. This can mean basic chores take longer, leading to less time
spent on other activities (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:161). Alternative “social and economic ‘coping’ strategies” may take the form of selling off livestock during a drought or bad crop season or storing foodstuffs during good harvesting seasons (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:161).

With changes in power structure and control over resource use or allocation comes the elimination of traditional knowledge and management activities and the integration of grassroots actors into systems in which their control and agency has been altered (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:100). The change of control over environments of which grassroots are the most affected, leaves one actor (the state or Businesses, for example) in a position of control and hierarchy over the other. The loss of the ability to be in charge of and determine livelihoods not only has implications for everyday activities of actors, but can also impact more complex traditional and cultural norms. Groups whose identity is somewhat embedded in their relationship and use of their surrounding environment are in a position of social and economic loss of when they lose control over their environments and the livelihood opportunities that can be provided through these relationships. Furthermore, when actors are in a struggle with more powerful actors they are sometimes forced to change their actions or forgo certain opportunities in order to maintain livelihood standards. As such, it is important to also consider how struggles of power and control within human-human relationships within human-environment relationships form a cause-and-effect relationship, opening up different avenues for agency and grassroots actors to act within these relationships.
Structure and Agency

Agency, as broadly defined by Ahern, is the “socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (2001:110); that is, the actions and decisions that people make are in relation to forms of power that they are engaged and exposed to (Ortner, 2001). Because people are their own agents, the interpretations and formulations of agency are not rigid in nature, and rather hold a level of plasticity, similar to individuals or groups who are able to change their opportunities to enact agency. As such, Ortner (2001) differentiates between two modalities of agency. The first is related to the idea of domination and resistance as forms of power and the second is related to intention and “people’s projects in the world and their ability to both formulate and enact them” (Ortner, 2001:78). Agency, then, can be seen as important to both domination and resistance; when someone has more power or agency they may be seen as having domination. Likewise, resistance to certain forms of domination is defined as ‘power agency’ (Ortner, 2001). That agency of power is contrasted by what Ortner defines as the agency of intentions, or that of people's projects, purposes, and desires (2001:79).

Agency of intentions is used to examine the actions that people undertake as a reflection of their own terms and categories of value that are shaped by local cultural contexts and norms (Ortner, 2001). Ortner argues that all humans have a sense of “routine practice” (2006:134), which is shaped by the sociocultural environment. Routine practices are not static human responses; rather in part reflect structural contexts that humans are embedded in. Intentionality, then, includes multiple states – “cognitive and emotional at various levels of consciousness” (Ortner, 2006:134) that together are aimed at an intentional or desired end purpose.
The structural contexts will be dependent on the various social, cultural, and environmental surroundings that vary throughout present day geographies and history. The structures will shape everyday reactions and practices, and in turn, will also affect agents in their everyday lives. Agents, and their negotiated position of power are shaped by structure and are shaping structures at the same time, and thus should be regarded not as static, but rather in a constant process of change (Sewell, 1992:4). Furthermore, argues Ortner, cultural and historical influences on agents, and thus their agency, means that humans living in various places and times will demonstrate and enact various forms of agency (2006:136 -137). Thus, the agency of intention needs to be understood in both in historical contexts and in contemporary practices. Structure will also affect the intentions of actors, and thus agency of intentions is not synonymous with the concept of free will. Therefore actions reflect the ways people are embedded in structurally defined and established social categories, levels of power, and societal makeup (Ortner, 2001:80) and the intentions of people or actors must be interpreted within a culturally specific structure. Power relations, and agents control or power over certain social and cultural environments will also need to be understood in order to understand intentionality. The actors that Bryant and Bailey (1997) discuss are part of this larger structure of power and control, and as will be shown, influence the ways in which farmers employ agency.

Similarly, Eric Wolf (1989) discusses four modes of power. The first sees power as the characteristic of the person and the ability of a person to have power. This understanding of power, however, does not show how this power will play out. The second form of power is the ability of one to impose their power on another. This can manifest itself in both interpersonal relationships and also in group dynamics and social
action. The limitation of this understanding of power is that although it shows interaction amongst individuals, it does not provide a clear explanation of the environment in which these forms of power manifest themselves. The third avenue of power is the power to control social environments that will influence the actions of others. Wolf calls this type of power “tactical or operational power” (Wolf, 1989:586). The fourth mode he describes as structural power, a mode of power that “not only operates within settings or domains but that also organizes and orchestrates the settings themselves and that of the specifics of the distribution and directions of energy” (Wolf, 1989:586). This mode of structural power, argues Wolf (1989), allows for certain controls over social capital and labor. It shapes social actors, the social environment, and the ways in which people in society are able to function within it (Wolf, 1989:587). Wolf asserts that understanding and acknowledging these modes of power “delineate how the forces of the world impinge upon the people we study” (Wolf, 1989:587), and I add that an understanding of these structures is necessary in order to make sense of the decisions they make and the ways they act in the social, economic, political, and physical environments that they live in.

**Political Ecology, Structures, and Agency: Complimentary Conceptual Frameworks**

Political ecologists look at various actors responses to human-environment relationships in light of power, structure, politics, social statuses, and culture that influences those relationships. This includes the examination of power structures and who creates discourses or controls the environment in question. In understanding these power relationships, political ecologists are better equipped to understand that subsequent actions of various actors which they are researching (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:37).
Relationships can be understood in somewhat of a cyclical manner. For example, by examining the state’s regulations and impact on Businesses, and then examining the impacts of Businesses on individuals, one can make connections between the decisions of power holders and those individuals in society who may be marginalized. Actions are impacted by larger power structures in which we are all interconnected. A main question of my research is how smaller-to-medium scale farmers are reacting to, or acting in, these broader power and political structures. In my analysis chapters I seek first to examine how smaller-to-medium scale farmers see themselves within broader political and power structures in Paraguay, in relation to the state, larger-farmers, and wholesalers, and then examine the actions these farmers are taking in order to achieve some forms of power or agency within these structures.

Before I begin my analysis chapters, I turn to a discussion of the research locations, participants and methodology.
Chapter 3

Field Site Background and Methodology

This chapter will discuss my experiences and actions while conducting fieldwork in Paraguay. My data collection was ethnographic in nature and in-depth semi-structured interviews provided the bulk of my data. I conducted interviews at three city markets and during multiple farm visits. In total, I spent 9 weeks in Paraguay collecting data for this thesis project and had unique experiences, which included being in the country during a congressional coup d’etat. This chapter discusses my time in the field and will further elaborate on my methodological choices.

Field Site Background

Paraguay is a landlocked country that shares borders with Argentina, Bolivia, and Brazil. It has a vast river system that makes up some of the rivers that feed into the River Plate Basin on the border of Argentina and Uruguay. This is also the location the Guaraní Aquifer, one of the world’s largest fresh-water reservoirs (World Bank, 2012). The country is made up of two diverse physiographic regions; the Chaco in the central and northwest, and the Oriental region in the central and southeast (Glatsle and Stosiek, 2006). The Chaco makes up 60 percent of Paraguay’s landmass and is bordered by the Río Paraguay in the East, which runs through the middle of the country and then North along the border of Brazil. The Pilcomayo River runs along the Southern border with Argentina and Bolivia in the Northwest (Glatsle and Stosiek, 2006). The Oriental region, which makes up the other 40 percent of the country, is located in the southeastern part of the country to the East of the Río Paraguay. This area is made-up of three distinct areas:
the Río Paraguay Valley, the Central Plateau, and the Alto Paraná (Bertoni and Gorman, 1973 as cited in Glatsle and Stosiek, 2006). The Río Paraguay Valley is a low-lying plain and is home to almost half of the population of Paraguay. It is location of the capital city, Asunción, where the majority of my research was conducted, and where the three main agricultural zones are located.

**Figure 1: Map of Paraguay, source: nationsonline.org**

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**Asunción: Demographics, Food Retail, and Transportation**

Paraguay has a population of 6.5 million (World Bank, 2011). Asunción, the capital of Paraguay, has a population of 540,000 and an additional 1.9 million in the greater
Asunción areas (CIA, 2012). Many municipalities, such as Luque, San Lorenzo, San Antonio, and Villa Elisa are within the Central Department and connect the city both socially and economically to the capital. Barrios within Asunción divide the city into smaller communities that those who live in them claim identity to.

The historic downtown provides a clear example of the contrast between rich and poor and reflects the inequalities within the country as a whole. The Presidential Palace, museums, well-kept parks, fine dining restaurants, and up-scale hotels provide the business district and those from out of town a space to indulge in modern lifestyles. Just beyond the Presidential Palace, however, you will see poor neighborhoods with slum-like living conditions. The parks are often home to homeless members of the population and “tent cities” can sometimes be found in downtown parks.7

City buses are frequent in Asunción, and although they are a little worse for wear, they provide relatively cheap and accessible (if you are fully able-bodied) way of getting around the city. They also go beyond the city boundaries, and with just a few transfers one can make it far outside of the downtown core. The vastness of the bus system in Paraguay allows members of the population to travel far distances, and provides for one option for people to transport goods around the city. For example, for one of my farm visits I travelled to the city of J.A. Saldivar, which is approximately 40 km away from the city center and only requires one bus transfer.

7 It must be noted that there was an apparent “cleanup” of these tent-cities and upon my return in the summer of 2012 there was not anyone living in the parks downtown. Just beyond the park, however, and in clear view, were wooden structures that appeared to be relatively new. My assumption, after further inspection and conversation with people who lived in Asunción, was that the people who were living in the park had been moved a block away to this location.
Access to food appears to be relatively easy in Asunción if you are willing to shop at the many stalls that line the streets. Many supermarket chains are also scattered across the city, and if you have the time to travel by bus or a vehicle you can go to Mercado de Abasto, Abasto Norte, San Lorenzo Market, or Mercado No. 4. All four markets provide access to food, both fresh and packaged, and provide some of the lowest prices in the city. Likewise, the city is scattered with small roadside vendors that provide fresh produce to passers by. In addition to fresh and packaged foods all of these locations provide members of the population access to traditional herbal remedies that play a prominent role in Paraguayan culture and identity (see Millman, 2012). These sites represent a large informal sector that plays an important function in the livelihood of many Paraguayans. For those who are able to contribute more of their earnings to food purchases, there are the supermarkets (such as Stock, Super Seis, and Real) and Agroshopping.

**Data-collection Locations**

**Mercado de Abasto:** Mercado de Abasto is located just off the main road of Avenida Defensores del Chaco near the city center of Asunción. It is situated on 11 hectares that are divided into *bloques*, or large warehouses, providing a separation of national and international produce as well as *mayoristas* (wholesalers) and *minoristas* (smaller retailers). Its original intention was to provide a space in the city that was just for mayoristas, but due to demand, it also opened up a few *bloques for minoristas.*

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8 An administrator at DAMA provided a brief history of Mercado de Abasto.
Mercado de Abasto is a fascinating market to walk around; you can watch the migration of produce from wholesalers to re-sellers and it is easy to tell the difference between who is shopping for personal consumption and who is buying with the intent to re-sell or use in restaurants. The most southwestern entrance is surrounded by large mounds of citrus fruits, cabbage, squash, mandioca (cassava), and watermelons. In the eastern part of the market smaller stalls where the majority of vendors are selling the same products for generally the same prices. It is clear who is re-selling produce, although it is harder to tell who is selling both their own produce and other produce that they have bought. Many participants who sell their produce will have a variety of verduras or greens, which include mostly lettuce, onions, cabbage, spinach, swiss chard, kale, and a variety of herbs such as cilantro and parsley, and so their stalls tend to stand out from the others.

Huge blocks of national produce are set up between the main southwestern entrance and the main northeastern entrance. These blocks are clearly labeled and provide customers with the option of choosing national or international products. Throughout these blocks are smaller stores, butcheries, shops that sell eggs or milk, and little cafes that sell sandwiches and refreshments. There are also grocery stores that provide consumers with packaged and prepared goods and hardware stores that provide a variety of items for home repair and gardening. At Mercado de Abasto you can find almost anything you want; there is even one small store that sells clothing.

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9 Watermelons were predominantly seen in during October 2012 because of seasonality.
10 I was told that due to multiple harvesting times per year for greens, that they were almost always available locally in the market.
11 Bloques translates into Blocks in English, however, these buildings were more like warehouses with open walls.
In the center of the market is a large car park where both car and truck taxies can be hired to take buyers produce to their desired destination. There are larger transport trucks that carry produce to and from the market. In this same area there is a small chapel, a small reflection of the Catholicism prominent in this country.

Outside of each block are multiple dumpsters where produce that is deemed unfit to sell is discarded. It is not uncommon to see people searching through the dumpsters looking for produce that is salvageable; this is a visible example of the inequality that occurs in this country. These dumpsters, along with the many trucks, butchers, and litter contribute to the unpleasant smells that accompany this market. Like in most of the city, stray dogs and cats are common, picking through the leftovers and running free.

Along the streets in front of Mercado de Abasto are many buses that stop to drop off and pick up passengers and produce. Mercado de Abasto is the busiest in the morning, and I have been told that some farmers begin to arrive as early as 3:30 am to start setting up and greeting the first customers.

Figure 2: Mercado de Abasto - Wholesale Fruits
**Agroshopping:** Agroshopping is a small weekly market located in Asunción proper that is open every Tuesday from 8AM-7PM. Physically and socially it is very different from the other markets. It is located in Shopping Mariscal Lopez, a ritzy shopping mall that is celebrated its 16th birthday in September of 2012\(^\text{12}\), and is located in a wealthy neighborhood of Asunción. Agroshopping is currently in its 14th year, and is situated in an underground parking lot. It is cleaner and better organized than other markets, and has a board at the entrance that lists the average prices of specific products.

All of the vendors at Agroshopping are in the same uniform – green hats and aprons white t-shirts, all with the same Agroshopping logo. At this market you have a variety of vendors and products to choose from, some of the best produce in the city, and the interaction with farmers provides a social atmosphere where customers can ask questions about the origins and production methods of each item. Adolescent boys, who wear orange aprons and orange hats, can be hired for a small fee to carry your purchases. They carry wicker baskets that are adorned with the Agroshopping logo. Outside you can see sellers who are not permitted into Agroshopping – most likely re-sellers who sell smaller quantities of produce on the city streets. The wealth of this market is also seen in the luxury cars that drive through the parking garage, dropping off and picking up patrons. Signs are posted above each display, either indicating their farm or business name, and produce is displayed on wooden tables draped in yellow and green tablecloths. This is true for more than just the produce, and vendors who specialize in cheese, meat, baked goods, specialty oils and sauces, and herbal remedies all have something to tell you about their items. Patrons are exposed to a wide variety of products that make shopping at

\(^{12}\) This was noted on a large banner that was set up outside of the mall.
the grocery store seem dull and boring. However, Agroshopping is an up-scale market, and only those who can afford its products are able to shop here. This is revealed not only in the prices of the goods but also through the exclusive set up of the market.

The difference in wealth is also observed in the patrons who frequent the market. I heard a variety of languages during my time at Agroshopping, including German, English, French, Japanese, and Arabic. This market is clearly catered to the wealthy, and protects this through rules and regulations of vendors. Both Finnis and Candia (2011) and Millman (2012) noted similar observations during their fieldwork.

Figure 3: Agroshopping – Vendors selling produce on a Tuesday

**Abasto Norte:** Abasto Norte opened in the summer of 2012 and is a well designed, clean, and convenient market. It located in Limpio, a city outside of Asunción in the Central Department. It is easily accessible by bus as it is located on the main street of General Elizardo Aquino. Similar to Mercado de Abasto, Abasto Norte is divided into **bloques** that inform patrons of what kind of products they will be able to find there. For example, **bloques** A1, A2, and C are specifically for fruit and vegetable wholesalers, B and C are dedicated to eggs, dairy products, and baked goods, whereas D is dedicated to other shopping needs such as pharmacy, shoes, clothing, and banks. According to their website Abasto Norte is “aimed at providing quality services that meet the most demanding customer with fresh produce at competitive prices, with the development of fruit and
vegetable producer in the marketing of food and related products to the family table.”

Abasto Norte is a unique market and reflects, in many ways, the cohesion of traditional and modern market sale spaces. In blocks A1 and A2 there is the option of using grocery carts, security guards watch the entryways, and an upstairs loft has a cafeteria space where patrons can sit and have a snack or a meal. The shops that sell dairy, eggs, and meat products are spacious, clean, and enclosed with large windows that patrons can look into. In a sense it is a combination of the chaotic Mercado de Abasto and sophisticated space of Agroshopping.

Figure 4: Abasto Norte –Image from -
https://www.facebook.com/abastonorte/photos_stream

13 http://www.abastonorte.com.py
Fieldwork

Identifying and Locating Participants: Conducting research in market spaces allowed me to be both a consumer and a researcher opened up opportunity for me to ask vendors about the origins of their produce and whether they themselves grew the items. I had two criteria when locating participants: the first was that if participants were vendors, they had to have grown at least some of the produce they were selling, and the second was that they had to be relatively smaller scale farmers, which, as noted in Chapter 2, meant farming 20 hectares or less.¹⁴

Plot sizes were limitations to the kinds and amount of produce that I observed at each stall. There were many times that farmers indicated they grew a certain product and sold it during certain seasons. For example, many participants indicated that they grew tomatoes on their farm and sold them in October when they were in season. However, because I conducted fieldwork during two seasons in Paraguay (Winter and Spring in the Southern hemisphere), tomatoes were not always at the stalls of farmers. It is for this reason that I could not use the number of products as an indicator to qualify a farmer as a participant. Rather, I would approach each vendor and ask whether or not they were the growers of all or some of their products. At all three markets this was a relatively easy sampling technique. At Mercado de Abasto and Abasto Norte smaller vendors were all grouped together in the same area of the market, making it easy to locate farmers and wholesalers. In areas that were more clearly wholesale I was not able to locate many growers of the products, except for one stall where I came across a farmer who was part

¹⁴ I did speak with a few farmers who worked with more than 20 hectares of land, but considered themselves to be smaller-scale producers relative to the larger farms in the eastern part of the country.
of a larger cooperative. At Agroshopping it was fairly easy to locate farmers. This was due to the nature of the market, which dedicated itself to the celebration of fresh produce. Likewise, because it was the smallest of the three markets it was easy to keep track of those who I spoke with and who agreed to an interview and those who did not wish to participate.

To keep track of people I spoke with I walked around each market with a map that I had constructed myself with the aid of Google satellite maps and made note of each place I had been. From here, I would ask each vendor I came across whether they were both a farmer and a vendor. To avoid bias I attempted to speak with most of the vendors at each market. With the exception of Agroshopping, it was relatively difficult to find growers at the larger markets, as re-sellers who often bought wholesale products ran smaller stalls. As I will discuss in the concluding chapter, a limitation to my research is the small sample size. As such, my findings are representative of the farmers whom I spoke with, but are considered to be relatively preliminary.

**Data Collection Methods**

*Participant Observation:* I used a variety of data collection methods, all of which provided me with insight into the daily lives of small and medium scale farmers and market vendors. My data collection was ethnographic in nature and multiple market visits, regardless of whether interviews were conducted, allowed for confirmation of what I was observing. Participant observation was used to gather supportive data and open up opportunities for conversation. I spent time in the markets observing the surroundings and had a list of questions that I would ask myself. Some of these included: Who are the
people that are selling here?, What are the vendors like?, How informal or formal is this market?, What are the sights, sounds, and smells?, and What differences do I notice being a customer at each individual market? I also recorded the prices of goods, variety, and attempted to record the number of vendors, which proved to be more difficult at places as large as Mercado de Abasto. I took on the role of being a customer and engaged with farmers about the origins of their products and whether they themselves were the grower. These conversations enabled me to gain an understanding of what types of products were generally grown in Paraguay and which products were more likely to be imported. For example, I was told that Paraguay does not produce very many apples, and the ones that it does produce do not generally make it to markets but go straight into the processing industry to make juices. If I came across someone who was selling apples, I then able to make an educated assumption they were re-selling them, but I would inquire, just to be sure.

In some circumstances farmers did not want to participate in an interview in the marketplace and invited me to visit their farms. In total I made 3 farm visits during my data collection period. While visiting the farms I was usually given a tour of the area while conducting the interview. Combining these two experiences allowed the farmer to point out specific areas of their farm that they felt were important for me to see while engaging in conversation about my general inquiries of agriculture in Paraguay. During one farm visit, I was constantly being handed strawberries that were being picked fresh from the field. The enthusiasm for farmers to show me their products demonstrated a sense of pride of their fields that I would otherwise not be able to have seen, other times I would sit with the farmer and drink tereré, at which point I was moving beyond just
interviewing the farmer and rather engaging in a social and cultural interaction that is common throughout Paraguay and neighboring countries.\textsuperscript{15}

\textit{Semi-structured interviews:} I conducted 16 semi-structured interviews as my main data collection method (see Table 1). Interviews were conducted mostly in Spanish, with the aid of my research assistant, Daniela. Although I have a working knowledge of the Spanish language, I am not at a level of fluency that would allow me to conduct an interview while gaining the most understanding of what the participant was saying. In some cases, participants preferred to speak in Guaraní, and so Daniela Aguero, my research assistant, would translate from English into Guaraní. Daniela was vital to my research, and I am thankful for her knowledge of Paraguayan agriculture and for her research experience.

The questions that I asked were designed to encourage participants speak about their experiences being a small-to-medium scale farmer in Paraguay, as well as their ability to get their produce to market and the role that the market played in their everyday life. These questions addressed the benefits and struggles of selling in the urban market spaces, the opportunities that SFEs have to get their products to the market, their relationship with the government, and how they are adapting or dealing with climate change.\textsuperscript{16} See Appendix 1 for list of interview questions.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Tereré} is a cold drink infused with \textit{yerba mate}. It is seen all over Paraguay and other Latin American countries acting as a social drink that is shared between friends. It is consumed through a mate straw, a close ended straw with holes designed to prevent the mate leaves from entering the mouth of the drinker.

\textsuperscript{16} Questions pertaining to climate change were added to my list of interview questions after many farmers commented on how it was affecting them. It became an important question that enriched my data immensely.
**Secondary Data Collection:** I used multiple resources to supplement my data collection while in Paraguay. This included accessing physical material from libraries, pamphlets, and price sheets that were provided to me from Mercado de Abasto as well as conducting secondary interviews with people who did not fit the criteria of a main participant but who were knowledgeable on small farmer and market spaces in Paraguay. Secondary interviews provided more in-depth insight into issues such as research, politics, and government involvement.

While on a walk through the downtown core of Asunción, I stumbled upon an agricultural library that provided secondary data into the many programs that are established for small-to-medium scale farmers and agricultural projects throughout the country. Finally, a variety of newsletters, reports, and pamphlets that I picked up at various locations provided additional insight into agricultural programs in Paraguay.

**Ethical Consideration:** Ensuring confidentiality amongst my participants was of importance throughout the whole of my research process. I applied and received clearance to conduct my research from the Research Ethics Board (REB) at the University of Guelph. The Universidad Nacional de Asunción did not require me to have secondary ethics approval. I took multiple steps to inform participants of the nature of the project and of their rights to withdraw from the project or refuse to answer questions they did not feel comfortable with. I obtained oral consent from every participant and provided him or her with a copy of my consent forms that had been approved by the REB. The consent form had been translated into Spanish with the help of my research assistant. My
The project was not considered to be high risk, and I feel that any risk that was posed for the participant is outweighed by future benefits from collecting this data.

I collected my data via voice recorder and handwritten notes. In both cases I ensured that the data was protected when I did not have them on my person. The apartment hotel that I stayed at while in Paraguay had a safe box in the room, where I kept notes, the voice recorder, and my external hard drive. Additionally, my computer is password protected and was never left on when I was not in my room. Upon my return to Guelph, I was careful when transporting my data and as often as I could would not take it out of my place of residence.

**Breakdown of Participant Information**

I conducted 16 interviews, including 3 farm visits, an additional 3 secondary interviews with two faculties at the Universidad Nacional de Asunción and one with the administration at Mercado de Abasto. I was only able to conduct one interview at Abasto Norte. It was very much a space of re-sellers and I was only able to locate two farmers. Due to scheduling issues only one farmer was available for an interview.

As noted in the Introduction, I have chosen to use the term small farmer entrepreneurs to describe participants. Many farmers owned less than 20 hectares of land and so I assumed them to be small farmers. However, one farmer (Hector) indicated that he did not identify as a small farmer and that small farmers were those who produced on a subsistence level and lived in more rural areas. He perceived himself to be a medium-scale farmer. To avoid the confusion between subsistence farmers and small farmers who
produce for commercial sale, I use the term small farmer entrepreneurs to refer to the participants in my research.

**Table 1: Participant Breakdown**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agroshopping</th>
<th>Mercado de Abasto</th>
<th>Abasto Norte</th>
<th>Farm Visits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Interviews</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Farm Size</td>
<td>1.75 hectares</td>
<td>2.5 hectares</td>
<td>1 hectare</td>
<td>4.6 hectares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Products Sold at Stalls</td>
<td>Lettuce, Cabbage, Spinach, Onions, Green and Red Pepper, Beets, Radish, Broccoli, Cauliflower, Cassava, Squash, Strawberries, Herbs, Cucumber, Apples, Oranges, Bananas,</td>
<td>Tomatoes, Lettuce, Herbs, Swiss Chard, Spinach, Onions, Green and Red Peppers, Potatoes, Cassava, Strawberries, Melon, Cucumber, Squash,</td>
<td>Lettuce, Onions, Bananas, Pineapple, Melon, Tomatoes, Green and Red Peppers, Honey</td>
<td>Herbs, Tomatoes, Strawberries, Onions, Beets, Squash, Lettuce, Cabbage, Radish, Cauliflower, Corn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research and Unexpected Issues in the Field**

In June of 2011, I traveled to Paraguay to make connections with the neighborhood of San Antonio, establish a research project on urban and peri-urban agriculture, engage with faculty at the Universidad Nacional de Asunción and set up my research for my fieldwork for the summer of 2012. In June 2012, I left for two and half months of
fieldwork. Upon my arrival I was notified that there had been flooding in San Antonio due to increased water levels in the Río Paraguay and that many community members had moved out of the area. It was difficult to find people still living and producing in this area. The area had been badly damaged by the flooding; houses were boarded up, debris of tiles and cement were piled through roadways, and extensive water damage could be seen on the houses.

Given the situation and state of the area, and the lack of potential participants, I realized that the project was no longer viable. I first looked for a new neighborhood where I could continue with my planned research on urban and peri-urban agriculture, but it became clear that there were no similar neighborhoods that met my research requirements in the greater Asunción area. Finally, I changed my research focus completely. I submitted new forms to the Research Ethics Board (REB) at the University of Guelph on June 21, 2012, and I received ethics clearance for the new project on June 29th, 2012.

While all of these changes in my research were occurring, there were larger events happening in the country that impacted the social, economic, and political environments in Paraguay. Conflict between landless peasants and police in the eastern province of Canindeyú erupted on June 15th, 2012 and in total, six police officers and eleven landless farmers were killed (Lambert and Nickson, 2013:452). This event buzzed through media outlets and was the topic of discussion in many of the markets that I visited. Due to the location of the conflict I did not feel that it would influence my ability

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17 The Río Paraguay (Paraguay River) runs through the entire country of Paraguay, bordering Brazil at the Northeastern part of the country, Argentina to the most Southwestern part of the country, and separates the Northwestern part of Paraguay from the most Southeastern.
to do research. However, the week that followed proved to be a more difficult environment in which to conduct research when President Lugo was impeached in a congressional coup d’état. During this week and the one to follow, it became clear that due to these political uncertainties I would have to cut my research trip short, with the hope of returning in the fall. Prior to my early return home, I managed to conduct 10 primary interviews, two secondary interviews, and two farm visits. Upon my return to Canada, I examined my data to conduct a preliminary analysis to examine reoccurring themes and re-structure my interview questions. In the Fall of 2012, I returned to Paraguay for three weeks with revised interview questions and continued my data collection at all three markets. During this time I conducted six primary interviews, one secondary interview, and one farm visit.

_The Impeachment of President Lugo_

On June 21, 2012, President Fernando Lugo was formally impeached shortly after a clash between landless peasants and the police on June 15, 2012. Lugo, who was the first Liberal party leader to be elected into presidency after almost 60 years of Colorado leadership (including the dictatorship of Stroessner), was impeached on the fault of “‘poor performance functions’ (mal desempeño de sus funciones)” (Lambert and Nickson, 2013:451). The Colorado Party, which, in contrast to Lugo’s 90 percent approval ratings by the public, heavily opposed his proposed policies in Congress and had already challenged Lugo’s presidency. Lugo’s promised deconstruction of institutionalized and governmental corruption fell within three main categories: land, taxation, and the judiciary (Lambert and Nickson 2013:451). However, the majority of
seats in Congress still belonging to the Colorado party with their strong relationship and alliance with the Rural Association of Paraguay and the Paraguayan Soybean Association (Lambert and Nickson 2013:453), restricted Lugo’s ability to make any significant systemic changes and the majority of his efforts were defeated. Considering the deep political corruption within Paraguay, it was surprising that the impeachment of Lugo was not based on more significant accusations (Lambert and Nickson, 2013:452). Rather, he was charged on five counts of poor performance and the inability to address or control the rural insecurities that had occurred just a week prior to him being ousted, in what has become known to been the clashes in Curuguaty (Lambert and Nickson, 2013:452).

During his presidency, Lugo called for the re-allocation of land and wealth in order to decrease the gross inequality amongst Paraguayan citizens. All of his attempts to do so were thrown out by Congress, of which almost all members belong to the small number of land-holding elite in the country (Lambert and Nickson, 2013:453). It is no surprise, then, that when Lugo attempted to deconstruct the inequality, which included an attempt to redistribute the 8 million hectares (the tierras malhabidas) that were unequally distributed during the Stroessner regime, that he was targeted. The close ties between those in Congress, and thus those who were voting on the potential reformations of tax, land distribution, and judiciary proceedings, influenced government officials to vote against such reforms (Lambert and Nickson, 2013:453). It becomes clearer then, that the impeachment of Lugo for issues that seem miniscule are related to the wealth of the large land-holding elite who hold power in Congress (and poverty and vulnerability for the majority of the population). The structural inequality that keeps poor and smaller sized farmers in a place of vulnerability, seems like an impossible issue to address and turn
around. Indeed, when the president who is attempting such reforms is impeached in a trial that did not even meet the constitutional criteria and was essentially illegal, and when laypeople who are fighting for their rights are killed without repercussion, it is very hard to see positive opportunities for growth amongst smaller-scale farmers who rely on their production and sales for their livelihoods. This context helps us understand the actions that smaller scale farmers are taking as they negotiate their place within this broader structure of inequality and violation of basic human rights.
Chapter 4

Farming In The Midst of Politicized Environments: An Actor-Oriented Approach to Small-to-Medium Scale Farming and Market Access

In this chapter, I will explore how farmers' actions are influenced by the experiences and contexts of SFEs’ ability to sell at city markets and engage in direct-marketing initiatives. Specifically, I focus on three main structures that impact SFEs’ ability to sell their products directly to consumers. They are: (1) Access to resources and farmer-government relationships, where I consider the local dimensions of the politicized environment in Paraguay, and the barriers and exclusionary measures farmers see as preventing them from accessing market spaces, (2) the presence of imported produce in Paraguay and the impact that this has on farmers to sell local items at the market, and (3) the growth of supermarkets and the private sector expansion of supermarkets in Paraguay, and how this has contributed to the exclusion of SFEs and created even more barriers to markets. Within these four areas I examine the relationships with these structures that farmers have expressed and show how their decisions are influenced through their embeddedness within these structures. As mentioned in Chapter 2, my analysis will use an actor-oriented approach (Bryant and Bailey, 1997) to examine how SFEs are acting within a structure of unequal agricultural power relations and production in Paraguay. This chapter also sets up my discussion in Chapter 5, which considers farmer agency in overcoming these barriers.
“I always work alone”: Access to Resources and Government and Small-to-medium Farmer Relations

The agricultural sector in Paraguay is divided both by the size of farms as well as the geographical location within the country. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the most populated areas of the country are located east of the Paraguayan river. Forty percent of Paraguay’s landmass makes-up this region and is home to 98 percent of the population (DGEEC, 2003 as cited in Berry, 2010, p.63). As of 2000/01 26 percent of land in Paraguay was owned by 98 percent of the population, meaning that 2 percent of the population owned 74 percent of Paraguayan land (Berry, 2010:89).

Farm size in Paraguay determines the resources that landowners can access. Berry (2010:73) discusses how those who own large tracts of land (larger than 50 hectares) are more likely to have opportunities to access credit, support from government organizations and agencies, and will have greater access to infrastructure, research, and development. As smaller farmers are located near the major cities, the significance of proximity to city markets for small-farmers selling their items is evident. However, regardless of geographical location and proximity to cities, smaller farmers are still at a disadvantage in comparison to large farmers who have far more access to credit, technology and new production methods, extension services or research and development. In this sense SFEs in Paraguay are part of a larger structure that is dominated by large-scale landholders, agribusiness, and a government that promotes and supports the production of crops for export and are not providing as much assistance to agricultural production for local consumption. The farmers that I spoke with in Paraguay were aware of their position within this structure, and often spoke about the struggles that they face as smaller producers.
I asked participants about their experiences as small farmers and how they negotiated their production and business within an environment that caters to large-scale production and imported agricultural goods that are sold in the market places for low prices. At all three markets, farmers expressed similar relationships and experiences with government organizations. The following discussions highlight some of these and show how farmers feel restricted and somewhat left out of the agricultural production environment in Paraguay. It must be noted that farmers who have access to city market spaces, whether they be individual stalls or shared stalls owned by cooperatives, already hold a higher degree of power or agency than those farmers who are further from the cities or the landless peasants in the east, and so these discussions cannot be assumed to be true for smaller scale farmers who are further away from the city.

Daniela and I took a bus one afternoon in June to visit José, whose father we met at Mercado de Abasto and invited us to visit his family farm in J.A. Saldivar. J.A. Saldivar is located in the Central Department, approximately 40 minutes outside of Asunción, and in 2002 had approximately 37,000 inhabitants. This area, I was told, is known for its strawberry production. Other crops that I observed growing were swiss chard, spinach, mint, onions, tomatoes, beets, and lettuce.

I first met José at the front gate of his homestead, which led into a large yard with two houses, a large well, and two motorcycles. His father (who I met at the market) was not home, but José explained that he himself could take us down the road to see their farm. We climbed onto the back of two motorcycles and drove over the rough red soil for about five minutes until we came to an area that had multiple farms divided into long, narrow pieces of land. The farm was approximately three acres and slowly sloped
upward. Along the slopes were pools of water that, José explained, were used to water the plants when the rains didn’t suffice. The pools were lined with black plastic, and hoses connected the pools to one another and led out to the crops themselves. This technology, José told us, is very expensive and is not always available to farmers who do not have a lot of capital. These particular lines of hose, he went on, are worth 2 million Guaraní and are approximately 6,000 Guaraní per meter.\textsuperscript{18} As we walked through his crops he pointed to the areas that were ready for harvest, the majority being strawberries and various types of mint. Onions were being planted in one area, and the tomato plants were just getting tiny white flowers and did not produce fruit for harvest until October. As I spoke to José about his farm he was quite eager to show me all of his crops, especially the strawberries that were ripe and were warm to the touch from the hot Paraguayan sun.

\textsuperscript{18} During the time I was conducting fieldwork, 1 Canadian dollar was worth around 4,400 Paraguayan Guaraní.
Eventually we made our way back to his home where we drank Tereré and sat on colorful wire chairs that are common throughout the country. It was here that we got into a deeper conversation about small farming in Paraguay, struggles with government assistance, and access to market space. Like many of the farmers I spoke with, José emphasized the lack of government support for small producers. He noted that as a farmer you can live well if you know what you are doing, if plan your harvest, and if you have access to capital. He said,

You can live well if you have vegetable gardens, the only thing that you have to have is your capital, because sometimes the harvest is bad. We don’t have a lot of help from the government, here we are the technicians, [the government workers] stay in their office and don’t know anything about what happens out here.

José’s experiences demonstrate that sometimes, regardless of expertise and planning your production, bad seasons can occur. Maria, a farmer I met at Mercado de
Abasto. When I asked her if there was a difference post Lugo’s impeachment shared a similar sentiment as José, saying:

It is the same because politicians always lie. When they want roles they make a lot of promise to farmers. When they get a good position it is always the same, and they forget about their promises. Right now, it is a big sacrifice because you have to start from nothing. Here in Paraguay, it is always harder because we don’t have implements or technology. Big farmers take the big help from the government and the little farmer has to always fight for the help.

Maria’s comments indicate a lack of trust of politicians and government projects that promise help to the farmers. She sees their promises as ways to gain votes from the citizens, and shows how farmers who have more power and land are often given better access to technology and resources in exchange for, she indicates, votes.

When I asked participants about their relationships with the government, I often had to use probing questions in order to engage with certain issues. It seemed that participants were cautious about criticizing the government. I had a very interesting conversation with Joseph, who after our meeting at Agroshopping invited me to come and see his farm. His family and a few hired workers ran his farm near J.A. Saldivar and it seemed more technical than other farms I visited or saw. There was mesh set up above rows of lettuce, basil, strawberries, and onions to protect them from the harshness of the mid-day sun. He also had a greenhouse where he started seedlings before transplanting them. The care that he took with his products, and the importance of ensuring their health and quality was quite apparent during our time together.
Perhaps it was because we were in the privacy of his property that Joseph spoke openly about his relationship with the government. I asked him specifically about his relationship with the government and how he saw this relationship more broadly with farmers similar to himself. He described how there are “programs” set up, but that he did not think they did a lot to help farmers like himself.

We do not have any help. We ask about things, but we do not have a specific person to show us, and we have to go and ask people about the production. There is an agronomy call center close to here, but it is political and doesn’t work. In this farm we do not have contact with the center. [The government] does not make anything useful, they just have superficial meetings and we do not believe in the government.

Joseph is expressing his frustration with the programs that the government sets up for smaller scale farmers and shows that although they are in place, he does not find them accessible or very useful. Often participants would speak about how the government says
that they are doing things for smaller farmers, but that often times these programs are inefficient or lack adequate support. Likewise, these programs, participants noted, were quite politicized and so often they would prefer to avoid using them. In this sense, then, farmers are embedded in broad politicized environments and more local politicized environments. That is, they are exposed to structural influences at the national level, and then too at the local level when departments set up agricultural programs that farmers are supposed to be able to access.

In a discussion I had with Sarah, a farmer at Agroshopping, she commented on how the government does not do enough to promote and allow for the organization of SFEs in cooperatives or organizations.

People here will make a committee or an organization of farmers – but not everyone in the organization will be a farmer. There will be other people who are part of the group – for example teachers. They will get help from the government even if most of the people in that group are not farmers, and this is the reason that I do not join the group. I always work alone.

Sarah went on to explain how people organize themselves together to appear to be a farming organization, even when they are not, and how this prevents other farmers from receiving any help. Another major problem she saw with these groups was that they were often politically motivated, and she felt that government assistance should not be dependent on allegiance to a political group. She said,

We need more help from the government, but without the political groups. Help from the government depends on whether you are with the Colorado or the Liberal groups. You need to be a part of one in order to receive help. If you don’t have a political affiliation, you can’t get as much help for your production.

Sarah recognized the dangers of affiliating oneself with a specific party. The choice that Sarah made to not participate in an agricultural organization or committee is influenced
by a broader structure that is based in historical fears linked to years of Colorado governance and dictatorship. Thus, the choices that Sarah makes in her daily farming operations are influenced, and possibly restricted, by these same structures. Her choice to sell at Agroshopping, further to be discussed in Chapter 5, may also be a form of resistance to these structures, allowing a chance for independence and opportunity for direct-marketing without having to become involved with a chaotic and corrupted political system.

Similarly, Carolina spoke about the need for more government support and independent organizations. She echoed Sarah when she told me, “We need programs that have projects that work with real farmers. Because many projects say that they will work with farmers, but then they use the money for other things.” The lack of credibility that organizations have among the farmers that I spoke with is a key reason they are hesitant to get involved. The presence of cooperatives in Paraguay is rare and is based in a history of cooperatives being destroyed (see Vasquez-Leon, 2010). The success of these organizations, however, is dependent on a variety of external influences as identified by participants, such as the presence of political pressures, access to credit, or other cooperative members.

Without government assistance or access to credit, these farmers are placed at a point of vulnerability, where a loss of harvest can mean the loss of income. José mentioned that it is not uncommon for farmers to use all of their capital investing in technologies, watering systems, or seeds and explained that the most problematic issue for the farmers that he knows is that they use all of their capital and then have nothing to fall back on if the harvest fails.
Bryant and Bailey discuss the use of adaptive strategies as a coping mechanism to changes in human-environment relationships (1997:161). One of these methods is to change coping strategies to ensure economic and/or social security. Because of the structures set by the government, which encourage larger production, José is forced to change his farming methods and techniques to work within the structure in which he is embedded. José emphasized the importance of having to plan his harvest in preparation for the unknown. Without a plan, he said, he would risk losing invested capital and not be able to sell his produce at the market. He said,

You have to plan your production in order to have a good harvest – you need to plant at the right time and harvest when people need it so you can get a high price for your product. If you do not plan you will lose part of your harvest or money because you can’t sell it.

Planning for a bad harvest season, or even planning your planting year-to-year to ensure the best crops, is an important aspect of ensuring success within a highly competitive agricultural market. Investing in technologies, even simple irrigation technologies, can help farmers to decrease their own workloads or ensure that their crops get the proper inputs that they need. José’s investment in watering hoses, for example, helped him to ensure that his plants were getting enough water during the dry seasons and made it so that he did not have to worry about watering his fields by hand. I asked José what other kinds of technologies he was using on his farm. He mentioned the need for good seeds, lots of water, and chemicals, but was quick to point out that he no longer invests in many technologies because other people would come and steal them from him: “Years ago it was safer to have machines – the technology – now the farmers have to fight with people who try and steal their tools.” The struggles that some farmers are facing in Paraguay are
not all directed to a politicized environment, and José’s concerns about stealing shows that
there are other aspects within a localized environment that need to be considered.

Gezon's ethnographic study of Northern Madagascar on the ways that interconnected external power sources and “shifting political affiliations” (2005:135) creates conflict among people who are restricted to a local areas, shows that the subsequent environmental struggles can be examined through multiple lenses of local, national, and global approaches. She notes the importance of the use of scale in anthropological approaches to political ecology questions, arguing that “the term scale recognizes that there are multiple levels of analysis but appropriately leaves open the character of the connections among people and places (if, indeed, there are any connections) and invites investigations into who influences who” (Gezon, 2005:148).

With this in mind, it is important to consider the multiple levels of influence that smaller-to-medium scale farmers are under and how they perceive themselves within these relationships. José spoke of being impacted by individual actors around him who threaten his capital gain through the possibility of stealing his machinery, which influences his decision to not invest heavily in mechanical technologies. On the opposite end, however, is the impact of global actors who influence his ability to get his produce to market, and once again threaten his ability to gain capital. Further discussion of actors’ use of adaptation to gain power over their production and sales will be discussed in Chapter 5.
Imported Products and International Relationships

The current global agrifood system is a reflection of the “interconnected processes of agricultural industrialization, globalization, trade liberalization, advances in technology and consumer and policy concerns regarding food quality, safety and the environment” (Blandon, Henson, and Islam, 2009:251). The process of complex agroindustrial development has occurred in both industrialized and developing countries, albeit at different rates and times. Developing countries, such as those of Latin America and in particular Paraguay, have seen the development of larger scale, industrialized, and highly mechanized agriculture at a rapid rate in the past two decades (see Blandon, Henson, and Islam, 2009; Berdegué, Balsevich, Flores, and Reardon, 2005; Reardon and Barrett, 2000).

Vertical markets and procurement strategies of food production and transaction are increasingly replacing opportunities for farmers to sell directly to consumers and even sometimes restricting smaller scale farmers from selling to the buyers on the market at all (Blandon, Henson, and Islam, 2009) Accompanying this move from traditional to more contemporary agrifood systems is the emerging presence of retailers who sell a wide variety of food and non-food items, and increasingly larger producers who are using contracts to secure shelf space for their products in these food retail institutions (Blandon, Henson, and Islam, 2009; Reardon and Berdegué, 2002; Reardon, Timmer, and Berdegué, 2004). Blandon, Henson, and Islam (2009) suggest that the reason that many small-to-medium scale farmers are unable to access the market is the high transaction costs that inhibit their participation.
The Recurring Story of Tomatoes: Local vs. Imported

José and I spoke broadly about global agricultural markets when I asked him about the imported products that could be found for sale throughout Paraguay. We spoke of how imported products can take up “shelf” space, limiting access for local producers to sell the same products at the same markets. The presence of imported products puts up barriers to the prices that farmers can get for their products. The close proximity to other major agricultural countries, particularly Argentina and Brazil, means that farmers are in competition with products that are imported and sold for a lower cost than national produce. The tomatoes, José explained, are the worst for this due to the influx of imported tomatoes around the same time as the harvest in Paraguay.

In Paraguay tomatoes are a high value commodity, but sensitivity to weather patterns, the need for water, and the longer growing period (longer than lettuce and spinach) makes them more expensive to produce. Farmers who spend more money producing them may rely on selling at the niche markets, such as Agroshopping, where there is less competition from wholesalers and a consumer base that is often willing to spend more money on food purchases. The barrier to getting tomatoes to market is two-fold. The first issue is that the tomatoes produced in Argentina and Brazil are imported during the harvest season of local tomatoes, flooding the local markets and decreasing the value of local products. The second is the inability to access contracts with larger supermarkets.

José’s experience with tomatoes directly relates to this first barrier. As we were walking through his fields I asked him why he was covering the base of his tomatoes with black plastic. He told me it was to decrease the number of weeds growing between his
plants and to ensure the least possible amount of evaporation occurs when he waters his tomatoes. His tomatoes, he went on, would be ready by October, but by that time there would be an increase in tomatoes on the market from other countries. “The cost is higher for tomato production,” he said, “the price of our tomatoes depends on the price of international tomatoes and how many are imported. If there are a lot of tomatoes that have been imported, then we have to sell ours for less. That is the problem with growing tomatoes.” There are two main points of concern with this statement: the first is that José is planning his crop production by trying to include a high-value commodity and is taking a risk that they produce well enough to offset his costs. The second is that there is a large influx of tomatoes from neighboring countries that decrease the value of his tomatoes when selling to the markets. Yet, José still grows tomatoes. He has a stall at Mercado de Abasto, but sometimes sells produce to a neighboring farmer who has stalls at Agroshopping. Other farmers echoed José’s worries that imported tomatoes negatively affected ability to sell the harvest at a profitable price. This suggests that farmers may continue to take risks despite the lack of market protection, and despite the lack of support that they receive.

Frederico, a farmer from Agroshopping, echoed José and indicated that imported tomatoes are very expensive until the local tomato-harvesting season in October, when the prices drop. There was a major difference between their perceptions of the presence of tomatoes in Paraguay. While José saw the excess tomatoes as a barrier to his market access, Frederico saw the presence of imported tomatoes through a dualistic lens. On the one side, he saw that tomatoes became more accessible to the general population because imported tomatoes from neighboring Brazil and Argentina could be purchased for a lower
price. On the other was that these countries were able to produce larger amounts of tomatoes because of greater access to energy and technology. The problem, he said, is that many of the resources in Paraguay are not accessible by farmers. More specifically, Frederico noted, many farmers were not able to access energy for a reduced cost. He told me that if you wanted to have tomatoes all year, they would have to be grown in a greenhouse, which would require large amounts of energy. In Paraguayan markets, after the main harvest of national tomatoes was over, he guessed only 10 percent of tomatoes at the market were grown in Paraguay. The rest came from Brazil and Argentina, where there is better tomato production infrastructure. I asked him what he meant by this, and he went into a story about the Itaipú hydroelectric dam that borders Paraguay and Brazil on the Paraná River. He said,

> The economic situation is that we sell cheap electricity to [Brazil], and then they produce tomatoes, and when they are ready to sell they sell them at really high prices and because we do not have national tomatoes available, the high prices are our only option. We need a project from the government to sell electric energy to the small farmers at lower prices so they can have greenhouses.

Frederico did not have tomatoes for sale at his stall (it was not the local harvest season when we spoke), and looked at the issue of imported products in a different way. While José and other farmers noted the effect it had on the prices of their own tomatoes, Frederico noted the effect it had during the off-season for Paraguayans to be able to purchase tomatoes. In his view, having the local tomatoes in the market at the same times

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19 I assumed that he was also referring to hot houses, which differ from green houses as they use higher amounts of energy (other than solar) to create an artificial heat that tomatoes thrive in.

20 Ninety percent of the energy generated from the Itaipú dam is used by Brazil accounting for 20 percent of its total energy use, the 10 percent of the energy from the dam meets the needs of Paraguayan energy use (Folch, 2013:45)
as imported tomatoes was good for consumers because it made purchasing tomatoes cheaper than at other times of the year. At the same time, this competition was bad for farmers. SFEs Paraguayan farmers are being marginalized by having to match the prices of the competition and are not receiving payment for what they consider their tomatoes to be worth. While this negatively affects the SFEs in Paraguay, it has a positive effect on those who have less to spend on food items. An imported tomato provides a cheaper option to the more expensive local tomatoes, but also provides a false sense of food security. That is, if tomatoes were to stop being imported, then Paraguay would not be in a position to supply the demand from consumers.

The inequality of resource allocation (i.e. energy from the Itaipú dam) further marginalizes small-to-medium scale Paraguayan farmers against their (potential) counterparts in Argentina and Brazil, and can influence their future actions as producers. Although some farmers, like José, have adapted through the use of low-technology options (such as watering hoses and black sheeting around the base of the tomatoes), other farmers maybe choose to stop growing tomatoes all together. This has further implications for decreased food security, biodiversity and food sovereignty at the national level, which is somewhat beyond the scope of my research. Dependency on imported products risks decreasing local products being competitive and if farmers are not able to make a profit through alternative market spaces then they may end up stopping production all together. This in turn has potential negative consequences for biodiversity of fruit and vegetable production if farmers begin to focus on just a few crops. Likewise, Paraguayan consumers are left with a false sense of food security and are subject to changes in both local and international economies. What is important to note, however, is
that through the examination of multiple levels of scale – the impact of international tomatoes, the unequal distribution and sale of national energy, and the preferences of local consumers – we can see that SFEs in Paraguay are in positions of vulnerability and marginality in global and local markets, as well as in global and local human-environment relations.

Many of the farmers that I spoke with noted that larger farmers are getting the most government assistance. Indeed, the support that these large agro-producers receive puts smaller-to-medium scale Paraguayan farmers in a politicized structure of power that is strongly connected to the international economy, global commodity prices and production. SFEs in Paraguay, however, are not only marginalized by agricultural structures. Businesses, as Bryant and Bailey (1997) discuss, can also affect the political and economic relationships that actors can have with the environment. If SFEs in Paraguay have similar vested interests as other, more powerful, actors, then it is also important to understand the dynamic between these two groups. In the next section I examine how access to supermarkets and vertical market access and distribution is further marginalizing farmers when it comes to accessing market spaces.

**Supermarket Expansion in Paraguay and Wholesale Produce**

With changes in food retail in Paraguay, many smaller food retailers who sold the produce from local small farmers began to be pushed out of the market. Gartin (2012) has examined the presence of food deserts in San Lorenzo, a suburb of Asunción, as a result of changing food retail and examines dietary changes and obesity risks. She shows how many open-air markets in San Lorenzo have been forced to shut down because the
majority of food purchases are being made at large grocery stores. Consequently, independent grocers and smaller corner markets can no longer access their supplies from the open-air markets, and they too have had to shut down. The interconnectedness of large and small-scale grocers, the use of open-air markets and the loss of market space for SFEs poses further threats to direct-marketing opportunities for these farmers. If SFEs no longer sell directly to the customer, and selling at open-air markets is not an option, then they will be overtaken by medium and large-scale producers, and wholesalers who hold contracts with the larger supermarkets and food processors. In San Lorenzo, only one open-air market is still thriving and remains a main location that provides market space in the city, but daily trucks from the interior, Brazil, and Argentina (Gartin, 2012) meant that finding famers at this location was almost impossible.

**Supermarket Expansion in Paraguay and Effects on Agricultural Production**

Globally, the presence of supermarkets has expanded rapidly. In Latin America, supermarkets were once niche spaces predominantly accessed by the wealthy of major cities (Reardon and Berdegué, 2002). Since the 1990s, supermarket accessibility has improved throughout the developing world, for both the wealthy and the poor (Reardon et al, 2003). The expansion of supermarkets from major-cities and rich neighborhoods into small-cities and middle-class and poor neighborhoods can be attributed to changes in both demand and supply of supermarkets. On the demand side, the expansion of urban populations and urbanization has created a larger demand for food retail shops (Reardon et al, 2002; Reardon et al, 2003; Reardon et al, 2004; Reardon, 2011). I do not intend to go in-depth into supermarkets in Paraguay, but I use the following statistics to paint a
larger picture of how supermarkets are able to push-out small producers and by making contracts with larger producers and processing companies.

The growth of supermarket expansion in Paraguay has more or less matched that of other Latin American countries. During the 1960s and 1970, open-air markets and small independent stores acted as the main avenues of retail sale for fruit and vegetables (Balsevich, 2003). This changed during the 1980s when the Paraguayan government began to promote wholesale markets, pushing retailers who previously bought at open-air markets to purchase their fruit and vegetable produce from the various wholesale markets. Eventually, open-air markets (such as Abasto and the San Lorenzo market) procured their produce directly from wholesalers. The first supermarket in Paraguay opened in 1963 and was called El País; the second supermarket did not open until 1972 under the name Supermercado Total (Balsevich, 2003).

As more supermarkets and supermarket chains began establishing themselves, food distribution and procurement practices throughout the country changed. Sales in the supermarket sector, according to Balsevich (2003) grew at a rate of 15.9 percent per year between 1992-2001. In 1992, supermarkets had a participation rate of 10-20 percent in the overall food market; by 2002, this number had reached to between 50-60% (Balsevich, 2003). In Paraguay, supermarkets had 19 percent participation in urban food retail in 1992 and 45 percent in 2003 (CAPASU, 2002 as cited in Balsevich, 2003, p.1). By 2001, 80 percent of the produce that small stores sold was sourced from wholesale markets (Balsevich, 2003). This becomes particularly problematic for independent farmers who are trying to sell their produce directly to consumers, and as direct market
spaces diminish the need to look into other alternatives for sales or compete directly with wholesalers in the market.

In his study on supermarket expansion and procurement systems of fruits and vegetables in Paraguay, Balsevich (2003) identified two procurement systems that he claims dominate the supermarket sector in Paraguay. The first, and most common system of fruit and vegetable purchase was buying directly from wholesalers. The second was buying produce directly from Brazilian suppliers. The use of specialized wholesalers for these specific supermarkets throughout Paraguay provided services that independent producers and even more traditional wholesalers were not able to provide. These included specific delivery times and freshness of produce, inventory coordination, increased variety, competitive pricing, and the ability to extend payment periods and not have to pay cash up front.

Understanding supermarket trends in Paraguay is necessary if we are to understand the issues that farmers are facing in the market spaces. It is clear that small and independent farmers are competing with supermarkets, which provide convenience for consumers, and wholesalers who control the shelf-space of these supermarkets. In this sense, it is easy to see how farmers are situated within both a local and global exclusionary structure of produce procurement practices. The following section examines some of the conversations that I had with farmers in the market about their own perceptions of the influence of supermarkets, imported produce, and wholesalers on their experiences both producing and selling their items at the market.
Participant Perceptions of Supermarket and Wholesaler Produce:

While speaking with farmers, I asked them about their relationships with other vendors and whether supermarkets impacted their production/business practices. These questions brought about the most lively and in-depth discussions of my fieldwork, and many farmers were aware of not only their own production and their relationships with their peers, but also the larger agribusiness sector, food procurement initiatives, and the food retail sector that they are embedded in.

In many ways Agroshopping reflects a traditional open-air market while at the same time providing customers of the convenience of a supermarket. Nevertheless, farmers who I spoke with at Agroshopping still felt that they were in competition with wholesalers and supermarkets. Likewise, the uncertainty that farmers spoke about also reflected an understanding of their position at the market and stressed the importance of producing high quality products had to their success there. I spoke with Carolina and her partner at Agroshopping. They did not grow a wide variety of vegetables, but their produce included spinach, swiss chard, onions, lettuce, broccoli, radishes and strawberries. She told me that she grew everything that she sold because at Agroshopping because you had to be a producer in order to be allowed to sell there. Although the majority of people that I spoke with at Agroshopping were producers, produce signs and conversations made it clear that not all of the produce sold was grown in Paraguay.

I asked Carolina about the prices at supermarkets and whether she felt her business was being impacted by their existence. She quickly answered yes. She continued, “The supermarkets are our biggest competition because they set the prices and it is hard to survive in the markets for small producers because the supermarkets have
sales, and usually they have those sales on Tuesdays.” I asked if she thought they did this on purpose, and she said, “Yes, I think they mean to do it on Tuesdays. The cost of production is very high here – this space, transportation, bags, lunch – it makes it hard to have cheap prices.” Carolina also spoke about the benefits that Agroshopping provided for her business, which I will further elaborate on in Chapter 5. In focusing on her perceptions of supermarkets it is clear that Carolina viewed supermarkets as a primary competitor. In addition, she felt they had a significant amount of power over producers whose costs were high compared to supermarkets that, through stronger relationships with larger producers and wholesalers, are able to sell their produce for less. The comment that she made regarding supermarkets having sales on Tuesdays cannot be confirmed, as I did not speak with the supermarkets about this and saw adverts for sales on many days of the week. However, it does show that there is a perception of supermarkets knowingly trying to compete with SFEs and that farmers are feeling threatened by the supermarkets ability to source huge amounts of produce and entices customers with sales.

Pedro, a farmer at Agroshopping, also had similar feelings toward supermarkets and the inequalities between farmers who were able to have contracts with them and those who did not. When I asked him about contracts with supermarkets in relation to selling at the coveted Agroshopping space, he noted that there are still inequalities that need to be addressed. He said, “This is complicated, because those who sell to the supermarkets are guaranteed sales. It is harder for us to have guaranteed clients because

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21 Vendors are responsible for buying the bags that they put their produce into for customers. This happened at the other markets as well, but at Agroshopping the bags are uniform and have the Agroshopping logo printed on them.
we are only selling once a week.” Pedro is showing how, regardless of the prestige of selling at Agroshopping, there are still uncertainties of selling there and that because he is unable to have a contract with the supermarket he is taking a risk of not being able to guarantee sales each week. Blandon et al (2009) explored supermarket contracts with smaller farmers in Honduras citing that smaller producers need to consider many factors if they wish to infiltrate this type of supply chain. This includes understanding and adhering to quality and supply frequency requirements, and having the capacity to manage and negotiate contracts. For many, they argue, the cost is high to infiltrate these markets. The farmers I met often spoke about how they were not large enough to maintain contracts with the supermarkets and that it was not an option for them to sell their produce there. As such, they were restricted to selling either from their farm or at the local city markets.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have examined the experiences of smaller-to-medium scale farmers and the influences that larger and more powerful actors and have on their ability to access market spaces, ensure economic opportunities, and continue farming on relatively smaller scales in the surrounding catchment area of Asunción. I have explored external influences and power dynamics, citing the experiences of participants as they negotiate themselves through the politicized environments of local and international agricultural sectors. Although many of the examples reflected everyday adaptations to these structures, there is no doubt that participants are able to demonstrate agency through intentional acts of their own. In the next chapter, I will further explore these ideas and discuss the various
ways participants exercise agency and negotiate these structures when it comes to agricultural decisions.
Chapter 5

“My family enjoys the activity, it is good for us”: Agroshopping and Engaging with Agency and Structure

In this chapter I argue that despite and in light of the structural issues discussed in the previous chapter, farmers still have some control over their production and livelihood decisions. I examine four main ways that farmers attempt to negotiate within structures. They are: (1) Using Agroshopping as a niche market to access customers directly, (2) Specializing and focusing on concepts of quality produce to build a customer base and gain an edge on imported products, (3) Using alternative agricultural production methods as a way of adapting to a food retailing environment that caters to imported food and wholesalers, and (4) Using social networks and cooperatives as avenues to strengthen farmers’ agricultural production and sales. Here I show how social capital is used to counteract some of the barriers that the structures influence onto farmers. Specifically, I discuss the case of the Agroshopping market in order to demonstrate practices of farmer agency. I also argue that although Agroshopping is a niche and relatively new market, the fact that it provides farmers the opportunity to sell directly to customers allows for a level of empowerment and livelihood enhancement and is a reflection of traditional food markets. In order to support this argument, I engage with Ortner's discussions of agency as “people’s projects in the world and their ability to both formulate and enact them” (2001:78). Additionally, this chapter will show how small-farmers are negotiating and enacting their own sense of agency through direct-marketing initiatives and customer relations.
I will address the roles that social capital and the feelings of satisfaction that farmers expressed in terms of avenues of agency and livelihood development. Ortner argues that agency is,

Precisely concerned with the meditation between conscious intention and embodiment habituses, between conscious motives and unexpected outcomes, between historically marked individuals and events on the one hand, and the cumulative reproductions and transformations that are the result of everyday practices on the other (2001:77).

In the case of direct marketing at Agroshopping, farmers are transforming agricultural production, even if on a small scale, to fit their own personal ideologies and intentions. Agency, then, is “virtually synonymous with the forms of power people have at their disposal, their ability to act on their own behalf, influence other people and events, and maintain some kind of control in their own lives” (Ortner, 2001:78). Ortner (2001) distinguishes between two types of agency that may contradict themselves, which she uses to frame and expand on relations between human intentionality and historical processes. This approach brings into the discussion of agency “a variety of culturally constituted desires, purposes, and projects that emerge from and of course reproduce different socially constructed positions and subjectivities” (Ortner, 2001:79). In this sense, then, the choices that Paraguayan farmers make when engaging in alternative growing or selling practices can be seen as questioning and confronting the dominant farming techniques in Paraguay. They are a coping strategy that farmers use to counteract their inability to gain the best prices for their products. Likewise, farmers who are accessing the market through social networks are also using it to ensure they are not fully reliant on the farm-gate prices, which can be relatively low, unpredictable, and risky.
Agroshopping stands out as a main theme in this chapter as its rules and regulations of involvement state (at least in theory) that only producers are can sell at the market.

1) **Niche Markets: Agroshopping as a Farmers’ Market of Opportunity**

Stephenson (2008) argues that farmers’ markets are social entities that encourage relationships to form between customers and vendors. In creating a social atmosphere that caters to the needs and desires of the customers, farmers’ markets can become a space where people can trust farmers to provide for their food needs. As I will show, these markets can also provide a space for innovation and adaptation that allows farmers to exercise agency in light of great inequalities within political, economic, and social structures in Paraguay.

Farmers’ markets are a reflection of the community in which they are situated. Referring to a farmers' market in rural United States, Stephenson shows that a particular market celebrates a community’s rurality by the ways that customers interact with farmers, the location of the market, and the ways in which vendors interact with one another (2008; see also Smithers, Lamarche, and Joseph, 2008). Similarly, Agroshopping has been set up to reflect areas of Paraguayan culture in the types of food and produce that are sold at the market, the customized uniforms that all vendors wear, and the little details of Paraguayan character such as the wicker baskets that are carried by teenage boys who can be hired to carry your purchases. *Una Costumbre Natural* (see figure 7), translated as *A Natural Practice* or *A Natural Custom* (see also Finnis and Candia, 2011), is on the signage throughout the market and is a reflection of the social atmosphere that
this market is trying to create. I begin this analysis with a brief description of conversations I had with Pedro and Sandra, which highlight how niche markets can be used to exercise agency.

**Figure 7: Signage at Agroshopping**

Pedro was one of the oldest farmers that I spoke with in Asunción. In addition to the legumes, grains, and seeds, he also sold cheese and eggs. He always seemed to be busy, and so I was thankful when he agreed to do an interview with me, on the condition that I could wait while he served his customers. I happily agreed, and our conversation took place over an hour while I sat observing him as he greeted his customers, sometimes engaging in long conversations. Pedro began selling at Agroshopping 14 years ago in a space that he used to share with his brother. They worked together until his brother passed away 4 years ago, and since then he has been managing it on his own. His sister, he pointed out, rents the space next to him and sells a variety of dried goods, spices, and
herbal remedies. When I asked Pedro about the benefits of selling at a market like Agroshopping he responded by saying,

> This market is different, because you can sell in large quantities in just a few hours, and this does not happen in other markets. There is not another market like this anywhere . . . The benefit of selling at this market is that you can sell a lot and people will pay you a just price.

Pedro mentioned another important aspect of direct marketing and farmers coming together in one space to access customer directly. He said, “[all of us] small-farmers have the same issues, I have similar problems with production and climate, and if you ask other people you will have similar answers. We always talk about it.” The ways in which farmers speak to one another about their livelihood struggles reflects a shared sense of community. Although each farmer is acting as an individual, their shared experiences allow them to connect in a way that provides a stronger relationship amongst market vendors. In this sense, Agroshopping is a place to build on social capital that may not be available for farmers who are isolated at their farms and dependent on farm-gate or spot market prices from buyers who travel through the countryside to re-sell the items in the urban markets.

Agroshopping is different from the other two markets and the farmers who sell there have different stories and experiences. At the same time, however, there are shared experiences that all participants had as smaller-to-medium scale farmers working in Paraguay. Sandra was one of the first farmers that I spoke with at Agroshopping. Her stall was tucked along a corner unit and had a large variety of produce available. She told me she grew produce with her family on her small 2-hectare farm and the rest of the produce she sold, such as citrus, is bought from wholesalers. There were a total of four people working at her stall that day, she and her daughter who dealt mostly with money
exchange and weighing produce, and two workers, a man and a woman, who were selecting and bagging the produce for customers. On the day that I met Sandra the market was unusually slow. I first thought that it was because of the cold weather, but she informed me that it was because all of the roads around the market were shut down for an important meeting that was happening in a nearby building. Sandra agreed to participate in an interview because of the slow business that day, and we took a long time discussing the political, environmental, and social issues of farming in Paraguay.

Sandra explained that she had been selling her produce at Agroshopping for 13 years, almost as long as the market itself has been open, and that in this time she has seen and experienced a lot of changes. The most significant, she explained, was that she had to downsize her farm.

Years ago we had a larger farm, but we have a problem with commercialization, and now if you produce you produce in small quantities. This is so that you can sell the produce that you grow. The most important thing is that we sell our own produce and we do not need other people to buy and then sell again.

Many mentioned the influx of too many products in the market farmers (discussed in Chapter 4) and it was clear that to prevent having too much production and not enough sales, downsizing was a viable option. That is, it is better to be able to produce smaller amounts and ensure higher sales than it is to produce larger amounts and risk getting lower prices. In this sense deciding to decrease her farm size was a risk reduction strategy that Sandra used.

Ortner argues that an agent is in a constant state of negotiating relationships of “power, inequality, and competition” (2006:131); in Sandra's case, this is about other farmers and wholesalers. Specifically, these actors who are able to produce on a larger
scale, she implies, engage in an unnecessary step of buying produce and re-selling it. Sandra had to downsize her farm in order to continue to independently sell her produce at the market. Her decision demonstrates relationships between structures and how actors are “empowered to act with and against others by structures” (Sewall, 1992:20). That is, the realities of farming in Paraguay created the conditions in which Sandra felt she had to downsize to remain in control. Nevertheless, Sandra's decisions to downsize and find a niche market demonstrate Ortner’s (2001) idea of agency of intention.

Finding a niche market and avoiding the middleman was of importance to Sandra. I was told by a vendor that to sell at Agroshopping you had to be a primary producer, but I am not certain of this as I saw a small handful of vendors who were selling pre-packaged and imported foods, often catering to the large number of Japanese and Germans who live in Paraguay. Additionally, the presence of non-traditional Paraguayan foods at Agroshopping is a clear reflection of the types of customers that frequent the market. It is also a reflection of the ways that vendors and farmers use the presence of foreign shoppers to diversify their products and cater to a unique niche demand. This option would make most economic sense at Agroshopping, where many foreign and wealthy Paraguayans shop.

Sandra was quite aware of this and spoke about how selling at Agroshopping is beneficial. “It is a good business,” she said, “and this market is convenient. . . this kind of market helps the farmers and it helps the people – both have benefits. This is the objective of this market, and it is working well.” After 13 years, Sandra knew well the benefits of Agroshopping, and she was able to see how the changing preferences of her customers would benefit the farmers themselves, as long as they were able to adapt to it.
High prices at Agroshopping has set it apart from other food retail spaces, which means that farmers selling there are at a significant advantage over those who lack contracts with supermarkets and are selling either from their farm or at Mercado de Abasto or Abasto Norte. In a way, Agroshopping has become a niche market where the use of direct marketing and social connections provide an alternative livelihood strategy for SFEs.

If SFEs are dealing with a variety of issues that leave them vulnerable to environmental, economic, social, and political instabilities then reducing their vulnerability can greatly influence their livelihood success. Schipmann argues that that the overflow of benefits from modern supply chains to traditional markets is often overlooked (2010:40). Non-traditional products that are initially introduced by modern-supply chains have the opportunity to be adopted by farmers and introduced to more traditional market spaces, allowing those that have been excluded from the modern supply chain to be able to still benefit from it. In this sense, Agroshopping is a unique and specific space that provides farmers with an alternative to the supermarket and large-scale production supply chain, which many farmers cited as not being an option for their produce.

Markets where farmers participate by providing a specific product, and I would argue, a specific concept, allows them to move beyond the farm gate price and have more control over their production. Agroshopping is an outlier, it is a limited space that allows farmers to enact power and control over their own production process, and while rent at Agroshopping is expensive and thus excludes other farmers (and creates or reinforces inequitable power dynamics between SFEs) it provides a mode of alternative action. Or, to put it in other words, farmers are able to defy the structure in which they are enmeshed
and thus respond to the power structures that make it hard to sell directly to customers in other city markets.

2) **Capitalizing on Quality: Specialization and Production Methods**

The activity of farming fits into a larger relationship between households and agroecosystems (Gliessman, 1998). This can go beyond just households who are involved directly in the production process, and move to the relationship between farmers and customers. Farmers identified relationships with customers as key benefits of the experience of selling at Agroshopping. As Hector at Agroshopping told me, “We have it good here, and it is our biggest hope to sell a lot at this place. We can make contacts here – restaurants and casinos, they may come and contact us here – it is a window into the world. My clients can bring more opportunity.” The use of Agroshopping as a place where farmers can diversify their products and meet the demands of consumers was a major benefit for farmers. It reflects a relationship between farmers and customers that cannot be met when vertical production chains and middlemen stand in the way of this interaction. It also allows farmers, especially those who are smaller in scale and who can quickly diversify to meet changing demands of consumers, to provide specialty items to individual customers. I encountered this understanding multiple times while conducting research at Agroshopping. The use of both specialty items, such as exotic greens or organic products, reflects some of the ways that farmers are capitalizing on the niche social and economic environment of Agroshopping.

Some farmers I spoke with specialized their production systems by moving from growing traditional varieties of lettuce to growing more “exotic” types of lettuce to meet
the demands that consumers were making. They began to change the products that they had available, showing that they are well connected to market demands. The discussions I had with participants also indicated that they were attempting to constantly increase sales and build relationships with customers, thus exercising their own agency over their production and sales. When I visited Joseph on his farm, I noted the many varieties of lettuce he had growing under shade mesh. In relation to his production of lettuce varieties he said,

The products are the best at Agroshopping, but they are more expensive, and other supermarkets sell the same kinds of produce for a lower price. [Agroshopping] is a place for rich people. At [Mercado de] Abasto we only sell our traditional varieties, but at Agroshopping we sell the products that people want – our prices at the markets are the same, but few people will buy the different varieties at [Mercado de] Abasto.

It is clear that Joseph knew well what his customers wanted at both markets that he sold at, and he deliberately used the unique clientele of Agroshopping to increase the desirability and diversity of his produce. Through the production and sale of non-traditional varieties of lettuce, Joseph was further increasing his control over his production and sale of fruits and vegetables. The use of social relations in this example shows how relationships can build on farmer’s ability to gain stronger and somewhat more secure livelihoods. Joseph intentionally focuses on growing to meet the demands of his customers, and ensuring his place in a niche market. It is through these connections he is attempting to counteract the larger agricultural structure that he is embedded in.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Agroshopping is a more modern market set-up that offers access to both traditional and non-traditional foods. Some of the farmers I spoke with were building their business by utilizing this space and would perhaps not be doing as well if they did not have access to it. At the same time, the space of Agroshopping
would not be the same if SFEs were not selling there. The benefits and experiences for farmers and for customers is reciprocal. They cannot exist in the same way without one another.

The use of specialty items as a way to gain a stronger hold in the marketplace was widely discussed amongst participants. On the one hand, these items were used as a way to secure relationships with customers (such as the above discussion with Joseph and his use of non-traditional lettuce varieties). On the other hand, providing the market with specialty items and products that were not easily imported allowed some farmers to focus on a niche market. The use of specialty items shows economic rationality in the decisions of farmers, and thus they are exhibiting agency through their decisions to produce specialty items that the current import market in Paraguay cannot provide. Produce that was more fragile, such as leafy greens and green onions, were most often identified as national produce in both the markets and supermarkets. The fragility of this product meant that it did not travel well, and so imported leafy greens that traveled longer distances would have been lower quality compared to the national products that were generally harvested the same day as they were sold. Products like these provided farmers with a way to ensure they had a specialty items that were not subjected to the competition of imported products. The following is a discussion that I had with Hector about his experiences growing specialty items for Agroshopping.

I spoke with Hector about the kinds of things that he grows and the reasons he specialized in greens. He told me it was because they were relatively easy to grow in the climatic conditions of Paraguay, there were many growing seasons in one year, and that greens were not imported from other countries and so competition was lower. “Here”, he
said, “we only produce greens and so there is not a lot of competition with imported, just the influence of our market locally.” In all the markets I went to while in Paraguay, greens were the most common local product. However, importing greens seems to be relatively low, and based on data given to me at Mercado de Abasto, greens are one of the lower imports to that market. It was clear that the niche market of local produce was held in the production of greens. Specialty greens, however, such as varieties of lettuce, spinach, and chard, were mostly found at Agroshopping. Many people told me that this was because only the foreigners would buy it and that Paraguayans only ate one type of lettuce. It was evident that lettuce held top spot in the niche market for small producers in Paraguay, but the sale of “exotic” lettuce for foreigners showed also how Agroshopping was the favored niche market for those who were not from Paraguay and those who had the money to shop there.

Ortner refers to this as agency as power and relates this to peoples’ “ability to act on their own behalf, influence other people and events, and maintain some kind of control in their own lives” (2001: 78). Hector, and other farmers, are using their knowledge of consumers wants and catering to them in order to maintain their sales. Thus, farmers are acting on their own behalf to influence others. That is, they are acting on their knowledge about consumer preferences and capitalizing on opportunities in order to maintain some control over their livelihoods. Or, in other words, they are influencing where consumers buy their produce by providing the products that they want.

Hector spoke extensively about the competition of produce from other countries and the lack of accessibility to selling his own products at other markets, specifically supermarkets. When I asked him if there was any assistance available for him to access
he, like many of the other farmers I spoke with, touched on the inequality of resource allocation in Paraguay and its close ties to government politics. Hector also felt that the government did not understand the needs of small farmers and that they need to open up the market so that Paraguayans can access the same opportunities as those who import produce from Brazil and Argentina. He went on to say that, “Usually we have produce from other countries, and we have the same products from here, but we do not have the same opportunity. In the farm we work just to survive, not to live.”

There is an indication here that farmers like Hector, who are trying to sell their own products at urban market spaces, are not achieving the level of success they feel they could in a different social, political, and economic environment. Hector went on to say “the people do not have the same opportunities to sell their things and to get their relationships with clients because the big farmers have contracts with the big supermarkets. So, even if you have good products you can’t sell it in the supermarket.” Hector is indicating that quality is sometimes omitted when retailers sign contracts with larger farmers. The produce that I bought at Agroshopping was some of the best produce in the city, but even the produce at Mercado de Abasto and Abasto Norte were generally better quality than the produce I bought at the various grocery stores around Agroshopping. Hector’s comments imply that even though he is in a space that provides social connections and direct marketing opportunities that allow them to be agents of their own production, farmers at Agroshopping are still constrained by larger economic and political structures that affect many aspects of their agricultural decisions.

The quality of the “farm fresh” products that Hector spoke of can be linked to farmers’ connection with their land and produce. Freshness, some vendors mentioned, is
one of the reasons that they like selling directly to their customers. They are able to ensure their products are high quality, but the work that they have to put in to achieve such high standards can be a sacrifice. Similarly, many of the farmers I spoke with sacrificed a large amount of time to even be at the markets, and thus losing time that they could be spending on other on or off farm activities.

3) **Alternative Agriculture and Innovation within Farmers’ Markets**

The national economy in Paraguay saw a slowdown in the second half of the 1990s, which had a negative impact on family-based agriculture (Berry, 2010). The lack of policies to encourage productive family farms meant an increase in imported foods from neighboring countries of Brazil and Argentina. These imports left Paraguayan family farmers lacking a competitive edge. The one exception was larger family farms that specialized strictly in fruit crops (Galeano, 2010:104).

Innovation and responsive changes on the part of SFEs have been, for the most part, in response to “stimuli from market intermediaries or by other agents, public or private, which provide financial or technical services to facilitate the realization of innovation” (Galeano, 2010:107). In this sense, Agroshopping, Mercado de Abasto, and Abasto Norte, have all provided space, and in some cases more technical support, to farmers and have fostered a move toward modernization and adaptation to traditional small-to-medium scale farming. And, while there is much to say about the lack of government support expressed by SFEs (see Chapter 4), we still have a responsibility to further to examine the role these markets play in contributing to ownership and agency in agricultural production. When I met Marcus, for example, he explained the benefits of
selling at Agroshopping. “I sell here for the customers, and the economic benefit…we are proud of our agriculture and we come here for the infrastructure and the good clients, but we have to make a large investment here.” Despite the sacrifices made, the opportunity of selling at Agroshopping allowed Marcus to have power over who his clients were. This is particularly important to consider, especially when many farmers throughout the country are using farm-gate sales to wholesalers as an avenue for getting their products to market. Furthermore, participants noted that direct-marketing opportunities were a way to show off high quality products.

At this point I return to the conversations that I had with Frederico and Sarah, both whom were smaller farmers who used Agroshopping as their main avenue to sell their produce directly to consumers. As such, vendors understood the importance that the quality of their products would play in whether their items sold well at the market. At the same time, they saw having fresher and higher quality products as a way of being more appealing to consumers and thus having an advantage over some of the products that were sold at the larger supermarkets. Sarah, for example, saw her ability to provide fresh-from-farm produce as an advantage over other vendors because she was meeting the desires of customers. “People prefer fresh produce directly from the farm,” she said, “Now people are giving more importance to fresh produce. This is important for us, people are wanting to buy fresh greens and are willing to pay the price.” Thus, Sarah is using Agroshopping to cater to a niche market where people are willing to pay higher prices for fresher products. This is one way that farmers like Sarah are ensuring that they are getting fair prices for their work and produce.
Production methods, and thus the connection that participants had to their land, was also seen as an advantage, stemming from their ability to produce better quality products. Frederico spoke in-depth about the rules and regulations of chemical use in Paraguay. He described how over the years “red” labeled chemicals had been eradicated because of their harshness to the environment. Less harsh chemicals, however, like the yellow, green, and blue labels were still readily available. Frederico preferred not to use any chemicals, instead focusing on alternative ways of production to provide healthier and better quality food for his customers.

We use worms for our farms - vermiculture, and we use a special pollination system also. The problem is the government does not provide much help for organic production. So we prepare our soil in a special way, we will plant a cover crop or leave it to rest for a year. Years ago we had problems with our soil, but now it is better because we have a better practice.

By using alternative forms of agricultural production, Frederico has been able to set himself apart from the other producers both by ensuring the longevity of his soil nutrient levels and by catering to a specific niche market of customers whose preferences are organic produce. In these ways, both Frederico and Sarah are working within an agricultural system that does not always allow for alternative forms of agriculture or avenues of sale. The use of alternative forms of production methods were used for farmers to stand out from other producers. They were demonstrating what Ortner (2006) referred to as agency of intention. Their actions were speaking to their desires and wants as a farmer and they were finding ways to work beyond the constraints of the social, cultural, and political structures they are embedded in. They are able to work beyond these constraints, however, due to the option of accessing consumers at Agroshopping who demand such products. That is, the market forces that Agroshopping creates through
consumer demand fosters and supports the production and sale of more ecologically produced products.

4) “I have pride in my products”: Expressions of Agency in a Politicized Environment Through Social and Economic Networks

The interactions among food producers, investors, and nation states have been shaped by the global agricultural economy. Privatization and deregulation processes, marketing systems that exclude small-to-medium scale producers, and competition among emerging private producers have transformed food production, procurement, transportation, and sale practices (Vásquez-León, 2010:3). Marginalized groups face uncertainties and challenges as they attempt to maneuver the changing systems and food procurement practices. However, adaptations to new agricultural production environments may allow for entrepreneurial movements and new forms of economic production for farmers. One way this can happen is through the creation of cooperatives or collectives in which farmers work together as a form of social capital (see Vásquez-León, 2010; Berry, 2010:103). As defined by Durston (1998:2) social capital is,

Comprised of formal and informal systems of norms, institutions and organizations that promote the trust and cooperation in communities and also in wider society. It is “capital” because it is a resource that helps to accelerate the accumulation of well-being, and “social” because it is not the exclusive property of individuals but is possessed by social groups and can be characteristic of entire social systems.

To this definition, I add the importance of the family unit as a social group, especially when family farms include individuals beyond the immediate family. Social capital for family-oriented farms contributes to decreasing costs of production, such as hiring workers and ensuring stability if one person cannot be on the farm. Farmer cooperatives
and organizations share similar benefits of social capital. As Berry (2010:114-115) notes, this can be in the form of solidarity through organization and decreased transaction cost when farmers work together to get their products to the market. Although there are similarities between the benefits of family farming and cooperatives, the majority of Paraguayan farmers are not part of a cooperative organization. Family farming is more prominent. In the following discussions, I highlight some of the ways that farmers are utilizing social capital, farmer-to-farmer relations, and cooperatives to maintain their place in agricultural production.

*Farmer-farmer Relations*

José explained to me that even though he does not sell at Agroshopping himself, his products might end up there. He said,

> Farming can give you all that you need, if you have good plans for each month and each day. There is no help from the government; we are our own engineers of our production. Farmers have good relationships between one another because we are all small farmers. Mercado de Abasto is very important because it is the only place that farmers have to sell produce, we also sometimes have clients that come to the farm, they are mostly from the Chaco.

The vast expansion of the networks that José was able to participate in is very much connected to his ability to continue farming, and gives him more opportunities than farmers who are further outside the city limits and the infrastructure that it can provide.

I asked José how he was able to get his produce to markets other than Mercado de Abasto, he told me “we do not take our produce to Agroshopping ourselves, but people come and pick it up and then re-sell it there.” José notes two distinct elements that speak to social networks and collaboration of farmers in Paraguay. The first he mentions is the
relationships that SFEs build between one another and how they share a common identity in their livelihoods. The second is that even though he does not sell at Agroshopping, he networks with farmers who are selling at Agroshopping, allowing him to reap the benefits of the market without having to pay the high cost of rent. This is a secondary avenue that allows farmers to be part of a system that they would otherwise be excluded from and can have major benefits for independent producers.

In a sense, this use of social networking allows for grassroots actors to work together in their everyday adaptations and actions against the structures that marginalize them. Although they are not acting as a unified group (which is more commonly seen in the resistance movements of landless peasants against soy farms in the northeastern Departments) they are engaging in a social adaptive response to cope with changing agrarian production and markets. As the doors to direct marketing opportunities are closing for smaller producers, coping strategies that involve social networks and camaraderie type relationships are forming amongst smaller producers. Bryant and Bailey (1997) describe social and economic coping strategies as a result of grassroots actors modifying economic practices and building relationships with neighbors in order to seek assistance. At the same time, they argue, these coping strategies will become less relevant when environmental degradation becomes worse (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:161). What needs to be highlighted here is that social and economic coping mechanisms can actually allow small-to-medium scale producers who are at a point of marginality in agricultural networks to keep afloat for longer periods of time. If networks are not established, then these producers may be in a more vulnerable position relative to external changes in the
market, such as increased imports from neighboring countries or wholesalers buying up market space.

**Family Farming and Productions Systems**

In order to further assess family farming in Paraguay, Galeano examines the efficiency of 8 family farms through the measurement of the capacity of these farms to “generate adequate levels of productivity and agricultural employment” (2010:110-112). The Central District has more recently been successful in supporting horticulturalist farmers. The family farms here also allow for a diversity of social capital forums, which, impact both the individuals and social groups that are part of them (Durston, 1998; Galeano, 2010).

Family farming in Paraguay plays an important role in poverty reduction through employment and income maintenance (Galeano, 2010). The role that family farming, especially for smaller-scale producers, can contribute to economic growth and employment opportunity is an important aspect of production livelihoods. In examining evidence from Paraguay and other countries in the southern cone, Galeano suggests that small-scale farming “can increase its contribution to economic growth and decent employment” if developed under favorable circumstances (2010:101). Often, family connections were the reasons why and how farmers were accessing market spaces and expanding their diverse skills. The importance of influential family ties emerged particularly strongly during my conversation with Maria.

Maria was the only farmer that I was able to speak directly with at Abasto Norte. When I inquired into how long she had been farming, I was surprised to hear that it had
only been for a few years and that she had only been selling at a market for a few months. She explained to me that she and her husband used to only produce honey, but now they were producing vegetables and some fruits. It was not until her eldest son began a program at an agricultural college that they decided to expand their production. Her son, she said, had to use some of their land as a place to practice for his studies, and once she and her husband saw how well the garden was growing, they too decided that they would try their hand at it. Maria indicated that it was hard for her family to start farming because they did not have all of the support that she feels they required. In her own words,

> Because we have a family business and we don’t have other people, it is better. This was the idea of my son – I have 9 children and my husband who help. Two of my children are in agricultural colleges, and the other 7 work at the farm with us. It is a good experience because my daughter is studying and has a relation to agriculture, and my son is studying Agronomy, so they have the knowledge of the crops. In our case it was a good decision. All of my family enjoys the activity, it is good for us.

Social connections that are bound by family can be interpreted as a source of social capital. Indeed, the connections that Maria’s son and daughter made at their schools allowed Maria and her family to expand their business and move towards selling produce at the market instead of just honey from their farm.

I inquired about the benefits of being able to sell at the market, and Maria mentioned that she was in more control of her production now that she had her own space. She said,

> It is very different for us now. Here [at Abasto Norte] you can see how the prices change, and today you might make just Gs.12, 000, but tomorrow you might make more. At your home you always make the same amount

22 At the time of our conversation Abasto Norte had only been open for a few months.
of money, and that is why it is important to be here. I work with a committee\(^{23}\), so I know all the prices in the market and have control over my own production. You have to know about the prices, because people will go to your farm and tell you a price, and if you don’t know the real price then you will believe them and you will lose money.

Maria is essentially saying that she has more control over the prices of her products at the market because she can see the prices of the other vendors and match theirs. When she sells at the farm gate, she is not sure what others have sold their produce for and thus she may end up losing money. She is gambling that customers will buy from her, but it is evident that she feels selling at the market has more profit potential than selling to wholesalers at her farm.

Like Maria, Marcus has been connected to the market, and farming more generally, through family connections and close social circles. Marcus was a farmer that I met at Agroshopping. He told me that he had married into a farming family, and that he learned all that he knew about farming from his wife and his father-in-law. When I asked him about how he had come to access his space at Agroshopping, he said that it was through a close personal connection, “An old friend, my Godfather, used to sell here, but he is too old now and his does not want to come here because it requires a lot of sacrifice. We wake up very early, and we do not sleep well, so it requires a lot of sacrifice.” This personal connection that Marcus has allowed him to gain economic benefit from the market, and while others (like José) saw this space as too much of a hassle, he saw benefits as outweighing the cost.

Ortner (2001; 2006) argues that some of the actions that actors take are a reflection of their value systems and that because these values are influenced by cultural

\(^{23}\) She is referring to an organized group that will receive benefits from the government if they can prove to be working together.
contexts that are often controlled by structural influences, they are not always a true reflection of agency. That is, the actions that people take are sometimes a reflection of the social, cultural, political, and/or economic situations in which they are embedded. Although I do not feel this precludes agency, it does put some restrictions on farmers and may limit the ways they exercise agency.

As discussed above, the value systems that some farmers held and subsequent actions that they took that reflect these values, were expressed in their farming methods. This was true for Isabella, an organic farmer that I got to know well during my weekly visits to Agroshopping. Like Marcus, Isabella also had family connections that allowed her to gain a marketing edge. She was one of the few self-proclaimed (but non-certified) organic producers that I met at Agroshopping. Isabella is an older farmer and at 1.5 hectares she had one of the smallest farms out of all the farmers I spoke with. Her 1.5-hectare space had provided her with vegetables for almost 30 years. Isabella did not supplement her products with imported fruits or vegetables; rather she had a small table on which she showcased her lettuce, green onions, cabbage, a variety of radishes, spinach, cauliflower, carrots, beets, garlic, squash, cilantro, broccoli and a variety of potted plants (mostly herbs) (see Figure 8). Isabella had learned organic production techniques from her cousin who was an agronomist, and then she continued producing organic fruits and vegetables for the duration of her farming career.
Isabella had a hard time selling and promoting her organic production, and believed that Agroshopping was the only place where she could get a fair price for her items. When I asked why she did not just go into more conventional production methods, she said something that I think speaks well to how Agroshopping (and niche markets like it) can provide a space for farmers to make their own choices and to follow their own decisions. She simply said, “Yo tengo orgullo de mis productos”, which translated means “I have pride in my products.” Despite the difficulties that Isabella faced, which she attributed to the lack of support from consumers for local organic products, she continued to farm in a way that allowed her to feel a sense of pride in her work. She said, “It is difficult, especially if you grow organic, because people are less able to pay for organic products and Paraguayan people think that it is the same to grow organics as traditional products.” When I asked further about her motivations, given the higher cost of
production, she mentioned that the motivations were the *extranjeros*, or foreigners who tell her how “*rico*” or delicious her products are. In addition, she said,

You know about the quality of the organic products, the smell, flavor, appearance, it is different. It is hard to be a producer who grows organics in Paraguay because the people do not want to give importance to organic production. But at Agroshopping, I have consistent clients from years ago, and they do not refuse the prices. It is different than at other markets.

Isabella’s choice to continue selling and growing organic products is dependent on the way that Agroshopping functions as a niche market. She is selling at Agroshopping because it is a location that allows growing organics to make economic sense. She expressed the pride she felt in being an organic producer, and her customers are enabling her to continue in this. Isabella's decisions demonstrate a level of agency through intentionality over the production and sale of her products through a local market that supports her business.

Hector too saw Agroshopping as not only being the ideal place for his current success, but also saw it as a space of opportunity that was not available to him elsewhere. The barrier to this was the larger producers who dominate the agricultural market.

The people do not have the same opportunity to sell their things and get their relationship with clients,” he said, “because the big farmers have contracts with the bigger supermarkets. So, even if you have good products, you can’t sell them in the supermarkets. . . it is like a black business behind production. Our market is so small and even we have problems, so we need to support our growers.

Hector only saw Agroshopping and direct marketing as one part of the larger picture. He, like many of the farmers I spoke about in Chapter 4, mentioned a lack of government support, or corruption with the support that was given, as a hindrance to successful smaller-scale farmers. This shows that in spite of a structure that lacks
government support, participants that I spoke with are still attempting, in most cases successfully, to engage in direct marketing initiatives and thus achieving some level of control over the production and sale of their products.

Cooperatives as Social Capital

I met Luis during one of my first visits to Mercado de Abasto. I arrived a little later in the afternoon, and many of the vendors were closing up their stalls. Luis, however, was sitting in a unit that housed many rooms that looked similar to garages. Cinderblock walls separated these units and many of them had upper lofts in them that appeared to house a small room or office. Each unit generally held one main type of produce – mangos, pineapples, potatoes, mandioca, bananas. I was hesitant to speak with him and had assumed that he was a larger producer because he was only selling pineapples. As it turned out, Luis only owned 1 acre of land; the rest of the pineapples came from other farmers who were part of the same cooperative. Luis told me about his family, the other cooperative members, and how he became a pineapple farmer. He only grows pineapple for sale, he said, the other things he grows (mandioca and corn) are for his own consumption. He brought his pineapples to Mercado de Abasto by a hired car from his farm 4 hours away because there is not a market as big as Mercado de Abasto in his city, and so he had to come here if he wanted to be able to sell all of his products. I further inquired about his thoughts towards the significance of the cooperative and the opportunity to sell at Mercado de Abasto, and he had this to say:

We have a cooperative of farmers, many people don’t believe in organizations yet, but in my area some people have started to work together. If you work alone in this production then there is less help, and it is harder to produce because the cost of production is expensive and
buyers don’t want to buy from you. [My family] started with a small quantity of fruits because we didn’t need a lot of money to do that – you need 5 or 6 million [Guarani] to have a good production, and then on top of that you have to pay your workers, buy chemicals, and water.

Luis is indicating that he uses a social network of other farmers in order to establish himself within the agricultural production environment in Paraguay. For Luis, the cooperative became a way for him to engage with activities that would supplement his subsistence agriculture. If he were the only producer, his costs of production would not allow him to compete in the marketplace because no one would buy his higher priced products. However, by forming a working group with other farmers, he was able to cut the transportation costs and paying for space at the market while at the same time ensuring he could sell his pineapple at a competitive price.

The sacrifices that small-farmers make when working toward a certain livelihood, and the vulnerability that they have toward outside actors, can make their lives more stressful and less predictable. Furthermore, small-farmers can sometimes use land-use change as a way to adapt to a changing social environment or to gain desired capital and can thus contribute to a change in how grassroots actors are using the environment around them. Bryant and Bailey note that “livelihood concerns remain a central issue in understanding the political implications of the environmental crisis”, and that the “crisis relates to the question of livelihoods which, in turn, is linked in a very specific manner to unequal power relations” (1997:152). Bryant and Bailey (1997) go on to describe two adaptation strategies that grassroots actors may undertake when they encounter strong political-environment conflicts and limited resource access that affect livelihood abilities. On the one hand, they say, grassroots actors are left with few possibilities when they are faced with poverty, little or no access to agricultural land, and/or limited or no access to
other environmental resources, and thus they depend on an extreme input level of labor. On the other, rural dwellers that have exhausted livelihood opportunities may migrate to the urban areas; such is the case within Paraguay (see Finnis et al, 2012) and across the borders into neighboring Brazil and Argentina (Gillespie and Browning, 1970; Parrado and Cerrutti, 2003).

With these scenarios in mind, I return to my discussion with Luis to show that through the collaboration with other farmers, Luis has established alternatives to the struggle of the strictly subsistence lifestyle and has avoided outmigration. When I asked Luis about the process of getting his products to market he responded by saying:

We bring our produce to market by car – we pay for the car and live 4 hours away. People are here all the time. It is not a problem to be here all of the time because we have a permanent place, but it is a problem if you don’t have your own place. . . we always come at night and it depends on how much you sell. Some days you sell all the produce on one day and then you can go back to the farm, If not, then you stay here until it is sold – on the days of the best business you sell all of your produce by the afternoon.

Luis did not see his time spent at the market as a sacrifice because he felt he had a better set up than those who did not have a permanent spot to stay in. Likewise, because his space belonged to his cooperative, he did not have to come to the market every day. Rather, he and his cooperative members would take turns staying at the market and selling the items. This could leave time for other household or income generating activities. However, working in a cooperative can create complex relationships and are not always a viable option for small landholders.

Luis’ ability to work with other people was the reason that he was able to gain access to the market, but he nevertheless experienced other struggles. Luis spoke about some of the barriers to starting cooperative groups. I asked him how they decide to price
their pineapples, and he said this: “It depends, if there is limited produce then the prices are more expensive. Sometimes the sellers will go and put cheap prices on so they can sell fast and cheap – but it depends on the time you have.” Even if cooperatives are counteracting the barriers set in place by more powerful actors, the members of the cooperative are still deeply connected to the decisions of other members of their group. As Luis pointed out, if other members have a limited time that they can spend at the market, then they may lower prices of the pineapples to ensure a quicker sale. This may even go against the determined price by the broader market, and thus depending on someone else to sell your produce may actually be riskier than selling it yourself. As Luis noted, however, he would not be able to support the costs of the market alone, and so relying on both market price and on other cooperative members to follow this price is a risk he takes to ensure he can continue to produce pineapples.

The relationships that form within a cooperative, then, means that in some circumstances, all members may bear the struggles of another member. Despite this, however, Luis felt his involvement in a cooperative made him a stronger producer.

If you want to work in a cooperative you have to have something to show, something to guarantee – if you have nothing then you cannot look for credit. We started out with just a few people in our [cooperative], but then we jumped to four more and it grew. It is because people are stronger in a group – you have producers and other activities – to produce you need others – the trend is to not work alone, because you are stronger.

Luis was indicating that he felt he was in a more powerful position because he was working with others like himself. For Luis this collective action lowered transaction costs and thus sell in spite stronger and more powerful actors (such as larger landholders or pineapple producers from other countries).
Examining the reasons behind people’s actions within the structures that they are embedded in allows for a greater understanding of the more complex relationships between various actors. Furthermore, it shows how some farmers forgo a certain level of control when they establish trusting relationships with other farmers and act in ‘everyday’ opposition to the political, economic, social, and environmental structures in which they are embedded. It is a way, argue Bryant and Bailey (1997:161), for grassroots actors to work in opposition to the power structures while at the same time avoiding direct confrontation with these more powerful actors. The use of cooperatives is one way to counteract the impact of large-scale agricultural production and large-scale importation of food items. Other avenues can be used as well, and many farmers who worked alone identified multiple actions that they were taking to counteract the impacts that larger-scale production had on their own farming experiences.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the ways in which small-to-medium scale producers are demonstrating agency and control over the production and sale of their products. I argued that although these farmers struggle with selling their products more than larger producers, they are still able, through niche markets and specializing in production methods/produce, to exhibit agency that allow them to have a level of success. However, even when this can occur, I have shown how farmers are still embedded in a structure of power inequalities and unequal access to markets and resources. In outlining niche markets, I have demonstrated that product specialization for farmers not only supports their farming businesses but can also support their own value systems and production
methods. Moreover, through the use of social capital, farmer-farmer relationships and alternative production methods, participants have been able to secure market locations and develop important relationships with consumers. Without niche markets such as Agroshopping, cooperatives that allow for more strength in the market as farmers work together, relying on family farming, and social connections that provide access to coveted market spaces, participants would possibly be in more marginalized and vulnerable positions. By examining the diverse paths that farmers have taken to increase their control and decision-making, I have shown that farmers are not restricted to one set of actions. Rather, participants are utilizing multiple avenues to achieve similar goals and take action against the structural inequalities within which they are embedded.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored the experiences of SFEs who sell their produce at three city market spaces across Asunción. More specifically I have outlined how SFEs are negotiating livelihoods within a politicized environment that favors an economy that is heavily embedded in agricultural export practices. I show how actors influence the structures that SFEs are embedded in, which, I argue, make SFEs economically vulnerable through a lack of access to the vertical markets that favor larger-scale agriculture and agribusiness who gain contracts and relationships with supermarkets. In addition to local competition, the sale of imported products and the connection that the food market in Paraguay has to international food market economies has further marginalized SFEs and has constricted their access to important markets within Paraguay.

I employed the actor-oriented approach of political ecology to understand these links and show how farmers are affected by political and economic decision-making and are, at various levels, being impacted by structures of power and inequality. I have argued that in addition to current agricultural inequalities, those SFEs are still being influenced by structural inequalities that were enacted and reinforced during the past century.

In addressing the structural issues, politicized environments, and unequal access to land I have also shown the ways in which farmers are attempting to negotiate and secure their livelihoods. Through the examination of various strategies, such as accessing niche market spaces, employing social capital initiatives that enhance market access, participating in family farming to decrease labor costs, using alternative production methods, and specializing in products that consumers demand, participants are
nevertheless able to negotiate a place for themselves in a context of the prevalent industrial agriculture production methods in Paraguay.

Through the employment of Ortner’s (2011) theoretical approach of agency, I have demonstrated that participants are responding to the structural constrains via actions that allow them to be agents of their own production and farming practices. By exploring the strategic decisions farmers make, I have shown that they are able to enact a level of control over their products that other small farmers throughout the country may not be able to do. In particular, farmer livelihoods are supported and enhanced by Agroshopping, which acts as a niche market that encourages and enables these farmers to search out alternative forms of production and provide elite clientele with specialty items not readily available in other parts of the city.

I have argued that actions and intentions of participants needs to be examined within the culturally specific environment in which they are embedded, in order to understand how SFEs are attempting to ensure viable livelihoods. Moreover, I have discussed the many different avenues that SFEs are using, arguing that there are multiple potential strategies participants may use to maintain and achieve their goals. In doing so, I have argued that the SFEs are indeed acting as their own agents and demonstrating agency while working within the structure in which they are influenced.

Although the SFEs that I spoke with are able to access market spaces in Asunción, there are many more smaller-scale farmers throughout the country who are excluded from direct-marketing opportunities and sometimes from continuing with their farming opportunities all together (see Finnis et al, 2012; Hetherington, 2009; Tucker, 2012). Lack of road access and exclusion from land ownership have been two major
issues that smaller farmers face when looking to get their produce to market spaces. In addition, there are broader issues in Paraguay that prevent access to market spaces, including the influence of imported products and vertical markets that are restrict smaller farmers from accessing proper food procurement industries and access to supermarket spaces. It must be recognized that although each farmer is experiencing something different based on their everyday circumstances, the power structures that limit market access to smaller-scale farmers are shared throughout the country. In some areas, such as the Eastern Frontier where landless peasant are clashing with authorities over land access, these power structures seem more apparent and in need of immediate address. In others, however, such as the Central Department where present day land clashes are far less common, the same structures are influencing SFEs but responses to them are less violent. The reality is that farmers who are selling at Agroshopping are a privileged few.

Research Limitations and Areas for Future Research

The primary limitation of my research is in relation to my fieldwork and the amount of time I spent in Paraguay. Even though I spent a total of 9 weeks in the country, I feel that a longer stay would have allowed me to develop more personal and consistent relationships with participants. Upon my return to Paraguay in October of 2012, I was pleased to find many of the participants that I spoke with remembered who I was. Yet, there were times where time restrictions, either for the participant, or me, prevented me from journeying to farms to conduct follow-up interviews. Time restrictions also affected the number of interviews I could conduct, and although I have presented my findings based on the discussions with participants, I am unable to discuss in depth the
experiences of SFEs who are selling independently from their homes or who are using middle-men to access market spaces. As such, I have relied on other published works to both support and enhance my own research. My analysis is limited to the participants that I spoke with, and should not be assumed to be broad generalizations of small-to-medium scale farmers across the whole of Paraguay.

Paraguay, compared to some other Latin American countries, is relatively under researched and so there are many areas that should be further explored. There is still work to be done, especially when it comes to examining small-to-medium scale farmer access to market spaces throughout the city. Although I only examined three markets, there is the possibility that there are other markets throughout the city that could be providing space to farmers. Furthermore, given things like the opening of Abasto Norte in the Winter/Spring of 2012, there is a clear need for research to be ongoing due to the changing opportunities and circumstances for SFEs. Moreover, as power within the government shifts and Paraguay continues as a relatively recently established democracy, the experiences of SFEs and their relationships with the government will be in a continual flux. This has already shown to be true as many farmers discussed the issues with the “old” government referring to the time before Lugo, and then later speaking to the time of Lugo’s Presidency and the shorter timeframe after his impeachment. The changing government systems, as well as changes in global agricultural markets, will all have trickle-down effects on SFEs and thus need to be considered over a longer time period.

My research has raised questions about the contradictions presented by the presence of imported products. If we take into consideration the poverty level of many Paraguayans, then it is easy to say that having an imported option that is cheaper than
local produce is better for the population as a whole because it increases food accessibility. On the other hand, when local farmers are not able to make a profit from their harvest, they may be forced to leave farming and move to urban areas, decreasing local food sovereignty and the benefits that go along with having a strong local and diverse agricultural market. As such, I call for future research to address these complex questions by focusing a research project on both the consumers and the farmers at Mercado de Abasto, Abasto Norte, and Agroshopping.

Finally, in future studies that consider the size of farmers and the categorization of farmers as small, medium, or large scale I call for the consideration of how farmers perceive themselves in these terms. I followed the literature in assuming that a certain acreage owned or farmed would determine the scale of farmer. However, I found that some farmers perceived themselves differently and contradicted my assumptions about terminology. As such, farmers’ self perception of their scale needs to be considered in future research.

*Public Issues Anthropology in Paraguay*

This research was conducted for the Public Issues Anthropology program at the University of Guelph. As such, it is important to address the ways in which my research and analysis may impact the public sphere in Paraguay. This research presents the everyday realities that SFEs face when accessing market spaces and negotiating their livelihoods in a politicized agricultural environment. It shows that there is a need for more direct-marketing initiatives for SFEs and that some farmers identify the benefits of direct markets as outweighing the costs and struggles that come along with being an
agricultural producer. There is a greater need for farmers to be able to access market spaces and be in control of the sales of their products. The findings that I have presented in this thesis can aid organizations in further understanding the needs that participants identify and the everyday struggles that they overcome. My hope is to return to Paraguay within a year of my completed MA thesis in order to present my findings in an accessible way to participants at all three markets. Furthermore, I will present a copy of this thesis to the Universidad Nacional de Asunción for the use and reference of faculty and students.

Producing food can be a beautiful struggle for some farmers. It is important to recognize the barriers that farmers face in producing food and getting it to market and understand the steps they take to have control over their sales. At the same time, recognition is needed for the enormous amount of work that goes into providing fresh produce to local communities. The farmers that I met during my fieldwork were all negotiating themselves through larger political, economic, and social systems, and it is my hope that I have represented them well throughout this thesis. In discussing the struggles, actions, and experiences as smaller scale farmers in Paraguay, many participants spoke of the benefits they get out of farming. I am extremely grateful for the stories and experience that farmers shared with me. My intention is to re-tell these stories within a broader framework and bring further meaning and understanding to them. With this in mind, I conclude with a final comment from Joseph, which demonstrates that despite the hardships he faces, he is still able to gain a satisfaction from his work. He said,

The best thing is that you see beautiful things all day, and because our vegetable garden is very different, people like our things. Sometimes for you it is not an easy situation, but when you see that people like your produce you feel good, and if you have your own clients you do not have a
problem with larger farmers – you have a part of the market and no one can take your place. In Agroshopping we have specific clients, and our clients want to pay for our products, these are people who know about the different kinds of vegetables.
References


Appendices

Appendix 1
Some Key Interview Questions (Reduced Guide)

1. How long have you been selling at this market for?
2. What kinds of products do you sell?
3. Which products do you grow yourself? And where do you get the products that you don’t grow yourself?
4. What role do you see this market playing in providing food to the city of Asunción? And what role do you see yourself playing within that?
5. Do you think city markets play a specific role in food access?
6. What is your experience selling your own produce?
7. Can you tell me about how/why you began selling here?
8. Can you tell me about some of the struggles you have dealt with in growing your own food?
9. Can you tell be about some of your crops/livestock that you have? Do you have other products that you grow but do not sell?
10. Can you tell me about how you feel about agricultural production in Paraguay and the role that this market has?
11. Can you tell me about relationships between small-to-medium scale and large farmers? With the government?
12. What is the best thing about this market for you?
13. Is there a sense of community here?
14. Can you tell me about climatic changes and influences on your production?
## Appendix 2

### Participant demographics - Identified small-farmers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Location of Interview</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Farm Size</th>
<th>Years Selling</th>
<th>Types of Products</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>José</td>
<td>Farm visit – J.A. Saldivar Sold at Abasto</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3 hectare</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Mint, tomatoes, strawberries, onions, beets, cilantro,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mario (Organic Producer)</td>
<td>Areguá Sold at Abasto Norte</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10 hectares</td>
<td></td>
<td>Carrots, beets, lettuce, onions (red, white, green), cilantro, bananas, cabbage, tomatoes, radish, cauliflower, swiss chard,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>J.A. Saldivar Sold at Agroshopping</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1 hectare</td>
<td></td>
<td>Corn, lettuce, basil, onions, beets, strawberries, cabbage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Abasto Norte</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1 hectare</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>Lettuce, onions, bananas, pineapple, melon, tomatoes, green peppers, red peppers, honey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Market</td>
<td>Age Range</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Land (in hectares)</td>
<td>Years</td>
<td>Products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
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<td>---------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rafael</td>
<td>Mercado de Abasto</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Tomatoes, lettuce, parsley, swiss chard, onions, spinach, oregano, cucumber, melon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raul</td>
<td>Mercado de Abasto</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>150 hectares in total of a cooperative</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Carrots, melons, lettuce, potatoes, tomato, peppers, onions, soy, cotton, sunflowers, lemon,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Mercado de Abasto</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>lettuce, cilantro, parsley, broccoli, tomatoes, cauliflower.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>Mercado de Abasto</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30 (family business)</td>
<td>lettuce, green onions, spinach, cabbage, parsley, cilantro, yerba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eduardo</td>
<td>Mercado de Abasto</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30 years (family farm)</td>
<td>lettuce, cabbage, green onions, strawberries,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>Mercado de Abasto</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>pineapple</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>Agroshopping</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>green onions, green peppers, carrots, lettuce,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Company</td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Size</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Vegetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frederico</td>
<td>Agroshopping</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5 hectares</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>tomatoes, carrots, cabbage, lettuce, beets, radish, onions, green onion, green pepper, red pepper, red cabbage, spinach,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolina</td>
<td>Agroshopping</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1 hectare</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower, spinach, onions, green onions, tomatoes, strawberries, cucumber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabella</td>
<td>Agroshopping</td>
<td>60-70</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1.5 hectares</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>lettuce, green onions, spinach, cauliflower, carrots, beets, radish, garlic, squash,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Agroshopping</td>
<td>Age Range</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Land Area</td>
<td>Years Planted</td>
<td>Crops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
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<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hector</td>
<td>Agroshopping</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1 hectare</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>lettuce, spinach, green onions, red peppers, green peppers, carrots, cabbage, onions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedro</td>
<td>Agroshopping</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14 w/ brother and alone 4 years ago</td>
<td>peanuts, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds, quinoa, eggs, corn flour, black beans, kidney beans,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>