Reconnection in Local Food Initiatives: Purpose, practice, and the calibration of value

by

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ABSTRACT

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Reconnection between producers and consumers is often presented as an integral part of the local food narrative. This project sought to interrogate the idea of reconnection between these two actors in Local Food Initiatives (LFIs) in Southwestern Ontario in order to engage critically with food localization processes and to better understand the assumptions and expectations of both producers and consumers. Drawing on interviews and surveys, this research suggests that producers and consumers value reconnection for different reasons and experience practical limitations in satisfying diverse expectations. The ‘reconnection project’ then, is perhaps not a firm foundation for food system change. New roles and responsibilities for each party, along with ongoing and changing negotiations between producer and consumer needs might predispose participants to favour other arrangements (without direct contact) if they became more readily available and were capable of guaranteeing both profitability for the producer and healthy foods for the consumer.
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Chapter One
Introduction

1.1 Why reconnect?

Growing discontent with conventional (or industrial) agriculture has inspired many forms of ‘alternative’ agriculture and food provisioning systems over the past decade. Increasing concentration and globalization in the conventional food system (Atkins and Bowler 2001; Kaufman 2012), along with its associated negative impacts on the natural environment (Belasco 2008; Guthman 2004; Kloppenberg et al. 1996), inequitable treatment of food producers, labourers, and animals (Guthman 2004; Patel 2007), and association with unhealthy and heavily processed foods (Belasco 2008; Moss 2013; Pollan 2006;), has elicited response and reaction in the form of ‘localizing’ or ‘relocalizing’ food production-consumption relations (Hinrichs 2003; Watts, Ilbery, and Maye 2005). These local alternatives typically represent an attempt by both producers and consumers to bypass, or engage less with, conventional modes of food production-consumption and subscribe (whether intentionally or not) to an increasingly popular local food narrative of more equitable prices for farmers, healthier choices for consumers, and broader environmental benefits and avenues for food systems change. However, the local food narrative is at times problematic (Born and Purcell 2006; Dupuis and Goodman 2005; Hinrichs 2003; Winter 2003) as its encompassing and normative nature centres on the idea that reconnecting producers with consumers leads to a host of mutual benefits. This research project seeks to interrogate and test the idea of ‘reconnection’ between these two fundamental actors in local food initiatives (LFIs) in order to engage more critically with food localization and the assumptions and expectations around local food.
1.2 Research context

A review of the literature on food localization highlights two interconnected themes. First, that close or direct producer-consumer interactions and relationships often underpin the structure and value of local food initiatives (Hinrichs 2003; Holloway et al. 2007; Venn et al. 2006); and second, that decreasing the geographical distance between producers and consumers along the food chain is assumed to promote or create these more meaningful relationships, in which both parties feel satisfied, connected, and share mutual interests (DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Sage 2003; Ilbery et al. 2005). Local food initiatives are thus expected to create space for a genuine ‘reconnection’ of producers with consumers.

However, this alleged ‘reconnection’, based primarily on geographical proximity and a shortening of ‘alternative’ food supply chains and networks (Watts et al. 2005; Renting et al. 2003), is as yet poorly defined or understood in alternative food systems literature. The ‘reconnection project’ tends to be presented on normative (rather than empirical) grounds as an idealistic assumption that some deem to be “uncomplicated and utopian” (Ilbery et al. 2005, 117). The ideal “enlightened food producer” meets the equally “concerned customer” (Smithers et al. 2008, 338) without mention of their potential economic, social, or ideological differences. In reality, these relationships are complex and diverse within different scales and settings of local food initiatives. Ilbery et al. (2005) therefore question ‘reconnection’ in terms of whether or not diverse actors along the food production-consumption chain can be brought closer together in expectations or mindsets towards the purpose or value of local foods and LFIs.

Guthman (2002) hypothesizes that in the case of organics, purpose and value are inherently different for consumers and producers. She suggests that consumers hold cultural or symbolic value(s) of food. These symbolic values are associated with subjective consumer
judgments surrounding the knowledge, trust, distinction, transparency, or simplicity that comes with buying organic (Guthman 2002, 302). In addition, *symbolic* values are altogether distinct from the *material* production costs associated with practical and economic producer concerns. Importantly, the “symbolic use value of food” often supersedes its “material use value” (Guthman 2002, 300), pointing to a potentially problematic disconnect between producer and consumer understandings of purpose and value in the production and consumption of organic foods. Guthman’s (2002) assessment refers specifically to how producers and consumers understand purpose and value of organic foods; however, a similar disconnect may be found in the realm of local foods. Although ‘local’ and ‘organic’ often get bundled into the same ‘good food’ package (Connell et al. 2008) perhaps too uncritically (Born and Purcell 2006), their similarities as “values-based food choices” (Connell et al., 2008 p182) are useful to consider. In particular, Smithers et al. (2008) propose that at farmers’ markets the *local food experience* may be more meaningful to customers than the *procurement of the food* itself. Thus, the social and cultural capital gained from shopping at a farmers’ market (Smithers et al. 2008) and its novelty and social atmosphere (Miele 2006) may be of more concern for consumers than developing a ‘reconnection’ with the producers and the food product.

Finally, Mount (2012) raises important questions regarding how the scale of LFIs might influence or change the ‘reconnection’ experience. Specifically, he suggests that ‘scaling up’ or making local food systems more broadly accessible might undermine ‘reconnection’ and translate into a loss of that elusive *symbolic* value that provides the basis for the perceived integrity and legitimacy associated with very small-scale, locally run food initiatives (Mount 2012, 109). Although Renting et al. (2003) imagine three ‘scales’ (face-to-face, proximate, extended) of short food supply chains (SFSCs) that work to communicate integrity, trust, and
legitimacy in *alternative* food networks (Renting et al. 2003, 399), the reality and diversity of *local* food initiatives alone suggest a continuum of scale even in the most ‘direct’ SFSCs. Stretching between the smallest-scale ‘face-to-face’ interactions of roadside stands, farmers’ markets, or home deliveries; to larger-scale ‘proximate’ interactions of farm shops, cooperatives or community-supported agriculture programs (CSAs), shifting ideas of ‘reconnection,’ legitimacy, and value arise and merit investigation.

This research project therefore seeks to interrogate and test the ‘reconnection’ between two fundamental actors in LFIs: producers and consumers. Additionally, and prior to empirical investigation, ‘reconnection’ itself needs better-defined parameters. Thus, an opportunity exists to simultaneously work towards a clearer definition of ‘reconnection’ in LFIs, and to test what, if any, sorts of ‘reconnection’ do occur in local food initiatives. Arguably, the viability of local food systems depends in part on the mutual expectations of producers and consumers being met.

### 1.3 Research aim and objectives

Mount (2012) emphasizes the important yet elusive role that participant perceptions play in creating the intangible “added value” often associated with ‘reconnection’ in local food initiatives. Smithers et al. (2008) discuss ‘reconnection’ as predicated on informal “terms of engagement” between producers and consumers in local food initiatives (specifically at farmers’ markets). These “terms of engagement” can be thought of as implicit, unofficial, yet highly valued contracts between participants, indicative of the type of ‘reconnection’ experienced in diverse LFIs. This research seeks to add empirical findings to the abstract notion of ‘reconnection’ in local food initiatives. Drawing on recent conceptualizations (Connell et al. 2008; Mount 2012; Smithers et al. 2008) of the ways that people negotiate their involvement in LFIs, my own research will attempt to theorize the relationship between participant motivations,
challenges, and expectations in LFIs in an attempt to better understand how consumers and producers calibrate or measure value in local foods. Understanding how producers and consumers frame value can in turn help to better define and understand ‘reconnection’ and its merits in LFIs.

In order to discover if and how producers and consumers experience ‘reconnection,’ this research will identify and analyze their motivations, challenges, and opinions that help construct, or are in turn constructed by their engagement in local food initiatives in Southwestern Ontario. Importantly, the ways that producers and consumers interact and influence each other will be investigated as they shift (or not) in local food initiatives of diverse structures. In analyzing producer-consumer values and the construction, stability, or fluidity or those values, this research project aims to test a part of the local food narrative that suggests that reconnecting producers and consumers acts as a foundation for alternative food systems development and change. The project seeks to interrogate the idea of reconnection in local food initiatives by contributing to a greater understanding of the following central question: **Do producers and consumers participating in local food initiatives share expectations and/or values concerning the merits of local food?** To address this question I propose three objectives:

**Objective One**  
**Understand and characterize motivations and challenges for producers and consumers in local food initiatives:** Investigate and document factors that encourage actors’ participation as well as those that make participation difficult.

**Objective Two**  
**Understand and characterize producer and consumer considerations used to calibrate and extract value from the local food exchange:** Investigate and document actors’ material and symbolic expectations, perceptions, and opinions of ‘local.’

**Objective Three**  
**Assess and compare the value of reconnection for producers and consumers in local food initiatives:** Discuss implications of how actors
experience and negotiate similar or distinct expectations and values
drawing on the empirical work conducted to support Objectives One and
Two.

1.4 Thesis outline

The remainder of this thesis will be presented in the following five chapters. Chapter Two
will provide an in-depth review of local and alternative foods literature and will provide the
groundwork for understanding and situating the research findings. Chapter Three will outline
research methodology, describe the study area, and characterize the study sample of participants.
Chapter Four will address Objective One by characterizing the motivations and challenges for
producers and consumers in local food initiatives. Chapter Five will address Objective Two by
characterizing how producers and consumers calibrate value in local food initiatives. Chapter Six
will address Objective Three by discussing the implications of the findings from Objectives One
and Two and by assessing the value of reconnection for producers and consumers in local food
initiatives. Chapter Six will also outline the project’s contributions and reflect upon limitations
and opportunities for further research.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of selected bodies of local and alternative food systems literature in order to outline how ‘alternatives’ are framed and discussed in the context of agricultural change and new production-consumption relationships. The chapter is divided into five sections. Section 2.1 will provide a short summary of capital, industrial agriculture and what is conceptualized as the conventional food chain, including important characteristics of food production and distribution and common critiques of its structural features and impacts. Section 2.2 will outline the productivist/post-productivist and quantity/quality binaries discussed in the literature to illustrate how ‘alternative’ agriculture has come to be held and positioned as intentionally opposing the industrial food system, as well as how those binaries have been problematized. Focusing in further on a more specific type of ‘alternative’ agriculture, Section 2.3 will focus on unpacking the aims, assumptions, and theoretical framings of local foods in order to provide a basis for understanding the concept of reconnection within local food systems. Section 2.4 will then discuss local foods as a ‘reconnection project’ and illustrate how producer and consumer experiences of reconnection are shaped by different perceptions, expectations, and needs. Specifically, this section will discuss shared and distinct ideas of quality in local foods as well as issues of accessibility and profitability as they relate to producer-consumer concerns. Based on the tensions noted in Section 2.4, Section 2.5 will conclude the literature review by questioning reconnection; both in terms of if/how it is experienced and whether it, as a basis for addressing larger agricultural concerns, provides a stable foundation for food system change. These types of questions indicate knowledge gaps in the literature and provide the rationale behind this research project.
2.1 Capital, industrial agriculture and the ‘conventional’ food chain

Conventional agriculture usually refers to systems of production that feature the philosophies and practices of industry and the absorption of farming into a global agro-food complex, making farm production “equivalent to factory production” (Guthman 2004, 62). Three overarching characteristics describe agricultural transition towards industrial production: intensification, concentration, and specialization (Atkins and Bowler 2001, 65). Intensification is characterized by the use of large high-tech machinery, chemical fertilizers, an overall increase in capital or purchased agricultural inputs (as opposed to labour inputs), and a landscape where highly productive farms dominate and are linked to agribusiness (Smithers and Johnson 2004, 192). Concentration refers to the process in which the largest operations buy out smaller land-holdings and the work of food production “is carried out by a declining number of people” (Smithers and Johnson 2004, 194) as the “agrarian ideal” of independent “owner-operated” (Guthman 2004, 11) mid-sized family farms or, “agriculture of the middle” (Kirschenmann et al. 2008), disappear. Finally, specialization refers to the decrease in the number or variety of products/crops grown or raised on any given single farm as well as to entire “specialized agricultural regions” throughout the world (Atkins and Bowler 2001, 66; Ilbery and Bowler 1998, 70). Farm profitability is linked to only one commodity, forming a landscape of monocultures, feedlots, and industrial-scale livestock, poultry, and dairy operations.

Conventional agriculture not only refers to industrial food production methods, but also to the associated processing, distribution, and marketing chains of control. The idea of the conventional food chain ‘bottleneck’ is common throughout the literature on food systems. Figure 1 illustrates the large number of producers and consumers on either end of the chain,
while a few large corporate actors in the form of processors distributors, marketers, and retailers dominate the route food takes to get from producer to consumer.

Figure 1: The conventional food chain ‘bottleneck’ Adapted from Patel (2007), p200

The conventional food chain extends globally and has grown out of the political and economic contexts of globalization, neoliberalism, and capitalism. Agriculture’s shift from nationally based food provisioning to a more global agro-food system can be traced as far back as the immediate post-Second World War era, and is tied more directly to the changing political and economic atmosphere of the 1970’s. Increasing economic globalization and the spread of neoliberal capitalist policies since the 1970’s has been accompanied by an “unprecedented deregulation of agriculture”, and the “hegemony of export-oriented neoliberal development strategies” (Goodman and Watts 1997, 1). The globalization of agricultural trade is inextricably connected to the broader “liberalization of global movements of capital” (Buttel in: Goodman and Watts 1997, 345), and has simultaneously dismantled the conditions for nationally based food economies or economically viable regional food chains. All of these features contribute to
its classification as ‘productivist’ (Ilbery and Bowler 1998), or, as capitalist “neoliberal business-as-usual” (Rosin et al. 2012, 8).

The structural features of conventional agriculture are increasingly criticized both in academic literature and in popular media. Born and Purcell (2006) outline three major lines of criticism regarding the “capitalization of food production”: environmental sustainability, food quality/human health, and social and economic justice (199), while for O’Kane (2011) these same criticisms are framed as negative environmental impacts, social/economic impacts, and health impacts (273). Similarly, Evans et al. (2002) suggest that consumers are increasingly concerned about the “impact of productivist agriculture on the environment, food safety, farm animal welfare, and rural economies” (317). Here, a brief overview of environmental, health, and socio-economic concerns connected to industrial agriculture are offered.

Despite “increased crop yields in the aggregate”, Born and Purcell (2006, 199) identify conventional reliance on petroleum for production and distribution, as well as water pollution from pesticides and chemical fertilizers, as undermining environmental welfare (200). Shrinking areas of arable farmland (O’Kane 2011; Oakland Institute 2014) and soil erosion from over-intensive use of chemical inputs (Kloppenburg 1996; O’Kane 2011) also underscore the criticisms of industrial agriculture’s focus on productivity at the expense of the natural environment. Concerns about human health are on the rise in light of “food-related scares and animal disease outbreaks like BSE and Foot and Mouth Disease in the 1990’s” (Lamine 2012, 240), E. coli and salmonella outbreaks, and concern and debate about genetically modified organisms (Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000; Winter 2003). These uncertainties cause consumers to express a “lack of confidence” (Petit et al. 2010, 1138) in, and question the safety of, industrial agricultural production methods and the overall nutritional value of conventionally produced
food. Some suggest that the conventional system provides not so much food, but merely energy dense, sugar-filled calories devoid of nutritional value (Pollan 2006); or, ‘cheap food’ (Norberg-Hodge 2002) that has been tied to obesity and chronic disease in the developed world (O’Kane 2011).

Finally, the critiques of conventional food chain raise concerns about social equity and economic viability in food production. Industrial agriculture encourages a systematic overproduction of certain foods, driving prices down for farmers and thereby triggering even more production and intensification to compensate for poor returns (Guthman 2004; Pollan 2006), while declining farm incomes and increasing costs for inputs trap many conventional farmers in an ongoing ‘cost-price squeeze’ (Marsden and Smith 2005; Rossett 2000). Adding to the ‘cost-price squeeze’ is the simultaneous consolidation of, and distance created by, companies that have consolidated power in the processing, distributing, and marketing of foods. They now capture most of the ‘value-added’ for food products (Ilbery et al. 2005), leading to a significant drop in the percentage of the final retail price of food retained by farmers. According to Ilbery et al. (2005), an estimated 7.5% of the final retail price of food returns to farmers in the UK – compared to 50% sixty years ago (117). Similarly, Norberg-Hodge (2002) tracks how US spending on food has shifted in the past century:

In 1910, 41 percent of US spending on food went to farmers, while 15 percent went to input suppliers and 44 percent to marketers. By 1990 the proportions had changed dramatically: input costs have risen to 24 percent and marketing to 67 percent …. [while] the farmer’s share had dropped to just 9 percent. (Norberg-Hodge 2002, 68)

The consolidation of power along the food chain means that food now travels through countless intermediary bodies before getting to the table. It is these intermediary bodies that capture much of the value that used to go to farmers. In addition, the increase in middlemen has led to an increased distance between producers and the end consumers.
Because food is now produced, bought, processed, distributed, marketed, and sold in the framework of international trade and global commodity markets – and because the multinational companies that control food function on a global scale – consumers are rarely geographically close to where their food products come from or know how they have been produced:

The growing detachment between the production of agricultural outputs and the manufacture and supply of food to the wider population has been one of the principal characteristics of the modern agro-food sector (Ilbery et al. 2005, 116).

While the distance created between producers and consumers is not inherently a negative development, disconnecting consumers with the food they purchase has allowed for much of the ecological and social exploitation associated with agribusiness (Guthman 2004, 61) to be ignored, or at least dismissed and glossed over. Many proponents of alternative food systems and critics of the global agro-food system therefore suggest that the best way to address the externalities associated with, but ultimately ignored by, conventional agriculture is to reconnect producers with consumers of food.

Through the “de-industrialization of the relations between food production and consumption” (Buttel in: Goodman and Watts 1997, 355), an increased understanding of the system of food provisioning can be shared, considered, and brought into constructive dialogue. ‘Alternative’ forms of agriculture in North America and Europe typically revolve around this important feature of ‘reconnection’ in the hopes of addressing the wider systemic human health, environmental, and social problems associated with conventional agriculture.

2.2 ‘Alternative’ agriculture: Opposing industrial food

‘Alternative’ agriculture is frequently conceived of in the literature as oppositional to ‘conventional’ agriculture because it seeks to address wider systemic problems associated with the ‘conventional’ food chain. To illustrate this point, two common framings of the
conventional-alternative dichotomy are briefly discussed below. They seek to explain and position the alternative food movement as counter to established conventional means of food production. However, simplistic definitions and binaries are often problematic. The problem of binaries is also recognized in the literature and this section will outline both the ways that scholars have sought to categorize ‘alternative’ and ‘conventional’ into two easily comprehensible categories, and their related calls for more diverse and complex understandings of food systems structures.

**Productivist vs. post-productivist**

Some rural geographers researching in the UK and Europe have conceptualized recent shifts in agriculture as trends of a larger ‘post-productivist’ agricultural framework (Ilbery and Bowler 1998). While conventional agriculture is considered ‘productivist’, emerging alternative food networks are characterized as ‘post-productivist’ and have at their core “concept[s] of sustainable agriculture” (Ilbery and Bowler 1998, 78). While ‘productivist’ principles in agriculture include the previously discussed intensification, concentration, and specialization in food production, ‘post-productivist’ principles are presented as directly antithetical, emphasizing extensification, dispersal, and diversification (Ilbery and Bowler 1998, 70-71; Evans et al. 2002). Instead of further intensifying production, extensification encourages businesses to decrease their “level of purchased farm inputs” such as chemical fertilizers and sprays. Dispersion encourages farmers to subdivide land and businesses into smaller units, thereby “dispersing agricultural production” instead of concentrating it. Finally, diversification seeks to develop new sources of income for farmers through moving away from mono-cropping or single commodity businesses (Ilbery and Bowler 1998, 70-71).
Although these trends have been identified to an extent in EU and US agriculture, and are arguably encouraged in part by farm bills such as the Common Agricultural Policy in the EU (Ilbery and Bowler 1998), it remains to be seen whether, and by how much, these changes actually occur in different agricultural sectors. Additionally, Evans et al. (2002) argue that conceptualizing agricultural change either as ‘productivist’ or ‘post-productivist’ oversimplifies the matter (317) and doesn’t allow for critical engagement with the many varied forms of already in-practice ‘alternative’ agriculture. Before analyzing more specifically one such ‘alternative,’ I will briefly discuss a second way that the conventional-alternative dichotomy has been conceived of in the literature.

**Quantity vs. quality**

‘Alternative’ agriculture can also be understood as responding to an increasing desire for **quality** foods (as opposed to the ‘productivist’ or conventional focus on **quantity**) and some consider the quantity/quality dualism to be an intrinsic part of productivist/post-productivist change (Evans et al. 2002). In the quantity/quality dualism, conventional agriculture is primarily focused on producing mass quantities of food and “maximizing the production of calories, protein, vitamins, and the like” (Stock and Carolan 2012, 115). One of conventional agriculture’s purported benefits is its ability to produce massive amounts of this ‘cheap’ food. However, many argue that it is only in ignoring environmental harm caused by intensive agriculture, or in perpetuating inequitable labour practices, that food produced by conventional agriculture can be said to be ‘cheap’ (Norberg-Hodge 2002):

We want inexpensive food, not food that is cheap. Conventional agriculture might produce cheap food but it does so only with great expense, to culture, biodiversity, human and environmental health – even global warming can be strongly tied to Big Ag’s myopic focus (Stock and Carolan 2012, 124).
It is from this critique that a call for higher quality food was born, wherein quality becomes an indicator not only of nutritional goodness, but also of social and environmental conscientiousness.

Alternatives to conventional agriculture then, are generally understood as being more concerned with the quality of food. That quality can be complex and socially constructed based on individual preferences, products, and places (Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000), but in general, advocates for alternative methods assert that “how food is raised, processed, and prepared” is of greater importance than the quantity produced (Stock and Carolan 2012, 115). And although food “made and produced with a greater eye toward ecological and social sustainability” (Stock and Carolan 2012, 123) may not be as ‘cheap’ monetarily as conventionally produced food, people have begun to demand a higher quality food (i.e. food that is ‘inexpensive’ or at least less expensive for the environment, for society, and for human health).

**Moving beyond dichotomies**

The existence of ‘other’ choices for food does not, and perhaps will not, displace or negate the importance of conventional agriculture. This is not to say that ‘alternative’ food networks are not worth studying, but to assert that any critical analysis must retain a certain amount of situational specificity. ‘Alternative’ agriculture cannot be studied as a homogeneous movement, and should not be thought of as the alternative to the conventional agriculture (as there have arguably always been multiple systems and forms of both ‘alternative’ and ‘conventional’ ideals at play). It is important to recognize and accept that the wide variety of movements claiming to be ‘alternative’ do not necessarily make up a unified or coherent opposition to conventional agriculture. Rather, that the roles ‘alternative’ food systems play are “highly situational” (Buttel 1997, 353), and represent many developing food systems and
networks “in addition to (and superimposed on) existing anonymous mass food markets” (Renting et al. 2003, 393). For Lamine (2012), ‘alternative’ agriculture is part of existing hybrid food geographies where the “agri-industrial paradigm” and the “integrated territorial paradigm” (‘alternative’) coexist and contribute to the development of “innovative pathways” or “transitions” to more sustainable food systems. Similarly, diversity among farms, farmers, and other actors within the food system encourages adaptive capacity and creates opportunities to work “toward social-ecological sustainability” (Folke et al. 2003, 355; see also Kummer et al. 2012). In this view, the existence of a diversity of initiatives or ‘alternatives’ is crucial to the development of transition pathways and increases resilience in agro-ecosystems.

Although it is tempting to conceive of ‘alternative’ agriculture as a coherent and singular opposition to conventional agriculture, this oversimplified dichotomy can be problematic because it “loses sight of the specificity of different examples of food production-consumption” (Holloway et al. 2007, 1) and perhaps more importantly, of the importance of diverse food networks, production methods, and structures. These gross characterizations of conventional and alternative present narrow and inflexible guidelines for production methods and limit, exclude, or fail to acknowledge the possibility for so-called ‘alternative’ food movements to address issues of quantity (more intensive production) or for ‘conventional’ food production to address issues of quality or diversity. Creating such a stark contrast implies that quality and quantity are mutually exclusive ideals, or that intensive food production is necessarily at odds with diversification or extensification.

Despite problems with such a defined contrast, the ideals typically associated with ‘alternatives’ do provide entry points for addressing larger food system issues. For example, a move towards quality over quantity indicates a positive shift towards dismissing the idea of
‘cheap’ food altogether in acknowledgment that in order to produce food, external factors such as culture, human health, environmental health, and social equity must be integrated into agricultural processes. It is these factors that local food systems purport to address and incorporate by way of reconnecting producers with consumers.

2.3 Understanding the ‘local’ food alternative: Aims, assumptions, and theoretical framings

Within emerging ‘alternative’ food provisioning systems there are a wide array of categories and characterizations reflected in the literature. Local foods represent one such ‘alternative’ to conventional agriculture, within which there are further variations between such incarnations as CSAs, farmers’ markets, direct selling, and ‘local’ sections in supermarket chains. Most broadly, ‘local’ food systems aim to provide a more equitable way for producers to sell their products, to give consumers healthier food choices, and to incorporate more environmentally sound agricultural methods (Born and Purcell 2006, 200). They tend to be defined as what they are not, or what they are opposing: ‘global’ (conventional) modes of food production and distribution. Characteristics such as small-scale and independently family owned farms, an emphasis on, and “economic sociology” of, quality foods, biodiversity and extensification in farm management, and a focus on close producer-consumer relationships are often attributed to local foods (Hinrichs 2003, 36) and presented as means to achieve local food system aims. These characteristics are directly antithetical to their global counterparts of large-scale corporate farming, an emphasis on and economics of quantity and price, monocultures and intensification in farm management, and distant producer-consumer relationships (Hinrichs 2003, 36) and are viewed as contributing to many of the problems that the ‘local’ seeks to solve. These goals and assumed characteristics surrounding local food systems help form an increasingly accepted local food narrative and reflect mostly normative qualities and claims with
which it is associated. Each can ultimately be questioned and many scholars have begun to criticize the local food narrative.

DuPuis and Goodman (2005) and Born and Purcell (2006) question these assumptions on a theoretical level, asserting that a new type of ‘unreflexive localism’ (DuPuis and Goodman 2005) or ‘local trap’ (Born and Purcell 2006) assumes that something inherently good exists about ‘local’ as a scale of organization. This type of assumption frames ‘local’ as a space of “pure conflict-free local values” (DuPuis and Goodman 2005, 359) and as resistance to “injustices perpetrated by industrial capitalism” (DuPuis and Goodman 2005, 361) and conventional agriculture. However, the ‘local’ can also be a space for ‘defensive localism’ (Born and Purcell 2006, 203; Winter 2003): a reactionary motivation for self-protection from expanding overseas markets (Qazi and Selfa 2005, 55), and increasing trade liberalization driven by a general xenophobic attitude towards foreign competition. ‘Local’ systems can also be based on the narrow interests of a “sectionalist, even authoritarian elite” (DuPuis and Goodman 2005, 361): the mostly white middle to upper-class consumers, or even be in conflict with the social justice goals they claim to value and work towards (Alkon 2008). On a more practical level, ‘local’ may not embody environmentally or socially sound production methods, as many geographically close food producers might be large-scale, use pesticides and fertilizers, and employ low-wage and/or exploited migrant labourers in their enterprises. Most simply, it should be the intent or explicit agenda of a ‘local’ food system that determines its superiority (or not) over larger-scale systems (Born and Purcell 2006). Thus, the idea that ‘local’ necessarily means a simultaneous promotion of environmental sustainability and/or social justice (Alkon 2008; DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Winter 2003), or represents an inherently more sustainable or
equitable scale for agriculture (Born and Purcell 2006; Hinrichs 2003) has been called into question.

Although the very idea of what ‘local’ means is still an area of uncertainty and ongoing discussion as the assumptions surrounding its benefits and outcomes are questioned throughout the literature, there are some recurring and useful frames of analysis for understanding local food systems broadly. The following offers a discussion of three major dimensions of local food systems as discussed in local and alternative food system literature: geographic, economic, and social. These dimensions outline important theoretical considerations in local food system analysis. Additionally, they begin to suggest that underlying the goals of local foods is the concept of reconnection between food buyers and food producers.

**Geography of ‘local’**

Rural geographers deal primarily with the idea that ‘relocalizing’ food – or putting a sense of place back into what we eat – helps to foster certainty, trust, and knowledge among consumers seeking ‘quality’ local food. By differentiating food based on its region or territory of origin, the project of ‘relocalization’ has also been seen as a way to revitalize rural areas, as has been noted by scholars working mostly in the UK and Europe (Marsden and Smith 2005; Ilbery et al. 2005; Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000; Morris and Kirwan 2011). Through two case studies: Graig Farm Organics in Wales and the Waddengroup Foundation in Holland, Marsden and Smith (2005) provide evidence of the positive effects that ‘relocalizing’ food can have on rural areas. Instead of continuing the “reconstruction of the countryside into a large agricultural factory” (Marsden and Smith 2005, 445) so typical of conventional agriculture, these businesses rebranded themselves based on region and production methods. In doing so they managed to recapture value, create jobs in the area (Marsden and Smith 2005, 447), and in general change the regional
geography to stave off the “economic marginalization and creeping rural decay” linked to modern agriculture (Marsden and Smith 2005, 448). In these cases, sustainable rural development was at the forefront of ‘relocalizing’ food through local entrepreneurial shifts toward ‘quality’ food production. More recently, what Lamine et al. (2012) term ‘territorial development’ can be seen as a continuation of the relocalization discussion, where diversity in territorial food initiatives is seen as a path towards more sustainable agri-food systems.

Another way to “identify and valorize local resources” (Watts et al. 2005, 27) and production methods is through specific certification schemes. European Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) schemes, or Canadian initiatives such as Foodland Ontario or Buy British Columbia (Ilbery et al. 2005) represent the creation of a market indicator for ‘place’ and also contribute to the ‘relocalization’ project. However, such certifications and labels may not always be a part of local food schemes. Rather, the meanings they convey about ‘relocalization’ are embodied, without label, by the very concept of ‘local’.

**Economy of ‘local’**

Geographers studying agro-food systems (Renting et al. 2003; Watts et al. 2005) point to the alternative economic dimensions of local food systems. They focus on the replacement of the conventional food chain with a ‘short food supply chain’ that theoretically helps to reconnect actors, “improve traceability” of food products, provide economic incentive for farmers who may be able to get a higher price for their goods, and in certain cases, reduce ‘food miles’ (Watts et al. 2005, 32-33). Short food supply chains (SFSCs) can be conceived of as geographically or spatially ‘close,’ or as geographically or spatially extended. *Figure 2* offers three conceptualizations of the possible ‘scales’ for SFSCs.
Even if the food chain is extended in a physical sense (i.e. the food still travels a significant distance) it can be considered a SFSC simply because it takes out the “number of powerful intermediaries between producer and consumer” (Watts et al. 2005, 32). Things like farm shops or farmers’ markets are close ‘face to face’ food chains, while certification labels or fair trade labels are examples of extended SFSCs, in which food travels a fair distance, but the consumer can still make a connection with the place and methods of production through information communicated on the labels (Renting et al. 2003, 400). The SFSC model provides a new form of economic engagement for both producers and consumers.

One way the more direct linkages between producers and consumers may demonstrate a new form of economic engagement in food production-consumption is in the fulfillment of what Buller and Morris (2004) term “market-oriented initiatives for environmentally sustainable food production”, or MOIs (1065). For many, a hallmark of conventional agricultural practices is that they produce negative environmental externalities (soil erosion, pollution) that go unaccounted for in food price (Buller and Morris 2004; Fraser 2012; Guthman 2007; Kloppenburg 1996; Mount 2012). In contrast, more sustainable food production systems not only attempt to account for and “offset more accurately the true costs of production” through higher prices for consumers.
(Buller and Morris 2004, 1070), they also begin to shift emphasis “from the negative to the positive environmental externalities of agricultural production” (Hollander 2004, 302). Recognition of the ‘multifunctionality’ of sustainable agriculture (Hollander 2004; Rosset 2000) - in its preservation of rural regions, biodiversity, and creation of environmental and economic public goods - is a way to assign value to agriculture’s positive environmental and social externalities; although it is “difficult to reflect their value properly in market prices” (Rosset 2000, 82). However, the ‘closeness’ of producer-consumer interaction in local food systems is an important way that communicating potentially higher prices and what they incorporate or “re-internalize” (Guthman 2007, 460) may be palatable as the “interaction and transparency in this relationship delivers accountability and trust” (Mount 2012, 109). In this way, part of the economy of local foods incorporates the integration of externalities – both positive and negative – into the production-consumption exchange.

**Sociology of ‘local’**

Finally, sociologists and social geographers tend to focus on the motivations – practical, economic, or psychological – behind producers and consumers getting involved in local food systems (Guthman 2002; Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000; Lamine 2005). Producer motivations are often conceived of in the literature as being tied primarily to operational or economic concerns – as they hope that by joining a local food initiative, they can recapture some of the food value lost to intermediary processors and marketers in the conventional food chain (Watts et al. 2003, 32). Producers may also be motivated by awareness of growing consumer “anxieties about pesticides” in food, or more generally about their concerns over the “environmental costs of globalized food networks” (Holloway et al. 2007, 10). Increasingly, producer motivations are tied to a mosaic of intertwined interests such as farm succession and transition (Inwood and
Sharp 2012), family and farm business life cycles (Smithers and Johnson 2004), farming philosophy, resources and finances (Inwood and Sharp 2012), and even subjective conceptions of ‘work’ (Petit et al. 2010) and changes in farmers’ roles and workloads (Weiss 2012).

Consumer motivations are seen as complex interactions between concerns and uncertainty over food safety and nutrition (Lamine 2005), a desire to support sustainable food production, a desire to support local farmers (Smithers and Joseph 2010), and a desire to distinguish themselves from consumers of ‘mass’ or ‘conventional’ foods (Guthman 2002; Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000). They may also be motivated largely by certain assumptions or perceptions surrounding “a producer’s ethical commitment to growing food in a particular way” (Holloway et al. 2007, 10), or, even more ideologically, they may subscribe to ideas of consumer-citizenship and responsible or ethical consumption. Within the realm of “food citizenship,” individual food consumption choices are expected (and hoped) to contribute to social change and embody a complementary connection between an evolving conception of self-interest (Atkinson 2012), autonomy in choice, and collective societal benefits (See Atkinson 2012 and De Tavernier 2012). Ethical consumption within the ‘local’ food narrative may also contribute and be connected to the above-mentioned alternative economic dimensions of ‘local.’

The factors outlined in alternative foods literature to date indicate that for different producers and consumers there can be varying motivations for involvement; some tangible and pragmatic, and some intangible and abstract. Much of the literature also suggests that these actors’ motivations are subjective or symbolic (Guthman 2002; Mount 2012), based on perceptions (Curtis 2013), constantly shifting, and easily influenced by “the motivations of the other” (Holloway et al. 2007, 10).
2.4 Local foods as ‘reconnection project’

Whether discussing the geographic ‘relocalization’ of food, economic ‘short food supply chains’, or sociological motivations of actors in LFS, the recurring theme throughout the literature seems to be bringing producers and consumers closer together both spatially and in mindset. A growing body of literature seeks to understand the intersection of these three dimensions of local foods (Holloway et al. 2007; Venn et al. 2006) and tends to frame these diverse issues as contributing to an overarching ‘reconnection project’ (Ilbery et al. 2005, 117). This ‘reconnection project’ is based on a ‘closeness’ and ‘connectedness’ between actors in local food systems “associated with the establishment of ethical relationships between producers and consumers” (Venn et al. 2006, 250). It is followed by changing behaviours and attitudes as consumers “re-define their conception of food, (re-)learn the way to handle it, (re-)position it in their scale of priorities” (Lamine 2012, 243) and producers develop skills in direct-marketing, change their business models, and become aware of the “many opportunities linked to partnership with reflexive consumers” (Brunori et al. in Lamine 2012, 244). Of particular importance in considering producer-consumer interaction in local foods, is gaining a clearer understanding of both their “material and symbolic, formal and informal meeting points” (Holloway et al. 2007, 9), and their points of difference. Besides the task of bringing these actors into closer proximity – arguably a successful tenet of sites of exchange like farmers’ markets – there are lingering questions of mindset and mutual understandings of food as well as how both parties adjust to ‘reconnection’.

Although the ‘reconnection project’ has been identified as significant - one that tries to bring together a variety of multi-disciplinary food studies - there is little empirical evidence showing that local foods necessarily reconnect producers and consumers in terms of ‘symbolic’
or ‘informal’ understandings of food. In addition, there is criticism that local foods often fall short of satisfying both producer and consumer needs despite their apparent ‘reconnection’, as broader accessibility for consumers may be at odds with producer livelihoods. Below is a review of dominant themes in the literature concerning how ideas of quality and the conflict between accessibility and profitability shape the potential ‘reconnection’ of actors within LFS.

**Understandings of ‘quality’ in local food systems**

Ilbery et al. (2005) observe that in the global conventional agricultural system, the production and consumption ends of the food supply chain are significantly disconnected. As a result of this disconnect, comes the “associated fracture between the consumers of food (and their interests) on the one side and the traditional producers of foodstuffs, the farmers, on the other” (Ilbery et al. 2005, 116). In order to try to bridge this gap, local food systems attempt to bring these actors into closer proximity – both physically and in mindset. However, even when consumers and producers have the opportunity to interact more closely with each other on a physical level, there remain certain differences in perspectives, expectations, and understandings of what ‘local foods’ are, and what they accomplish. Constructions of value provide insight into these differing views and offer a good starting point for further research into producer-consumer perspectives on local foods.

The idea of ‘quality’ as it contributes to understanding value in local foods is not exclusive to either consumer or producer perspectives. Both parties have expectations regarding ‘quality’ in foods - some similar, some contrasting – but what is important is ‘quality’s’ socially constructed nature:

Quality is a complex notion, the meaning of which may vary for specific products and between individuals, regions and countries. It is socially constructed through the interplay of different actors who may seek, for various reasons, to interpret, represent, and regulate quality in particular ways (Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000, 217).
Ilbery and Kneafsey (2000) suggest that the most basic way to understand quality is through its “satisfaction of consumer needs” and its general ability to “command higher prices in the market place” (Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000, 218). However, they also indicate that producers and consumers will have different perspectives on what quality is, or “how it may be measured” (Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000, 218) based on “value-laden concepts such as ‘authentic’, ‘healthy’, and ‘traditional’ (Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000, 217). Quality represents a factor involved in the creation of ‘local foods’ that is held in common by both producers and consumers, but one that can be defined differently between them.

**Consumer Perspectives**

According to Guthman (2002), consumer perspectives on the quality of local foods are predominantly based on subjective assessments and socially constructed ideals. Consumers may associate ‘quality’ with ideas of authenticity and supporting local farmers (Smithers and Joseph 2009), traditional farming methods and a romantic ‘pastoral symbolism’ of rural areas (Eaton 2008), the alternativeness of buying ‘local’ as opposed to ‘global’ (Dupuis and Goodman 2005), personal tastes and social distinction (Guthman 2002), or certifications/labels describing a particular unique region or ‘territoriality’ (Ilbery et al. 2005). Two of these ‘quality’ indicators - taste and authenticity – will be discussed in greater detail here in order to demonstrate their subjective and often unverified nature.

Guthman (2002) considers taste to be one of the factors that contributes to a consumer’s decision to buy organic as opposed to conventional food. She differentiates between ‘reflexive’ or ‘discerning’ taste, and ‘mass’ taste, asserting that reflexive or discerning eaters are those who make judgments about certain foods over others based on a variety of aesthetic, gastronomic, and cultural ideas (Guthman 2002, 299). She then argues that what influences a reflexive eater’s food
choices are actually *symbolic* ideas of value such as knowledge/trust, distinction, and simplicity (Guthman 2002, 302). Although Guthman’s discussion refers specifically to organic foods, the same symbolic ideas are arguably present in local foods as well.

Guthman (2002) explains ideas of knowledge/trust, distinction, and simplicity, as the presence of information available to help consumers’ decision-making processes; the importance certain customers place on the scarcity or uniqueness of a food product; and the desire for transparency about foods purchased respectively (Guthman 2002, 302-304). These types of symbolic ‘taste’ concerns are partly what keep local food networks a ‘niche’ market and lead to criticisms that access to ‘good food’ is exclusive. Buying foods imbued with these types of ‘qualities’ indicates “the possession of cultural capital, good taste and sophistication” (Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000, 217) and seems to satisfy consumers’ increasing desire to know “where products come from and how they are produced, not only for ‘health’ and ‘safety’ reasons, but also in terms of satisfying a current ‘nostalgia’ which harks back to a perceived time of ‘real’ and ‘wholesome’ foods” (Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000, 217). ‘Taste’ as described by Guthman – though itself a complex combination of conscious and unconscious judgments – forms one of the major contributions to consumer ideas of ‘quality’. In order for local foods to be high quality, they must in some sense be agreeable to these consumer tastes. They must also adhere to consumer ideas about authenticity.

According to Smithers and Joseph (2010), customers at farmers’ markets “typically wish to support farming and farmers/producers (preferably local) through the expenditure of their total food dollar” (Smithers and Joseph 2010, 239). This desire is based on the assumption that those participating in the market are “real” farmers, and “thus a legitimate vendor with “authentic” local food” (Smithers and Joseph 2010, 239). Studying customers at farmers’ markets seems to
indicate that consumers care a great deal about the authenticity of their engagement in local foods, and believe that the farmers’ market offers an authentic venue through which to engage with and support local producers and their ‘authentically local’ goods. However, Smithers and Joseph (2010) problematize the idea of authenticity at farmers’ markets by pointing out that for consumers, authenticity is often assumed or perceived rather than clearly defined or investigated. Foods bought and sold at FMs are automatically associated with ‘authenticity’ through a chain of assumptions about its production being local (and perhaps organic) and about the vendors being the producer/farmers. Despite the idea of authenticity remaining murky at best, it is clear that it also contributes to consumer constructions of quality in local foods, and thus must be taken into consideration along with taste.

**Producer Perspectives**

For producers, quality is also seen as constructed in the sense that it is determined and ensured through the producer’s hands-on involvement with production. The “hand-made nature,” the “quality of the raw materials,” the “natural character of the ingredients,” and the “small scale of production” connected to a farmer’s products ensures their quality (Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000, 244). These standards are upheld and ensured by the producers themselves.

Ilbery and Kneafsey (2000), through a case study of specialty food producers in England, conclude that “the main indicator of quality is the producer’s own taste and judgment” (Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000, 225), and that producers believe their own hands-on involvement in the food production process ensures the quality of their products. Although these ‘standards’ of quality on the producer end do echo similar ‘standards’ on the consumer end, Ilbery and Kneafsey (2000) note that producers often did not make reference to consumer perceptions of quality when they were describing their own understandings of quality. This does not necessarily mean that
producer/consumer standards would not align, but indicates that production methods are not always driven by the ‘consumer is king’ philosophy (Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000, 225). It implies that producers may create quality standards independent of consumer demands, while still being aware of the ‘quality’ food market. Although studies on producer constructions of quality are lacking in comparison to consumer-focused studies (and acknowledging the difficulty of translating varied farmer perspectives into clear themes), it is also possible that ‘quality’ may have more to do with ‘quality of life’ considerations for farmers:

The farmers thus claimed that their farming is about autonomy, profit, and well-being of nature and rural areas (Niska et al. 2012, 464).

Concern for profitability and well-being on the farmers’ part raises important questions about where livelihood (for farmers) on the one hand, and affordability (for consumers) on the other hand, fit into conceptions of ‘quality’ food. This conflict remains central to the local food debate and highlights a major area of contrast between producer and consumer perspectives and experiences.

What about cost? Livelihoods and accessibility

In addition to meeting new expectations and desires for higher quality food, local food systems also need to be mutually beneficial economically for the actors involved. Since food from a producer perspective is a source of income, their needs and expectations concerning LFS are largely calibrated by ‘material’ (Guthman 2002, 300) input costs and the corresponding economic return from their products. The value of local foods as seen by producers has a lot to do with maintaining livelihoods, running a business, and remaining economically viable and autonomous. LFS are meant to “support small farmers and help maintain the economic vitality of rural communities” in contrast to the global food system in which “an ever shrinking percentage of the price of food” is received by farmers (Norberg-Hodge 2002, 68). The hope and
assumption then, is that LFIs retain more of the retail value of their product instead of accepting the lower commodity prices associated with global agricultural trade (Ilbery et al. 2005, 117).

However, there are material costs associated with producing local foods (much like there are for producing organic foods; see Klonsky and Greene 2005) and with remaining ‘small-scale’ as many local producers do, that are not associated with large-scale conventional production. So while producers may receive higher payments in a local food setting, taking on additional production costs – either input or labour related – might mean that the added value retained by producers is not significantly different than what they might receive through conventional streams. Or, it might mean that consumers pay a price premium for local foods. While externalities are ignored in large-scale food production, thereby allowing for lower priced goods for the consumer (Norberg-Hodge 2002), in the typically smaller-scale local food arena there is a drive towards more sustainable forms of agriculture (Ilbery et al. 2005, 120). This push for more sustainable agriculture in the local food setting means that the environmental externalities of production become an important cost for producers to mitigate. However, the connection between more sustainable agriculture in the local food setting and increased production costs because of new imperatives to incorporate environmental externalities is tenuous at best and requires much more empirical research. One factor that has been more clearly documented in local food settings is increased farmer labour and changes in work and workload.

Many forms of local food production, being smaller-scale and less amenable to mechanization, are more labour intensive:

Government agricultural agencies tend to emphasize labor efficiency over land efficiency. Since local food systems rely much more heavily on labor-intensive rather than capital intensive methods, productivity per unit labor is of course much lower on small farms than on highly mechanized farms. But smaller farms are actually far more efficient if the most productive use of land is the goal (Norberg-Hodge 2002, 76).
In addition to production methods typically being more labour intensive, some studies of direct-marketing strategies and short supply chains suggest that farmers experience an increase in work like marketing, transportation, and infrastructure development such that these tasks “often outstrip the demands of on-farm activities” (Weiss 2012, 617). Farmers’ roles are also increasingly viewed as multiple, encompassing positions as “innovators, entrepreneurs, networkers, and/or knowledge carriers” (Kummer et al. 2012, 313). These shifts in workload, expectations, and even individual farmer perceptions about work as to “what is “a load” and what is “an interest in work”” (Petit et al. 2010, 1145) only add to the complexity of decision-making at the farm level. Thus, even as farmers recognize “opportunities that arise in the environment (markets, technology, consumer preferences)” (Milestad 2012, 370), their experiences with their own changing roles and workloads may negatively impact “liveability” (Petit et al. 2010) and their desire/ability to farm.

Producers need a fair return for the inputs – whether labour or monetary – necessary to produce the demanded higher ‘quality’ goods and address ‘quality of life’ concerns. Local foods must be able to cover material production costs and equitably support producers in their additional roles. For some, this ‘support’ can and should come from other ‘non-market’ actors along the chain such as individuals, universities, NGOs and public agencies (Gwin and Thiboumery 2014). But lacking these types of supports, producing and selling ‘quality’ local food often comes at a higher price for consumers (see for example Curtis 2013).

Consumers, generally speaking (but not necessarily local food consumers), look for a combination of affordability and quality and are often deterred by, or completely unable to pay for, the high ‘quality’ foods that characterize local food systems. It has been asserted that typical consumers of local foods are “relatively affluent, well-educated ‘foodies’” (Ilbery and Kneafsey
and upper-middle class citizens (Curtis 2013). One study conducted in South Carolina concluded that consumer willingness to pay for the higher ‘quality’ locally produced foods increased “with age and income” and was sometimes influenced by gender – with women being more willing to pay premium prices for animal products (Carpio and Isengildina-Massa 2009, 423). A more recent study specifically on premium “differentiated” meat products found consumers willing to pay price premiums ranging from 11 to 40 percent depending on the meat and production method (Curtis 2013, 10). However, these findings were based on data collected in which 81% of survey respondents identified as white and where the findings were especially true for white people of higher income who were married with one or two children (Curtis 2013, 4-10). Although there is limited empirical evidence on the accessibility of ‘local’ foods to a wider demographic, the existence of “unsupportive food environments” in both urban and rural areas where “healthy and affordable food” (Shaw 2006, 231) is often inaccessible to particular demographics of consumers indicates an important challenge for local foods if they are meant to address issues of social justice effectively. This critique is especially important to consider in light of ideas like food citizenship, ethical consumption, and individual consumption as a form of civic engagement for social/collective good. However preliminary these observations are, they are at least sufficient to indicate a potential weakness of, or challenge for, local foods: to satisfy producer needs in terms of livelihoods while also meeting consumer demands for affordable ‘good food’.

2.5 Questioning reconnection in local food systems: Knowledge gaps and research opportunities

A review of the literature indicates that producer-consumer relationships often underpin the structure of local food systems. Decreasing the geographical distance between producers and consumers is assumed (rather than empirically verified) to promote or create more meaningful
relationships, in which both parties feel satisfied, connected, and share mutual interests. However, this ‘reconnection project’ can be questioned in and of itself in terms of “practical implementation” (Ilbery et al. 2005, 117), or in terms of whether or not actors are brought closer in expectations or mindsets toward ‘local’ foods. Arguably, the ‘reconnection project’ provides an “uncomplicated and utopian” theoretical view that diverse interests along the food production–consumption chain can be coherently brought together (Ilbery et al. 2005, 117). In reality, these relationships and interests are complex and diverse within different scales and settings of local food initiatives, and are only beginning to be understood. Studies are only beginning to document shifts in producer and consumer roles and responsibilities in local food initiatives as they adjust to more regular interaction. Further empirical research into what prompts participation and motivation, as well as into how different participants in different ‘local’ food settings understand value in and of local foods, is needed in order to test the stability of producer-consumer relationships.

Not only can ‘reconnection’ itself be questioned, but it also remains unclear whether ‘local’ food systems founded on this ‘reconnection’ necessarily provide a better, more sustainable model than global agriculture. It has been suggested that more research is needed here in order to assess whether, if significant ‘reconnection’ occurs, this is a realistic approach for addressing larger environmental or social concerns about agriculture. According to Holloway et al. (2007), “a food network or project is never simply external to the producers and consumers, but both produces and is produced by the people involved (Holloway et al. 2007, 10). If this is indeed the case, then actors involved in local food systems are inextricably linked to their success or failure, to their meeting or falling short of goals. Producer-consumer relationships can
therefore also provide a starting point to critically assess the larger social and environmental goals and assumptions associated with ‘local’ foods.

Most generally, continued research is needed on the diversity of producer-consumer relationships in order to provide more empirical evidence about whether or not reconnecting producers and consumers through local foods matters, or is a realistic approach for addressing larger environmental and social concerns about agriculture. Although these themes are present in alternative food systems’ literature, they rest mostly on anecdotal and subjective experiential foundations and are rarely rigorously investigated and compared. They tend to obscure or create a caricature of, rather than clarify, real producer-consumer relationships and vary depending on the setting, scale, and commodity being considered in any particular local food context. Indeed, stronger empirical grounding is badly needed in terms of understanding producer-consumer relations and the purported ‘reconnection’ of actors within local foods. My research aim is to address the lack of empirically categorized findings surrounding the more abstract notion of reconnection in local food initiatives.
3.1 Research approach

The research approach adopted in this study involved direct engagement with research subjects and the collection of primary data from actors on both sides of the local food equation: producers and consumers. Although both producers and consumers were interviewed, the two parties were treated somewhat differently in the research approach. While more is known, or at least researched, in terms of consumer-focused motivational, behavioural, and willingness-to-pay studies, less has been empirically studied in regard to individual farmer expectations and motivations. Attention was therefore focused primarily on producers to gain more insight into their views and opinions about operating in the local food setting. As mentioned in Chapter Two, assumptions about producer behaviours tend to be normative in nature and lack empirical grounding. In addition to gaining insight into producer experiences then, farmer interviews also acted as an additional source of information regarding customers. These farmer perspectives of customers were valuable in further understanding producer-consumer interests not as isolated, but as indicative of interaction and reconnection. Farmer perspectives of customers also allowed for a generalized view of local food buyers in contrast with individual customers’ much more specific reflections on personal motivations. Customer interviews were intended primarily as snapshots into how they experienced reconnection with producers and as points of contrast and comparative interest with both producer experiences and other studies’ findings on consumer trends.

A mixed-method research approach was adopted in which short surveys provided insight into general consumer trends and motivations, while in-depth producer interviews assisted in understanding complex meanings and explanations behind broader trends and provided a more
detailed level of information on both producers and consumers. This approach follows that of Smithers et al. (2005). The combination of surveys and in-depth interviews with participants from selected local food initiatives asked producers and consumers to “examine themselves and each other” (Smithers et al. 2005, 285) in reflecting on their own participation in local food selling and buying. The surveys and interviews are meant to establish general and quantifiable trends and “themes in experiences, behaviours, and understandings” (Hay 2005, 153) of local food participants, as well as investigate the “diversity of meaning” (Hay 2005, 80) behind broader motivational trends. Field notes and participant observation from specific farms and locations of exchange were used to supplement and clarify interview and survey data and provided contextual information not always conveyed in one-on-one interactions with participants. The results presented in Chapters Four and Five are meant to provide a picture of the processes and considerations involved in the construction and understanding of value in select local food initiatives.

Surveys and interviews adopted a combination of quantitative (farm size, goods produced, goods purchased, frequency of interaction) and qualitative (opinions, expectations, perceptions, motivations, challenges) questions. In-depth interviews were semi-structured while the surveys were more structured. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were chosen for this opinion-based and place specific research project because they allowed for understanding the specificities of farmer experiences and knowledge, and helped build trust and confidence in the researcher-participant relationship. By using a clearly outlined “interview schedule” (Hay 2005, 82) the researcher was also able to articulate pre-formulated questions clearly while still allowing for open and reflective answers. Allowing for open-ended responses meant that farmers were able to respond more freely and participate in guiding the direction of the interviews. The more
structured format of the consumer surveys allowed these to be completed relatively quickly (which was important given the venues in which consumer surveys were conducted) and to gather a more general data set to complement, reaffirm, or point to discord between producer and consumer experiences. The consumer surveys are not meant to be a definitive profile of local food consumers but rather to be used as a guide for understanding the nature of ‘reconnection’ in particular producer-consumer interactions. Similarly, the producer interviews – though in-depth – provide only a snapshot of potential local food experiences and should primarily be understood as providing evidence to help further our understandings of ‘reconnection’ in local food systems.

3.2 Study area

Figure 3: Study area

The study area included four areas in Southwestern Ontario with emerging and established local food initiatives and partner organizations that contributed to regional movements towards
‘buying local’: Waterloo Region and Grey-Bruce, Huron-Perth\textsuperscript{1}, and Wellington counties.

Together, these regions and counties make up some of the most densely populated farming areas in Ontario, with all but Waterloo Region having between 2000 to 2525 farms according to the 2011 Census of Agriculture (\textit{Figure 3}). Largely an industrial-scale agricultural landscape, with hogs, dairy, poultry, and cattle/calf operations making up 59\% of gross farm cash receipts in Huron County, 70\% in Wellington County, and 71\% in Waterloo Region (OMAFRA 2010), these regions provided an interesting context within which to study emerging (sometimes oppositional) local food initiatives. They also represented regions with access to significant urban consumer centres such as Kitchener-Waterloo (Waterloo Region), Guelph (Wellington County), Stratford (Perth County), and Owen Sound (Grey County) perhaps contributing to the relative success and flourishing of local food initiatives in recent years.

The regions of Waterloo, Huron-Perth, and Wellington were initially chosen for two reasons. First, they all had established regional local food ‘maps’ available online or as informational pamphlets. These food maps provided an excellent starting point for identifying local food initiatives to approach for research. However, it was important to recognize that additional local food initiatives could exist and prosper in these regions by word of mouth or community support, without being listed on any food map compilations. This research remained open to including these types of initiatives as well. Secondly, because of their different urban-rural population make-ups (\textit{Table 1}) and abundance of farms, a diverse selection of producers and consumers (both rural and urban) could be recruited. Following the recommendation of one key informant interview, Grey-Bruce was added to the study area because of its dominance in beef production and because the two counties had more recently started to promote local foods through FoodLink

\textsuperscript{1} For the purposes of this research project, the counties of Grey and Bruce, as well as Huron and Perth have been amalgamated because they have jointly organized and listed local food initiatives through \textit{FoodLink Grey-Bruce} and the \textit{Huron-Perth Farm to Table}. 

Grey-Bruce. As a newer network for finding local food, Grey-Bruce offered an opportunity to research a less studied region (with fewer urban centres) working to establish similar ‘local food’ networks and guides to regionally produced foods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Total Pop*</th>
<th>% Urban</th>
<th>% Rural**</th>
<th># of farms*</th>
<th>Average acreage range*</th>
<th># of self identified LFIs***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Huron</td>
<td>59 100</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>2467</td>
<td>130-179</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>75 112</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>2252</td>
<td>130-179</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterloo</td>
<td>507 096</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>1389</td>
<td>70-129</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellington</td>
<td>208 360</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>2511</td>
<td>130-179</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grey</td>
<td>92 568</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>2248</td>
<td>130-179</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce</td>
<td>66 102</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>180-239</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Regional characteristics (Huron, Perth, Waterloo, Wellington, Grey, Bruce)

*Statistics Canada 2011 Census data (2006 Census data used for % urban and rural)
**Rural defined as those persons living outside centres with a population of at least 1000 AND outside areas with 400 persons per square km (http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/demo62g-eng.htm)
***Self-identified local food initiatives drawn from: Waterloo Foodlink, Guelph-Wellington Local Foods, Huron-Perth Farm to Table, Foodlink Grey-Bruce networks.

Other sources: Queens School of Business 2009 County Fact Sheets; Tim Welch Consulting and Lapointe Consulting County of Huron Housing Study (2006).

3.3 Sampling strategy and sample profiles

The producer sample selected for this research was based primarily on ‘self-identified’ local food initiatives in the four Southwestern Ontario regions. ‘Self-identified’ farms were those listed on local food maps or websites particular to each region and served as the starting point for identifying appropriate farms to contact for participation. In order to further specify and narrow the search for appropriate producers to contact, two key informant interviews were conducted; one with a regional representative on the Taste-Real (Guelph-Wellington) Local Food Map and one with a farm association director familiar with Grey, Bruce, and Huron counties. As a result of these interviews, participant recruitment strategies shifted slightly to incorporate Internet searches as many farms had recently developed their own websites and might be less heavily publicized or studied if they were not recruited from the local food map.
Following key informant interviews, the scope of the project became more clearly defined. A focus on meat and meat producers selling direct to customers would provide a complementary perspective to the numerous studies on vegetable CSAs and farmers’ markets. Meat was also of interest because of its contentious place in the food supply chain. Popularized critiques of conventional agriculture point to feedlots and factory farmed animals as unethical (from an animal welfare perspective), unhealthy, environmentally unsustainable, and detrimental to rural communities (See for example, Kenner’s documentary Food Inc. 2009; Pollan’s Omnivore’s Dilemma 2006; and Haltslander et al.’s, Beyond Factory Farming 2003). Thus, it was of interest to understand how buying meat locally might represent a different way of engaging with animal production for both producers and consumers. Initially, beef producers were meant to be the primary focus, but during the research process it became clear that many farms and farmers included a variety of animals in their operations including chickens, pigs, and sheep. Below is a brief summary of the criteria used to select producers to contact.

First, farms needed to produce and sell their own meat direct to consumers. Second, farms ideally had, and kept track of, a roster of regular customers. These rosters were sometimes from an already established vegetable CSA and increased the possibility of accessing customer bases. Third, farms employed a combination of selling strategies such as farmers’ markets, specialty stores, delivery, or on farm pick-up. Beginning with the regional local food maps, suggestions from key informant interviews, and internet searches, a preliminary list of 25 farms to contact was created based on the criteria above. After completing the first few interviews, new farms were considered based on producer recommendations. Initially, diversity of scale was also part of the selection criteria, but operations of diverse scale proved challenging to find, as only small
to medium-scale farms tended to engage in some form of direct consumer contact selling strategies.

Each producer interview began with questions about the structure and organization of the farm, quantities of meat produced and sold, production methods, and general background information of the farm and producer. Producers were then asked about their motivations to sell direct and challenges they experienced in doing so, as well as opinions on and perceptions of customers and local food in general. The interviews sought to uncover the factors that made direct selling and reconnection with customers work for producers.

**Producer sample**

In total, 13 in-depth producer interviews were conducted between June and September 2013. Each producer interview lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and a half. Of the 13 interviews, six were conducted with farm couples, while the remainders were with one individual (three women, and four men). All of the producer interviews were conducted at the participants’ farms. Going to the farms allowed for, in some cases, a short tour of the farm as well as the opportunity to observe less tangible everyday workings or nuances to the farm and particular farmers’ lifestyle. Though all farms featured in this project could be considered ‘small’ scale family farms in relation to nearby conventional market-focused operations, considerable variation was found across a number of dimensions. Some farms hired help while others relied on interns. Choices regarding selling strategies and animals raised varied, as did the age of the producers, how long they had been selling direct, and their overall farming experience. The desire to work full-time or not on the farm was highly situational and while farms often had other income streams, there were differences in terms of whether or not the goal was to keep or eliminate those other income streams. Thus, even among a small ‘niche’ market such as selling meat direct to consumers, a
diversity of approaches was evident as individual farmers and farm families navigated ‘alternative’ agriculture. The sample profile (Table 2) is described below in terms of scale, selling strategy, customer base, and product in order to draw some correlations and generalizations about the farms and farmers participating in this project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>Yrs selling direct</th>
<th>Beef cattle/yr</th>
<th>Hogs/yr</th>
<th>Lambs/yr</th>
<th>Chickens/yr</th>
<th>Turkeys/yr</th>
<th># Cust</th>
<th>Selling strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>150-200</td>
<td>CSA* Pre-Order D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>200-300</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>CSA* FM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>&lt;15</td>
<td>60-80</td>
<td>CSA* Pre-Order D Pre-Order PU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>70-75</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Pre-Order D* Pre-Order PU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>&lt;10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>CSA* FM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>FM* On Farm PU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>Pre-Order D* Pre-Order PU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>plus 48</td>
<td>200-220</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>FM* On Farm PU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Declined</td>
<td>Declined</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Declined</td>
<td>CSA* FM Pre-Order PU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>215</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30 (plus 40)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>Pre-Order D*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>120-130</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>250 plus 8 restaurants</td>
<td>Pre-Order PU* Pre-Order D (only to restaurants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>265</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>72-96</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>On Farm PU*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declined</td>
<td>Declined</td>
<td>Declined</td>
<td>Declined</td>
<td>Declined</td>
<td>Declined</td>
<td>Declined</td>
<td>Declined</td>
<td>Speciality Stores*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Producer sample

CSA - selling meat through an already established vegetable CSA
FM – selling meat at farmers’ markets
Pre-Order D – customers order via email or online and meat is delivered to central locations
Pre-Order PU – customers order via email or online and come to the farm to pick up
On-Farm PU – no pre-orders, customers can come to the farm and buy farm gate or from farm store
Speciality Stores – a variety of speciality stores in Toronto
* - indicates the farm’s primary selling strategy
Plus ## – indicates additional animals sold through the farm but sourced from other farmers
The average farm size of the sample was 140 acres, with a range from 50 to 265 acres (although one couple were only working 10 acres of their 100 acre plot). Most producers had been selling their meat direct to consumers for between 3-12 years, with one couple in their first year of operation, and another having sold direct for over 25 years. Depending on their selling strategy, farmers had varying knowledge of the size of their customer base. Generally, the farmers that had a ‘regular’ base of customers sold to anywhere between 50 and 400 customers, estimated either on CSA membership or email ordering lists. For those that sold at farmers’ markets, the customer base was relatively unknown, though most producers indicated they often recognized repeat customers at the market.

The three farms under 100 acres were the most diversified in terms of animals raised; raising three or more types. All three raised around 300 meat birds (the maximum allowed in Ontario without quota) and all three producers had been selling direct for less than 7 years. The three farms over 200 acres focused almost entirely on beef (one farm also raised 300 meat birds) and were the least diversified in terms of animals raised and selling strategies. One producer sold entirely through their on-farm store (with some meat going to other regional specialty stores), one took pre-orders and delivered, and one took pre-orders and had customers come to the farm to pick up (only delivering if the customer was a restaurant). None of them sold significantly through the farmers’ market and all had been selling direct for between 8 and 12 years. All other producers had a combination of selling strategies, using at least two if not three different ways to distribute their product. Farms in the 100-200 acre range raised a variety of animals, and generally seemed the most likely to rely more heavily on selling through farmers’ markets. Already established vegetable CSAs were used as the primary selling strategy for five of the 13 producers. All producers interviewed focused on direct sales to individual/family customers. No
farms were selling meat wholesale and only the largest beef producer sourced to restaurants – though others had tried the restaurant strategy in the past.

Meat was the main on-farm income for seven out of 13 farmers while meat sales supplemented vegetable sales for three farmers. The farm was the sole income stream and supplied full time work for two people (usually the farm couple) for nine out of 13 producers. One of these couples was ‘retired’, and one couple also had a large and well established on-farm store that brought in additional revenue. Out of the 13 producers interviewed, six hired unpaid interns while four producers had paid help. Some farms sourced meat (either finished or calves) from other farmers to sell through their own strategies – animals that they knew were raised according to their own production standards (this is noted in Table 2 as “plus #”).

**Consumer sample**

After completing the producer interviews, 31 consumer surveys were conducted to investigate how consumers experience sourcing their meat direct from farmers. Consumers were accessed through four of the farms that participated in the producer interviews. With the help of and at the suggestion of these four producers, four sets of consumer surveys were conducted on separate occasions at three different ‘venues’ of exchange, depending on the farm’s selling strategy. The first set of surveys was completed on-farm on a weekly CSA pick up day, the second at various delivery stops on one delivery day, and the third at an on-farm store during an open house event. The fourth and final set of surveys was completed by emailing an online version of the survey to the producer, who then forwarded it to their customer base via email as the corresponding producer suggested this would be the easiest way to connect with their customers since no delivery dates were coming up. In total, 23 surveys were conducted in person and eight were completed online. Conducting the majority of the consumer interviews ‘on site’
allowed for observation of typical transaction dynamics and behaviours of customers as well as for better understanding of the overall farm structure and selling strategy.

Consumers were approached after they had purchased or picked up their meat and, if they agreed to participate, were asked about their motivations for buying local meat and the challenges they experienced in doing so. Consumers were also asked about their conception of ‘local’ and to speculate about farmer motivations and challenges. Each in-person consumer survey lasted five to 15 minutes and was conducted at the site of ‘exchange’ with the permission of the corresponding producer. Of the surveys conducted in person, 16 participants were female and seven were male. Demographic information was generally not collected on consumers unless they specifically offered it as important to their motivations and was not collected at all on consumers who completed the survey online. As the primary focus of this project was on producers, consumer surveys were meant not to be representative of consumer behaviour, but to enhance findings and knowledge on the nature of reconnection between farmer and customer.

3.4 Analytic approach

All producer interviews except one were audio recorded and transcribed. Handwritten notes were taken and summarized for the producer interview that was not audio recorded, as well as for the 23 consumer surveys conducted in person. The eight consumer surveys completed online were left in their original format for analysis. All results were then coded and categorized with the help of HyperResearch, a qualitative research analysis program, and Microsoft Excel. Interview data was coded for common trends and analyzed along three broad categories: Motivations, Challenges, and Understandings of Value. This was done in order to narrow in on data most relevant to the research objectives. Summaries were then written for each category, separating producer and consumer findings and highlighting the most common answers and
themes. Analysis also focused on triangulating consumer and producer perceptions or opinions of the other’s experience with actual consumer and producer experiences as they described them themselves. Results are presented below in two chapters in summative tables and discussion, using selected verbatim throughout to illustrate both general sentiments and attitudes and highlight specific or outlying perspectives unique to a participant. Results are meant to identify similarities and differences between how producers and consumers experience their new relationships. No intention is made to invoke statistical evidence or generalize about other places. Rather, the intent is to gain understanding into the experience of reconnection in select local food initiatives and to suggest areas of potential for future research.
In this chapter, I will address Objective One by presenting findings related to understanding the motivations and challenges of producers and consumers involved in a sample of local food initiatives. The results reveal what people want or expect to gain and what factors encourage or deter participation. The chapter is divided into three main sections. Section 4.1 outlines producer motivations and challenges. Section 4.2 outlines consumer motivations and challenges. Section 4.3 concludes the chapter with a short summary and comparative analysis on how producers and consumers discuss and experience their own motivations and challenges in selling and buying local meat.

4.1. Producer Motivations and Challenges in Direct Selling

*Motivations: Negotiating ideals and practicalities*

Overall, three themes emerged from the data and define producer motivations for how and why they began selling direct to consumers. As presented in *Table 3* below, 92% of the producers interviewed expressed dissatisfaction with conventional farming systems, 92% expressed concerns with the environmental impact of conventional farming, and 69% expressed concerns with the health impact of modern conventional food. These three themes are unpacked following *Table 3*. Findings are based on the calibration of producer responses to a series of Likert-scale questions and open comments made throughout the interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>% producers</th>
<th>Representative Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfaction with Conventional</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>“In the regular open market, you’ve no control over what kind of dollars you will receive for your animal. And there’s years where you’re paid less than what it cost to produce.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“You have no control over price, it’s just market-driven. In this case, we have total control over price, directly to the consumer.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ecological Concern  92%  “I can show people who come to visit the difference between the land over here on this side of the wire and on this [other] side of the wire, and the only difference is that animals have grazed here, and animals have not grazed there. And where the animals have grazed is hugely improved. The animals have a huge role to play.”

“If you look at all the methane and pollution created by the feedlot environment vs. the grass fed environment: ok, so the grass-fed cow produces more methane, but the pasture she’s on absorbs far more than she will produce. So in a pasture base, it actually absorbs more carbon than it produces.”

Health Concern  69%  “At the end of the day the goal needs to be to look after the food: to have good healthy food, to look after the animals and look after the land.”

“When you see how healthy your cattle are outside, you know, if we move the cattle out of the barn and have them outside year round, we have no respiratory problems whatsoever. So as you start to make these observations, you become more aware of the ecological impact, the health impact and all of those things . . . So that’s why we keep our animals out eating the green grass – we put the omega-3 in the fat, we get the CLAs [conjugated linoleic acids], we get the Vitamin E. So we have a much healthier product.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Producer motivations to sell meat direct to customers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Dissatisfaction with Conventional’ refers to producers’ negative experiences and opinions of the conventional commodity system for selling meat. This theme incorporated sentiments of producers’ struggles for profitability under the conventional animal stock market and their desire to be part of a regionally based and resilient food system. Overall, 92% of producers expressed dissatisfaction with the conventional commodity system. In particular, producers associated lack of profitability under the conventional system with the lack of control they had over prices and production methods:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*In the regular open market, you’ve no control over what kind of dollars you will receive for your animal. And there’s years where you’re paid less than what it cost to produce.*

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the regular open market, you’ve no control over what kind of dollars you will receive for your animal. And there’s years where you’re paid less than what it cost to produce.</td>
<td>They contrasted the lack of control (lack of profitability) in the conventional system to the control (profitability) they experienced selling direct to consumers:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There’s also the economics of it. It’s just more profitable to sell direct to people who are consuming it than it is to sell it wholesale.

In this case, we have total control over price, directly to the consumer.

Producers suggested that the biggest problem with selling wholesale and into the conventional system was that market prices did not accurately reflect their costs of production either economically or environmentally. Thus, few farmers felt that they could run profitable businesses. Selling direct to consumers allowed farmers to increase their profitability because they could communicate their ‘real’ costs of production to individual (and more sympathetic) buyers. Because of this ability to communicate with and influence consumers, they could more accurately account for economic and environmental costs. Because of a willing consumer base, producers felt that they had the control to set prices as more reflective of those costs. In general, producer ‘Dissatisfaction with Conventional’ was clearly linked to economic concerns about their farm businesses. Equally important however, were producer concerns for the environment and ecological farming methods.

The theme of ‘Ecological Concern’ was related in many ways to ‘Dissatisfaction with Conventional’ in that it was generally presented as oppositional to the agro food system’s practices and production methods. Farmers drew comparisons between the conventional feedlot environment and their own pasture-based animal grazing, or between degradation of land planted to corn monocultures and restoring grasses and biodiversity. However, producers also spoke about their environmental farm philosophies apart from and independent of that dissatisfaction. Almost all farmers (85%) operated a pasture-based or grass-fed animal feeding system. These farmers argued for the usefulness and necessity of animals within the farm system, with one farmer connecting animals to the rest of their vegetable operation:
We have the animals for the fertility of the farm. As intensively as we grow vegetables, we need the animals to keep the fertility.

In general, the environmental justifications producers offered for raising animals included improving soil fertility, compost creation, carbon absorption, pasture quality, and plant and pasture biodiversity. Another farmer discussed the improved pasture quality thanks to the cattle:

I know that one of my main motivators has to do with preserving the pasture-based farm and the ecological role that that plays in the larger picture. The erosion and all the ecological issues are now my driving force [to farm ecologically and sell direct].

For some producers, ecological concern had always been a feature of their farm philosophy. Their own ecological imperatives meant that the best chance at running a profitable farm business was to sell direct to consumers. For others, ecological concern had been inspired more recently and had come in part as a complementary benefit to the economics of direct-marketing as producers were able to use production practices they felt were more ecologically sound, but perhaps more expensive:

It’s going to be through economics first . . . my theory is, once you get in it and you start to see how it all works, all the rest of it [ecological benefit] starts to come.

Most often, producers described a combination of motivations and, for this reason, it was somewhat challenging to determine (as even the farmers themselves could not always pinpoint) what came first: ecological concern or economic necessity. However, for those indicating non-economic or ecological reasons for wanting to sell direct, their initial answers were brought into question over the course of the interview as their need and desire to also be profitable as a business came out with further interrogation. The prominence of, and underlying concern for, profitability (also seen above in discussion of ‘Dissatisfaction with Conventional’) even when citing ecological motivations as primary, made clear that the economic concerns and environmental imperatives of farmers helped form an intertwined web of motivations. To add
further complexity to this web of motivations, farmers also tended to incorporate ideas of health into their ecological concerns.

Some producers discussed ‘Health Concern’ as motivational and wanted to produce a healthier product for customers (67%), but this theme was less pronounced than either ‘Ecological Concern’ or ‘Dissatisfaction with Conventional.’ Importantly, for farmers the animals, the environment, and the healthiness of the food were seen as interconnected. When health was cited as part of a particular producer’s desire to sell direct, this was almost always tied to broader ecological health and not just human health:

*At the end of the day the goal needs to be to look after the food: to have good healthy food, to look after the animals and look after the land.*

Farmers’ views on the linkages between human and environmental health might explain why human health concerns in isolation did not feature more prominently in their discussion of motivations. Instead, they frequently discussed the human health benefits of consuming locally raised, grass-fed/pastured meat in conjunction with the health of the land, soil, and animals, or in a few cases, in connection with there being consumer demand for such products:

*And then that brings satisfaction, to know that you are able to provide wholesome products for consumers to eat.*

The predominant focus on a holistic picture of ecological, animal, and human health contrasted with consumer motivations, which were by and large more narrowly human health related as will be discussed in section 4.2. First however, producer-related challenges are presented below.

**Challenges: New roles and limiting regulations**

Overall, three themes emerged from the data as the predominant challenges experienced by producers as they navigated the alternative and local food movement and sold direct to consumers. As presented in *Table 4*, 100% of producers expressed frustration with current
agricultural structures and policies, 85% of producers expressed difficulty in adjusting to their roles as marketers and educators, and 77% of producers indicated that a lack of infrastructure and distribution limited their operations’ potential. Each theme is unpacked individually below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>% producers</th>
<th>Representative Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Policies</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>“If you level the playing field and get rid of supply-management – because that’s an artificial economy as well. We have to charge what we have to because we’re competing against them for land and resources.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“The limitations are on the production side, not on the selling side. If you wanted to point at two things that would hold us back: number one corn ethanol policy, number two supply management.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing Role of Farmers</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>“There’s a hay field that needs to be cut, but the store is really busy. And people want to know that they’re dealing with the person that is in charge and growing the food and stuff. People want to see [us] in the store.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“People ask me what I do – I’m a farmer, because what I love to do most is be on the land. The marketing is a necessity, but if I could find a wholesaler who would buy all of our beef at a decent price, I’d probably give up the customer access. Not because I don’t like talking to the customers, but it’s very time consuming and it does take away from other stuff that could be done on the farm.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution/Infrastructure</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>“But that’s where developing the infrastructure for sort of a local market and cooperative where you know, one or two people did the marketing – for a local food system to really grow, it may need that kind of role in place because . . . all farmers do not have that skillset by themselves. And there are some real inefficiencies in grabbing all your own customers for your farm.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Right now we’re freezing the meat at the butcher’s and the people have to pick it up directly from the butcher’s. So that’s a little – coordinating as well to make sure it’s ready and people get there in time to get it and all that stuff.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Producer challenges in selling meat direct to customers

The most prominent challenges cited by producers were categorized most broadly as relating to existing ‘Agricultural Policies’. Here, government subsidies and supply management regulations were noted very specifically. All producers interviewed mentioned one or the other as limiting their potential. For example, supply management in poultry was often a source of
frustration and prevented producers from expanding poultry operations despite consumer demand for pastured chicken or free-range eggs. In Ontario, producers must buy quota in order to sell through the Egg Farmers of Ontario. If they do not (quota can be extremely expensive and, according to one farmer, comes with a minimum ‘must-buy’ amount that is out of reach for many small-scale farmers), that producer is legally limited to raising and selling 300 meat birds or 100 laying hens. The eggs produced from the laying hens can then only be sold at farm-gate. Many farmers interviewed for this project indicated that they could raise and sell more than the 300 meat-bird limit per year and that if restrictions on marketing eggs independently were removed, they could also sell more than the 100-laying hen limit. One farmer stated:

*We would love there to be an exemption increase . . . for non-quota holders to be able to raise more than 300 birds.*

The other major way farmers felt policy negatively impacted their businesses was through competition with large corporate farms. Fluctuations in corn prices as well as subsidies for corn-ethanol production were connected to recent land price increases with one farmer stating:

*I rent that 100 acres across the road and when corn shot up, so did land rent.*

Another farmer indicated that large dairy farms are competing for land – but not for production:

*They’re looking for places to dump their manure and they’ve got the supply guaranteed dollars behind them to help finance these purchases.*

For many farmers, agricultural policies skewed the economics of farming. They favoured bigger and more industrial farms while providing little incentive for exploring more ecologically-run, diversified operations. So, even though most farmers had moved completely out of the conventional system due to dissatisfaction with that system, its constraints were still being felt in some form. In addition, moving out of the conventional stream and leaving behind the ‘middlemen’ led to a completely new set of challenges around farmer roles and responsibilities.
Following ‘Agricultural Policies’, 85% of producers indicated that the ‘Changing Role of Farmers’ in direct-sell operations required them to adapt to new tasks and responsibilities. Here, ‘Changing Role of Farmers’ refers to the addition of marketing and customer relations to their portfolio of skills. Farmers frequently asserted that marketing took up significant time. They suggested this was a challenge not only for themselves, but was also part of the reason that other farmers might not start selling direct. Although most acknowledged that marketing was now an important part of their job, the tension between wanting or needing to be on the farm and needing to attend to marketing issues was difficult to negotiate. For one farmer (quoted above in Table 4), the tension between wanting to farm and needing to market in order to farm was enough of a stress that they felt that if they were still able to secure fair prices for their goods, reconnection with customers could be removed without necessarily being a loss:

I’d probably give up the customer access. Not because I don’t like talking to the customers, but it’s very time consuming and it does take away from other stuff that could be done on the farm.

Other farmers indicated that their product tended to sell itself, making marketing of little concern. However, dealing directly with customers was still a new role for most farmers to get used to. Customer relations mostly related to informing customers about what product was available, taking orders, sending and replying to emails, and arranging delivery or pick-up times. It also often involved educating consumers. Consumer education ranged from providing information on the farm’s own particular products to animal production and anatomy more generally:

Trying to explain to people how a pig can be cut up and why you can’t have four hams out of one pig.

For farmers, customer relations was also about negotiating between farm/farmer capabilities and customer expectations of convenience:
And it’s amazing, how many people – they all want to do it [drive out to the farm] in their first year, and then everybody wants delivery after that. So now let’s get convenient.

Building in convenience without compromising the nature of the direct relationship was an ongoing negotiation, and one that depended on selling strategy. One way farmers tried to negotiate the question of convenience was by working towards changing customer expectations through education:

They have to start understanding inconvenience; what they perceive to be inconvenient.

Farmers also pointed to the fact that they could not cater to every customer because they all looked for and expected slightly different things in terms of ease and convenience. Here, producers referred to consumer preferences for frozen vs. fresh meat and for specific cuts like steaks, people not having enough freezer space to accommodate large quantities of meat, and people needing delivery. In this respect, several producers expressed difficulty (and at times bemusement) in making the basic business judgment to accommodate or decline customer requests based on the practicality of doing so:

And while they would rather just have the steaks – and I tell them, you know what, an animal has all these cuts, we don’t have a retail store, so if you take the steaks, what am I going to do with the roasts? So yeah, they have to change and learn how to cook a roast and stuff like that, but if they want to support this type of farming, that’s what they’re going to have to do.

What you learn is that demands are different across the board. Not everybody is looking for the same thing. And you can’t please everybody. I would prefer, now that I’m puzzling it out in my head, to just stand for what I want, and then your customers will self-select.

Although what farmers felt were misinformed or unrealistic and changing customer expectations sometimes seemed like significant points of frustration, most tended to be sympathetic at some level to customer ‘ignorance’. Farmers acknowledged that in general their own customers found
them in the first place largely because those customers had some knowledge and understanding (though it was maybe in need of adjustment according to farmers) of food production.

Farmers also pointed out that in dealing with customer relations and expectations, they had to know what they could and could not manage as an individual producer, and then communicate that to customers who “easily get the concept” once they had a better grasp of producers’ practical limitations:

*I think customers have to take responsibility for searching out what they’re looking for and putting out there their expectations and what they want. And farmers have to be able to put out there what they’re able to produce and at what price, and what their needs are. So it’s kind of meeting somewhere in the middle.*

This back and forth relationship with customers was, for farmers, the biggest change to deal with as direct-sellers. But, as discussed earlier, it also allowed them to gain control over prices and production methods. Dealing with customers represented a behavioural or attitudinal adjustment for farmers, but there were also very practical limitations to direct-selling.

In terms of practical and physical limitations, farmers tended to speak about the lack of efficient ‘Distribution and Infrastructure’. Many hoped that through increased consumer demand for locally sourced products, distribution channels would evolve and develop in order to bring in a certain level of convenience and cost effectiveness still missing from many local food initiatives:

*Transportation is a better word than distribution. I don’t think there is cost effective transportation between the customers and the producers for a lot of these products yet.*

Some farmers seemed willing to delegate the task of distribution to some kind of external transportation system, while others emphasized that farmers needed to be active within those transportation channels and “get better at owning [their] own distribution channels.” Whatever
trajectory, there was always a balancing act between keeping ‘direct’ relationships in tact and tying in convenience and ease (for farmers and customers):

*Do we want to keep delivering? Do we really enjoy these outings to Toronto? Can we figure out a way to enjoy them more so that they’re not just a hectic delivery rush?*

Farmers also cited the need for new types of infrastructure such as farm shops, increased on-farm storage, delivery vehicles, freezers for consumers, and more stable/certain relationships with already existing infrastructure such as abattoirs and butchers. Somewhat surprisingly, only one farmer indicated worrying about abattoir closure:

*We do have a concern about that because they [abattoirs] are dropping off like flies.*

Many of these infrastructure and distribution needs required large capital, labour, and time commitments that farmers sometimes struggled to find and represented three other challenges farmers mentioned throughout the interviews. However, they will not be discussed further as they were less significant and were often closely connected to issues already outlined.

Some farmers acknowledged that it might be inefficient for each individual producer to try to tackle these challenges alone as opposed to working more cooperatively and at a larger scale to build more universally available infrastructure and distribution systems. However, these types of challenges, as well as those related to farmers’ changing roles, indicate that cutting out the ‘middlemen’ (though beneficial in many ways) (re)placed significant additional responsibilities on farmers. This created new sets of problems and tasks that producers tended to tackle individually, despite the fact that they had little time, money, or labour to do so.
4.2 Consumer motivations and challenges in buying local meat

Motivations: Healthy food

Shifting to consumer experiences in local food initiatives, three themes emerged from the data and describe consumer motivations for sourcing meat direct from farmers. As presented in Table 5, 94% of customers interviewed expressed concerns specifically with the health of modern, conventionally-raised meats, 81% expressed a general mistrust of conventional agriculture as a whole, and 68% expressed concern over the animal welfare standards of conventional farm operations. Each theme is discussed in greater detail following Table 5.

Perspectives and Key Quotes are highlighted as opposed to Representative Quotes as in previous producer-related tables because consumer opinions tended to be more varied, making it harder to identify truly representative verbatim.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>% Customers</th>
<th>Perspectives and Key Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>“Knowing what the animal is fed.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“The whole package: it’s local, organic, pesticide-free, GMO-free. It also tastes better and is better [for you].”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistrust of Conventional</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>“I know there aren’t growth hormones, and you can’t [guarantee] that if you buy from the grocery store.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“We’ve lost trust in our food system so what is our option?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Welfare</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>“We know what the animals have eaten and that they’re raised ethically.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“[I know] that there’s not some great big barn where animals are chained up.”</td>
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</table>

Table 5: Consumer motivations to buy local meat

Almost all consumers surveyed (94%) indicated that their motivations to source meat locally stemmed largely from personal and family health concerns. Usually, customers mentioned that they valued “knowing what the animal was fed” without specifying exactly what that meant. Consumers who did offer more specifics about what they thought was healthier about the meat and what the animals were fed listed things like there being no antibiotics, hormones
given to the animals, and the animals not being fed GMO or pesticide-sprayed feed. Although no producers were certified organic, some customers connected healthiness to the organic nature of the production methods as highlighted by one customer quoted in Table 5:

*It’s local, organic, pesticide-free, GMO-free.*

Customers also linked nutritive value in the meat with the grass-fed or pastured diet of the animals:

*The higher nutrient value and digestibility [of grass-fed beef].*

Thus, consumers using more general phrases such as “knowing what the animal was fed” perhaps presumed that any feed was pesticide-free, that it had not been treated with antibiotics, and that animals had a diet primarily consisting of grass/hay. While these concerns made up what farmers described as their production methods and were part of their ecological farming imperatives, for consumers, production methods were important in that they contributed to the overall health of the finished meat product:

*Animals are not eating prepared feed, but insects and plants growing outside in green fields. It’s organic . . . the meat is not seasoned, is gluten/glucose-fructose free, not radiated, not medicated.*

Arguably, production methods as a motivation to source meat locally translated into a concern for the quality and healthiness of the finished product and to a lesser extent, to animal welfare.

Some respondents invoked the additional responsibility they felt for providing healthy food for their young children. Although only some customers (26%) explicitly stated that their children were a large part of their motivations, it seemed that having a family and feeling personally responsible for their well-being was an underlying pattern and prompted many to seek locally-sourced goods. In large part, consumer sentiments of personal responsibility accompanied and resulted from their feelings of mistrust toward the conventional food system.
Similar to producers’ ‘Dissatisfaction with Conventional’, 81% of consumers showed discontent with conventional agriculture and food procurement. They felt they could not trust large corporations, or grocery store chains to provide them with safe, healthy, environmentally friendly, and nutritious food. They were also beginning to mistrust labels such as ‘certified organic’, and ‘free-range’. Consumers indicated a desire to take more personal responsibility for knowing about their food since they no longer necessarily trusted the food industry. Contact with a farmer was often emphasized as one ‘solution’ to the mistrust customers felt about anonymous food from the conventional food supply chain. According to one customer, many people had “lost trust in our food system” largely because “the industrial system is poisoning us.” Another customer stated:

[I’m] not comfortable buying meat at the grocery store just because it has a “free range” label.

Such mistrust seemed to stem from not knowing for certain how an animal had been raised or fed and if it (or its feed) contained GMOs or had been treated with hormones or antibiotics. In order to assuage these types of doubts, consumers were more willing to find farms and farmers to support that produced food they felt they could trust. One consumer stated:

It is up to me to find farmers who do [meet my standards].

This attitude suggests that individual customers had some base knowledge of what exactly they were looking for in their food and food production methods. Along with expectations about production methods to ensure a healthy product, consumer standards also encompassed animal welfare.

Although to a lesser extent than either ‘Health Concern’ or ‘Mistrust of Conventional,’ the theme of ‘Animal Welfare’ came up for 68% of customers as an important motivator and standard for sourcing local meat. However, most shoppers were very general in referring to
animal welfare. They used phrases such as “ethically raised”, “living conditions”, or “you know what they’re fed”, as evidence of ‘proper’ animal care or they indicated a general opposition to factory farms. Only a few provided specifics about what kind of diet they considered appropriate or what kinds of living conditions were ‘ethical’ for raising animals for meat. When customers did offer more detail, they focused on the animals’ diets of grass and hay instead of corn or questionable feed mixes:

*The animals eat better food here. I don’t want animals to be eating other ground up animals.*

*I am not comfortable buying anonymous [meat] anymore. They’re [the animals] in factory farms are fed food that they were never built to digest.*

Few provided any detail on ethical living conditions for animals other than noting that the farms and farmers they sourced from were not ‘factory farms’. Whenever consumers used reasoning such as “you know where it comes from and how [the animals] are being raised”, it was difficult to assess whether they used such phrases with any more detailed knowledge about what in particular it was they wanted to know about how the animals were raised, or if simply trusting that the farmer did so in an ethical way was sufficient. This was not a line of inquiry this research followed or predicted, but it was a question that emerged quite clearly from preliminary consumer surveys. This question of knowledge vs. trust echoes Smithers et al.’s. (2008) questioning of farmers’ market shoppers and their implicit trust of farmers instead of more precisely defining and/or verifying their own expectations of ‘local’.

Finally, consumers rarely referred to animal slaughter when they discussed animal welfare and when they did they usually connected a stress-free slaughter environment to the overall taste of the end product:

*An animal that dies screaming won’t taste as good.*
To a certain extent then, ‘proper’ animal husbandry from birth to slaughter (as subjectively perceived by individual consumers) seemed also to connect to the quality of the end product. Although manifested in different ways, consumer motivations could almost always be traced back to the bottom line of the healthiness of the meat product.

**Challenges: Convenience over price**

Consumer challenges were varied and often idiosyncratic. Some participants (26%) claimed they didn’t personally experience challenges in sourcing food locally. Rather, they pointed to what they thought might prevent other people from buying local food. Overall, two themes emerged from the data as representing the challenges consumers experienced in their own participation in direct-sell initiatives and obstacles they felt might prevent others from sourcing local meat: convenience and price. As presented in Table 6, these two themes were categorized as they applied to the surveyed customers and to the hypothetical other customers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>% customers</th>
<th>Representative Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convenience (Self)</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>“It can be difficult to come to the farm to pick up my groceries, but it’s peaceful and nice to visit. All you need to do is change your time management, and make visiting the farm and taking time out of your day a priority.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Driving is the biggest challenge – getting out there in winter.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience (Others)</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>“People like grocery stores because they’re convenient.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“People don’t know the options of where to get meat.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price (Self)</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>“I would sacrifice some of the free range stuff to save money.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Organic is expensive, so hormone-free is the next best.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price (Others)</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>“Having a different concept of what is a fair price might be a challenge.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“If people could shift from looking only at a dollar sign to a whole cost.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6: Consumer challenges in buying local meat**

The theme of ‘Convenience’ was slightly different for those customers claiming it as a challenge for themselves in their participation in local food initiatives (‘Self’) and those that indicated it mostly as a challenge preventing others from participating in local food initiatives
'Other'). In terms of ‘Self’, consumers described challenges of convenience as distance to the farms or delivery points and making the time to drive around more for their foods:

*Going to the grocery store, to this farm, to that farm – for families that work and have kids, that’s hard.*

For ‘Others’, challenges of convenience again had to do with distance and delivery logistics, but also with local meat being hard for people to find in the first place:

*It’s hard to find access points for local and organic.*

In addition, sentiments about learning to prioritize food differently in family budgets, learning how to cook and store larger quantities of meat, and getting used to “imperfect” food or more limited food choices characterized how customers were changing their views on food value and their own priorities:

*It is seasonal, and I think people have been spoiled by getting what they want whenever they want it. I think a lot of people struggle with not having the same choices when buying local meat.*

While customers acknowledged that issues like time and convenience were challenges even for themselves, they often expressed that because they’d rearranged their own priorities they were able to make it work. The extra effort or time that they were willing to commit because they had prioritized food, were then listed as reasons that ‘Others’ didn’t or couldn’t source local meat:

*If you are used to having a huge burger every day [then local meat seems expensive], but that’s not healthy. We are used to cheap, cheap, cheap – but animals can’t be raised or kept naturally for so cheap. We have to change the way we think and prioritize when it comes to money [and food].*

Because they hadn’t yet prioritized food in the same way, it was those ‘Others’ who still struggled with convenience and time, and largely with price.

Generally, customers tended to list convenience as a larger barrier than price (especially for themselves). When they did discuss price, it was slightly more common for customers to
suggest that price was a significant reason that other people did not opt to buy meat locally. While some did indicate that they thought about price and found it to sometimes dictate their ability to buy what they considered ‘best’ all the time, in general, customers accepted paying a price premium in light of the benefits they believed came along with their purchasing decisions:

*The cost up front is a challenge, but it is worth it.*

This sentiment also existed in conjunction with the idea that the price problem was not the farmers’ fault. Most customers acknowledged the idea of a higher price being a more ‘fair’ and ‘accurate’ reflection of the cost of raising animals ethically and organically as highlighted by one customer quote in *Table 6*:

*Having a different concept of what is a fair price might be a challenge [for others].*

Consumer opinions on price will be explored further in Chapter 5. For the sake of understanding consumer challenges here, it is sufficient to note that convenience was generally viewed as more of a challenge than price and that price as a challenge for ‘Others’ was largely connected to ideas of changing food priorities.

### 4.3 Summary: Distinct and parallel motivations and challenges

Before moving on to the second portion of the results in Chapter 5, a short summary for producer-consumer motivations and challenges is presented in *Table 7*. Themes for each category are listed in order of prominence according to the research findings and asterisks indicate where themes overlap or were slightly different expressions of parallel issues (discussed in more detail below).
Table 7: Comparing producer-consumer motivations and challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivations</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Producers</td>
<td>Challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfaction with Conventional*</td>
<td>Agricultural Policies***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecological Health (holistic)**</td>
<td>Changing Role of Farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distribution/Infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumers</td>
<td>Convenience***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health (human)**</td>
<td>Price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistrust of Conventional*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Welfare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While producers and consumers did broadly share some of the same motivations – namely, a dissatisfaction and/or mistrust of the conventional system (*), and health concerns (**) - these were expressed and ranked slightly differently for each group. In terms of dissatisfaction and/or mistrust, producers expressed their need to seek a profitable business model outside of the conventional system and this was at the foundation of their decisions to sell meat direct to consumers. While producers’ dissatisfaction had to do with their own profitability, consumers’ mistrust was primarily connected to their beliefs that the conventional system was producing unhealthy food. In regard to health concerns and motivations, while both parties did discuss them, producer conceptions of health were more likely to also encompass ecological and farm system health and resilience as opposed to the more narrow human health concerns of consumers.

In terms of challenges, the findings at first suggest fairly distinct experiences for producers and consumers. For consumers, convenience was the predominant issue, followed by price. For producers, agricultural policies and changing farmer roles were the most discussed challenges, followed by lack of distribution and infrastructure. These challenges initially seem much different from those that consumers experienced. However, closer analysis of the findings suggests that although articulated and experienced differently, consumer challenges related to convenience - and to a certain extent price - could be manifestations of the two higher-level
challenges that producers identified: agricultural policies and distribution/infrastructure. Though the relationship is far from simple and beyond the scope of this research project, how producers experienced and negotiated agricultural policies and a lack of infrastructure, likely determined much of how consumers experienced price and convenience and is discussed further in Chapter 6. The producer-identified challenge of the changing roles of farmers connects more to the unique negotiations of responsibilities between producers and consumers of particular initiatives. Although only one farmer expressed the possibility of giving up customer contact, the general findings on producer attitudes towards marketing and customer relations indicate that many might be similarly inclined due to time constraints and the fact that customer relations distracts from on-farm work. These struggles to maintain farm and customer related duties simultaneously raise important questions about responsibility and scale within the local food production-consumption chain, to be discussed further in Chapter 6.
Chapter Four revealed how producers and consumers experienced participation in local food initiatives in terms of their motivations and challenges and began to show how their experiences speak to the nature of reconnection. Chapter Five will attempt to understand more deeply the material and symbolic considerations that both parties use to calibrate value. Specifically, this chapter will address Objective Two by presenting findings related to how producers and consumers view local foods in terms of price and cost, what ‘local’ really means to them, and the value they see in engaging directly with each other in LFIs. The findings are meant to draw out why and how local operations work for producers and consumers and why and how they were valued. Like Chapter Four, Chapter Five is divided into three main sections. Section 5.1 focuses on producer opinions, Section 5.2 focuses on consumer opinions, and Section 5.3 concludes the chapter with a short summary and comparison between producer and consumer attitudes.

5.1 Producer opinions on value

Overall, three recurring themes emerged from the data that reveal producer perceptions on the value and merits of local food. As presented in Table 8, 85% of producers suggested that ‘local’ as a descriptor of their operations or of food was imprecise, 85% of producers suggested that trust was a valuable outcome of producer-consumer relationships in their direct-sell operations, and 77% suggested that being able to gain ‘fair’ returns on their products was a valuable outcome of producer-consumer relationships. These common themes were discerned based on producer answers to open-ended questions such as “what do you value or appreciate most about selling locally”, “why do you think consumers source food locally”, and “what
makes something a local food”, as well as from the thematic analysis and coding of each full interview for repeated sentiments or attitudes. Each theme is discussed in greater detail below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>% Producers</th>
<th>Representative Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Local as Vague/Less       | 85%         | “When you asked about local – back seven or eight years ago, local was such a big thing. But we have really seen a shift. They like that it’s local, but they want to identify where it came from and they want it to be pure meat with no additives.”
|                          |             | “So you can’t really be putting a geographic distance on it – it’s more that accessibility [that is important]…and a relationship [with the producers]. And that makes it a local food product.” |
| Trust as Valuable         | 85%         | “It’s about having that two way communication . . . they feel like we’re listening to them and they’re listening to us and it’s building that relationship again”
|                          |             | “So they come out and check me out. But what happens then is that they go home and they sell my product for me. Because they trust me, they tell their friends and their families. And those people no longer bother coming out and checking me out because they trust the [first] person. So you get this network where now rather than being certified by the government saying that our auditors have verified that this is genuine grass-fed – it’s their buddy [who] verified that we’re authentic grass-fed.” |
| Fair Price/True Cost      | 77%         | “I just think that the price of conventional food is skewed more than the price [of local]…the price that we charge for food is more like the real price. We have to know our cost of production, and big farmers say they know their cost of production – well that has been subsidized along the lines quite a few times by government and programs and stuff like that. So the cost of food that we are getting in the grocery store is not the true cost of food generally. So I think that it’s not that we’re too expensive, it’s that the other food is really cheap”
|                          |             | “Well I mean the cost of production is different too…when you’re buying feed by multiple tons, there’s price discounts and things like that. To raise livestock on a smaller scale it is a little bit more expensive per unit than it would be on a big scale. So the price has to reflect that. And then the labour too.” |

Table 8: Producer values and opinions

The first thing many producers wanted to point out in the interview process was the disputed concept of ‘local.’ They felt more comfortable thinking of and talking about their operations as ‘direct’ as opposed to ‘local’ and 85% indicated that the definition of local was very vague. As a result, ‘direct-sell’ replaced ‘local’ in most producer interviews as a more
appropriate and precise descriptor of their operations. In addition, they believed that for themselves and for consumers, the ‘local-ness’ of a product was in fact less meaningful than production methods (discussed below) – or for one producer in particular, regional economics:

*Investing in local food means that there’s more of your food dollars bouncing around within the economy in which you live rather than being exported to foreign countries, foreign governments, and big companies that have no interest really in you except as a source of money.*

Producers reflected somewhat on their own opinions of local, but focused primarily on what they thought consumers believed to be a part of the ‘local’ brand. This focus on the consumer could be related to the fact that for themselves (the farmers), ‘local’ was almost meaningless to their operations besides the fact that it was a marketing handle that consumers understood (and in part created). Producers were much more focused on their production methods and tended to brand their products on some other feature besides ‘local-ness’, like grass-fed, hormone-free, or pastured.

*The focus on our marketing is more about being pasture-raised for our stuff, but we do market it as local as well.*

They also agreed that, “how it’s raised, what it’s fed, and what’s in it” were of the most import to customers, over “how local it is.” Not only did producers value production methods over ‘local’, but they felt that underneath the label of ‘local’, production methods were really what consumers looked for as well.

Producers also emphasized how product-dependent any definition of ‘local’ was, especially in terms of distance. Many indicated that consumer criteria for ‘local’ often meant whatever was ‘closer’ or the ‘closest’ farm from their own home. One producer stated that ‘local’ really “becomes a more comparative thing” as opposed to a fixed distance. In terms of product dependence, meat was usually considered a more acceptable product to source from, or to sell to,
farther locations. Vegetables and fresh produce on the other hand, had a smaller ‘local’ radius in terms of distance:

*If it’s vegetables it needs to be fresh and not shipped. In our case it’s the idea of meat that is produced within a reasonable distance in a way that satisfies all of the criteria.*

One producer felt that labeling products with where they were grown and produced would be more effective than trying to come up with a definitive distance limit for ‘local’ goods. This would allow consumers to decide whether something was produced ‘close enough’ or ‘within a reasonable distance’ to them based on their own criteria. Similarly, the farm operation that ran a store and sourced from other farmers labeled all its products based on the farm they came from (not under their general farm store brand) in order to “identify the farms that are represented” and allow customers to “get to know that farm and that farmer” and base their decisions on that. Some producers felt that if labels clearly outlined the actual qualities of the product (production methods, place of production), they would be reflective of more important factors beyond specific distance.

In general, producers agreed that there was a need to be cautious in using the term ‘local’:

*We need to be careful that we don’t try to really create a label that defines good food.*

They also expressed an opinion that it would be beneficial to make “less of out it [local labels] rather than more” simply because of the confusion and relative unimportance of distance in comparison to production methods. Beyond production methods, just over half (54%) of farmers suggested that the relationship and contact that the consumer got to have with the producer was the most important part of the idea of ‘local’. Indeed, this contact did seem to play an important role in an equally important theme that emerged from the data: trust.
For 85% of producers, the value of reconnection lay in enabling them to establish trust with consumers and vice versa. Largely missing from the conventional system, farmers worked to build trust and transparency back into the production-consumption relationship through regular updates and newsletters, by seeking feedback from customers, offering refunds or exchanges if a particular cut of meat was tougher than usual, explaining farm challenges, and by opening their farms to tours and visits. Although all of these tasks also made up some of the challenges discussed in Chapter Four, the benefit farmers experienced in terms of the control they gained from being able to set prices (which consumers accepted based on their trust of the farmers) seemed to make the additional tasks worthwhile:

_I appreciate getting the price that we need. And secondly I absolutely love the connection._

Other benefits for producers came in the form of connecting with satisfied customers who provided positive feedback and who would then do much of the selling for them through personal recommendations and word of mouth:

_There’s also this trust by proxy thing. Their sister trusts us, so therefore they immediately trust us. We have some really dedicated people who we’ve never met, but they trust us because someone else they know trusts us._

Many producers asserted that once they gained the trust of a core group of customers, selling product became much easier as customers willingly recommended and vouched for the farmer and farm’s products and processes. This altered the farmers’ role slightly: crossing into the realm of supplier rather than seller. In this sense, it might be argued that the relationships over time evolved from “seller-buyer,” to “supplier-client.” Interestingly, since customers were “starting not to trust the big organic labels anymore”, producers believed that a recommendation by a friend or personal verification was what consumers looked for:
By building trust into their operations, farmers removed the need to continue or seek certification for their production methods, as personal responsibility among consumers seemed to be taking on greater importance than outside third party certifications.

When they discussed control, producers referred not only to having greater control over prices, but also to educating consumers and being personally responsible for production methods. Even though communicating with customers might not have been their favourite task, producers often indicated that helping people to understand their product and their farming style was essential to their business:

*They know when we are having drought and all this stuff because they are a part of this thing. They are connected to the farm. They know exactly what is going on. Each week when they come to pick up their basket, there is a newsletter. And it’s what’s going on on the farm: there are recipes, this year we’re having difficulty with this, there is an abundance of this crop this year . . . so they know why in a certain year there is more of something than other years.*

Producers suggested that educating customers about why certain products might not be available at certain times or why prices might change year to year helped maintain transparency and allowed them to keep a more consistent and committed customer base. They also felt that constant communication with customers made them more accountable for their own farm, the quality of their products, and allowed for independence in how they ran their farm operations:

*I realize, as soon as I hand over my customer base to somebody else, I’m now totally at the mercy of whoever I’m selling to. And so to keep that independence is [important].*

Because producers had varying production methods, delivery systems, order systems, and overall farm philosophies, their ability to communicate to the customer whatever their particular
‘brand’ was, was both essential and empowering. As long as the producers were able to communicate their brand convincingly, they were able to run their farm the way they thought best and felt that it was each farmer’s prerogative to do so.

Not only did producers see the development of trust as beneficial for themselves, but they also viewed it as valuable for customers. In their view, the trust reconnection provided allowed customers to exercise more personal responsibility in food procurement and explore food choices based on their own values:

If you like grassland birch, you can do it. If you like cleaner water, you can do it. If you want a healthier, more vibrant rural community, you can do it. You can leverage it all through food.

Here, farmers framed trust as a gateway to enhancing choice and personal responsibility on the consumer side and as a precursor for forming a more intentional sustainable food system brought about largely by consumer dollars. They spoke often about the power of consumer dollars in supporting and creating a better food system terms of health, animal welfare, and environmental and social sustainability:

The consumer dollar drives everything. So every time they buy beef out of the feedlot or out of the supermarket, they’re supporting feedlot beef. And you can go out and you can protest against feedlots, but as long as you are buying that beef, they’ve got your money to fight you with . . . So you vote with your dollar every time you buy something. So if you want small-scale, if you want your countryside full of small-scale farmers, that’s where your dollar needs to go. And if you go to the supermarket you can expect to see less and less farmers and just big corporate farms taking over the countryside.

Like environmental benefits accrued through ideas of ‘true cost’ (discussed below) however, these larger (and slow to appear) aggregate benefits and hopes for broad food system change through individual choices in consumption are always difficult to experience at the individual and immediate level. Before considering the implications of positioning the consumer dollar as an instrument for social change (which will be discussed in Chapter 6), the third and final theme
regarding producer opinions of ‘local’ should be discussed as ideas of ‘Fair Price’ and ‘True Cost’ also imply both individual and collective benefit.

Among the oft-espoused tenets of local food is that there is equity in pricing; that producers receive fair compensation for what they produce, that consumers get value for money, and that ecological externalities (positive and negative) of food production are accounted for. Whether this is always the case or not, it is clearly part of the narrative, as is the opposite assertion in relation to conventional long supply chain markets; that both producers and consumers lose and that broader negative externalities are unaccounted for. To gauge producer opinions on the price of their products and ‘local’ food more generally, producers were asked whether they thought local foods were too expensive and needed to be made more financially accessible to customers. In response, 77% of producers brought up issues ‘Fair Price’, and true costs of production. They felt that their prices were fair and were based on ‘real’ production costs and equitable compensation in terms of capital and labour inputs. In reference to meat sold via extended marketing at large grocery stores, one producer asserted that farmers “can’t make anything at 99 cents a pound” and that part of the goal for selling direct was to be profitable through receiving a fairer price – if only through the ability to retain a greater fraction of the profit.

While expressed in differing ways, there was a clear sense among producers that the first step in profitability lay in receiving a ‘Fair Price’. Equally important was knowing the ‘True Cost’ of food production. ‘True Cost’, an idea slightly different from ‘Fair Price’, had to do with end-product price accounting for environmental and social costs of food production more accurately than in the conventional system. According to most producers, subsidies to large-scale farms and incentives for over-production in pursuit of maximizing production and lowering costs
(dictated by commodity markets, and marketing mechanisms beyond farmer control) masked production costs for operating at a smaller scale:

When you’re buying feed by multiple tons, there are price discounts and things like that. So to raise livestock on a smaller scale it is a little bit more expensive per unit than it would be on a big scale.

They then contrasted their own ‘real’ costs of production and the attendant social and environmental benefits to the conventional falsity of ‘cheap’ food that they argued externalized many environmental and social costs. In light of knowing their production costs, farmers asserted that the higher food price was a function of that and a necessity in order for their business to be sustainable in terms of input costs and environmental costs:

We get a better price for our product which ideally compensates for the amount of extra money that we spend on our inputs.

I think that the cost, if it is a higher cost, is a reflection of food quality, management intensity, and hopefully also then environmental [costs].

Most indicated that they were not making “a ton of money” and wanted to ensure people didn’t think they were price gauging in any way, or not pricing based on actual needs and costs.

Based on an even broader concept of ‘True Cost’ by adding long-term human health implications to environmental and social concerns, some farmers (62%) were uncertain that their ‘local’ product really was more expensive than conventional products:

They [the customers] recognize that cheap food isn't necessarily healthy food. And so when you take into account your health care system – ok so I’m going to buy cheap food but now I have to go to the dentist more often, the doctor more often, supplement my vitamins. So take that into consideration when you're pricing this stuff out.

This line of consideration was and is difficult to quantify, and is likely even more difficult for individual producers or consumers to experience as mutually beneficial. The long-term health
benefits discussed accrue at a social level and not necessarily between the individuals at the moment of the food transaction.

Regardless of their varying opinions on whether their products were in fact more expensive than meat purchased from a large grocery store, most farmers (77%) did not think that their food should be any cheaper. They asserted that local meat shouldn’t be cheaper, especially for those “who are doing a responsible job of growing good quality food.” Rather, responsible local food production needed to be “both highly respected and economically valued so that it carries on” and recognized for “the real values that it contributes to society.” Others were adamant that local food “costs what it costs” based on all of the above considerations, and that “people need to rearrange their priorities.” Only two producers indicated that they would like to see, or would accept, lower prices if they could become more efficient or scale-up their operations. Those that hoped to grow as an operation wanted to compete:

[I want to] compete on a price basis with the conventional market [by] starting to get some efficiencies from scale.

All participants acknowledged that there was a tension between farmer profitability and accessibility for lower income people, but their need to sustain a business usually meant that they accepted that they were selling to a certain market and demographic. A few did offer ideas for solutions that centered on subsidizing consumers rather than large producers. This seemed like an understandable perspective coming from farmers whose livelihoods and businesses required their prices to remain comparatively high.

5.2 Consumer opinions on value

Overall, three recurring themes revealed consumer perceptions on the value of local food. As presented in Table 9, 84% of customers felt that trust was a valuable component in direct-sell operations, 65% expressed concern for production methods specifically over ‘local-ness’ in
general but still used the ‘local’ label as a signifier, and that overall, customers had conflicting and uncertain views on how to reconcile the price and cost dilemma. These common themes were discerned from customer responses to open ended questions such as “is it important for you to personally know the farmer producing your meat”, “in your opinion, what makes something a ‘local’ food”, and “why do you think farmers choose to sell their meat locally or direct to customers”, as well as from categorizing repeated sentiments throughout the interviews. To assess attitudes on price, conclusions were based on consumer responses to one likert-scale question (as discussed below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>% Customers</th>
<th>Representative Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust as Valuable</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>“Knowing about the farmer is important, but it’s more important to know that the meat I’m buying is organic.” “You can go to the farmers’ market and get ‘natural,’ but if you know the farmer it replaces a certification because you know what they are doing.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local as Vague and Less</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>“Local food doesn’t have all the fertilizers and the preservatives needed to transport it for long distances.” “[direct contact] makes it easier for me to identify which [farms] are operating in a sustainable, humane manner.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicting/Uncertain Opinions</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>“If I didn’t know the work involved, I would say yes it is too expensive. But I don’t know how they [farmers] make a living.” “It’s so product dependent. Their chicken is a huge chunk of change, but that’s because the feed is expensive. So I can’t fault anybody for prices.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Consumer values and opinions

Similar to producers, a fundamental benefit of reconnection for consumers was the trust created along the food production-consumption chain. Given that their mistrust of the conventional system was a large motivator for seeking out alternatives, it seemed understandable that the most prevalent benefit they spoke of was a newfound trust. A clear majority (84%) of customers valued being able to trust the farmers from whom they purchased meat and appreciated the ability to verify production methods themselves. Some customers valued
knowing the farmer over any certification, while others felt that farmers would be more responsible through being connected to customers:

<Contact> replace[d] a certification because you know what they are doing.

They [farmers] are accountable to customers this way.

Customers tended to place much more trust in farmers than they did in third-party regulation. One customer felt that government testing in larger operations would be “less accurate than a farmer’s own experience and time with an animal.” In addition to trusting farmers over third-party regulators, this type of personal verification also implied that customers believed or trusted their own judgment over ‘expert’ (government) judgment or regulation. Although most customers did seem to value their ability to directly interact with their farmer and viewed this as the primary reason for trusting the food, a few specifically stated that trust could be built and maintained without direct contact with the farmer. Thus, some level of removal from the farmers seemed acceptable. As one consumer put it, direct contact was “nice, but not critical” in the formation of trust.

Importantly, only 23% of customers mentioned explicitly that they valued supporting farmers and contributing to regional food security. This lack of connection to broader food system concerns echoed what a few producers noted in terms of how they perceived consumer attitudes:

It’s hard to play that [regional food security] as a consumer piece. I like that piece in conversation with the government, but most consumers aren’t at that level and they aren’t concerned about that.

Taken in conjunction with the health related findings on consumer motivations in Chapter Four then, it could be suggested that the consumer impetus to “know the farmer” was more about
verifying “a standard that they maintain” for the sake of health concerns rather than connecting with them personally or connecting with broader food system change. As one customer put it:

Knowing about the farmer is important, but it’s more important to know that the meat I’m buying is organic.

The bottom line for consumers was to verify the quality of the food, which, they felt, could be done with more confidence if they were dealing directly with the producer instead of with labels in grocery stores that they no longer trusted. Despite the fact that consumers seemed to mistrust labels, a certain adherence to the ‘local’ concept or label was still present.

When customers were asked to articulate their interpretation or understanding of ‘local’, most felt that it was a shorthand or code for a whole package of qualities – real or imagined. These qualities included the meat being organic, raised/produced ‘ethically’, allowing for contact with a farmer, and the belief that their purchase was a way to support local economies and communities. Overall, 65% of customers thought that these other qualities were equally or more important than a strictly distance-based definition of local. While the exact collection and combination of additional qualities that consumers valued varied significantly, it became clear that the value of local meat was calibrated based on much more than distance. One customer stating that direct contact with the farmer was the most important feature of buying ‘local’ while two others specifically indicated that direct contact with a farmer was not that important. Others agreed that the product being organic was actually more important than it being ‘local’. In addition, when distance was deemed important, its measurement was highly relative and product dependent. Some customers (39%) used driving distance as an indicator of how far they would go to source local food and a few asserted that driving farther for meat or for larger amounts of food was acceptable. Although there was a general concern for food travelling long distances and a sentiment of needing to “support local”, one consumer pointed out that there “is no black and
white for what’s best.” Other definitions like “as local as possible”, or “the closer to home the more local it feels”, pointed to the relative nature of the term, at least as consumers understood it. However, in contrast to producers who felt that ‘local’s’ slippery definition urged them to put less stock in the term, consumers seemed to do the opposite. They placed many additional qualities and meanings onto the term. To add to the complexity and confusion surrounding consumer conceptions of ‘local’ was their uncertainty about how to judge its price.

To assess consumer opinions on the price of local food, shoppers were asked to indicate their level of agreement to one Likert-scaled question: “local meat is too expensive and should be made more financially accessible to customers.” Their responses are outlined in Table 10 below and show no clear consensus. Consumers were generally unsure of how to judge or conceptualize the price of local meat.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree/Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree/Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>No Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 (19%)</td>
<td>13 (42%)</td>
<td>8 (26%)</td>
<td>4 (13%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Consumer responses on the expense of local meats

The nature of the responses indicated that many customers agreed with the first half of the question (that local meat was too expensive), but were unsure how to answer the second half (that it should be made more financially accessible). This uncertainty came in part from the ‘double-barreled’ composition of the question itself and although rephrasing the question was considered after initial interviews, it was decided that leaving the question in its original form helped to bring out the clearly existing tension between making local foods both profitable and affordable. Consumers tended to remain neutral or lean towards disagreement when answering because they were more aware of production costs and farmer livelihoods and could not therefore justify wanting a lower price. Those that agreed that local meat was too expensive usually agreed only conditionally and suggested it is the expectation of ‘cheap’ food created and
subsidized by the conventional system that makes local foods seem expensive. One consumer suggested:

*We’re spoiled by cheap food. Once you know what it costs, [local] seems more reasonable.*

For these customers, the ‘cheap’ conventional food skewed expectations about prices and realistic production costs, reflecting an attitude that ‘local’ foods accounted more accurately for the ‘real cost’ of food.

Shoppers who disagreed or were neutral about the comparative expense of local meat offered considerations like production costs/methods, farmer profitability, and fairness as acceptable reasons for the prices:

*You want to make sure you’re fairly compensating the farmers, so I don’t know whether the price should change.*

Some also brought up ecological costs with one customer stating:

*Regular prices are not reflective of long-term ecological costs.*

Another (one who hoped prices would go down) connected the higher prices to farm size and scale of operation:

*Because of the small-scale, prices are higher because they haven’t achieved economies of scale yet to make the prices cheaper. By buying local I’m hoping to change that.*

Finally, most consumers, whether they agreed, were neutral, or disagreed with the initial question, offered coping strategies - such as “using the whole chicken”, buying less meat in general, or buying it in bulk - as ways they were able to afford and justify buying expensive ‘local’ meat. Altering priorities, such as “not put[ting] money into pop and cigarettes”, and added health benefits were also reasons consumers accepted paying higher prices:

*I’m willing to pay the price premium to avoid consuming chemicals. If you pay more, you know that you’ll get more benefits in return.*
The prevalence of these justifications suggests that underlying most consumer opinions was the feeling that they were spending more on meat they purchased locally. As much as consumers practiced coping strategies, one consumer articulated what others might have been feeling:

*It is expensive and I guess it would be nice if it were subsidized in some way.*

There remained a certain underlying attitude that something was amiss in terms of fulfilling both affordability and profitability expectations.

### 5.3 Summary: Producer-consumer constructions of value

Chapter Five brought together findings on how producers and consumers constructed value in local food initiatives and how they understood the price and meaning of local foods. Findings showed similar themes as both parties agreed that trust was an important feature of reconnection and that ‘local’ can be a confusing label. However, distinctions were also clear in their articulations of those common themes. These differences are presented in Table 11 and are briefly summarized below before moving on to the final discussion in Chapter 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>On Price</th>
<th>On ‘Local’ as Vague</th>
<th>On Trust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Producers</strong></td>
<td>Certainty about fair price and true cost</td>
<td>Should make less of ‘local’ rather than more (focus on prod. methods).</td>
<td>Valuable for profitability and development of food system change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consumers</strong></td>
<td>Uncertainty and conflicting opinions about fair price</td>
<td>Collect and attribute additional meanings to ‘local.’</td>
<td>Valuable for verifying quality of food.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 11: Comparing producer-consumer values and opinions**

As highlighted in Table 11, both producers and consumers pointed to ideas of fair price and true cost of production when asked about the high(er) price of ‘local’ foods. Producers were more certain about the necessity of maintaining fair compensation for food production, both economically and environmentally, given that their livelihoods and farm health and viability relied on it. Consumers, although they expressed a similar line of thinking, were less certain or
confident about what fair price and true cost meant as many still admittedly struggled with increased food prices for ‘local’ meat. While perhaps not a surprising difference, this tension does highlight and reinforce a major line of critique and obstacle in broader local food system scholarship and practice: affordability for consumers vs. profitability for producers.

In terms of producer-consumer conceptions of ‘local’, these once again began in a similar place, with both parties acknowledging the vague and slippery definition (or lack) of ‘local.’ Producers reacted to this by emphasizing production methods as a more important branding strategy and basis for judgment or motivation than simply ‘local’ and suggested that the less people make of ‘local’, the better. Consumers however, seemed to group a wide variety of qualities under the ‘local’ idea, in a way, contributing to its elusive definition while at the same time recognizing its vagueness. Even though consumers too in the end seemed more concerned about production methods, there was still a significant amount of inherent trust or usefulness to the term ‘local.’

Perhaps the most informative difference in the context of this project appeared when each group discussed how valuable it was to trust the production-consumption chain again. For producers, trust enabled better selling opportunities and greater control over price and production methods. Producers also believed that control and personal responsibility would be important for consumers based on the assumption that knowledgeable and responsible consumers (along with producers who maintained value and control over the food production chain) could help build a more resilient food system. In contrast, consumers did not seem to connect control and personal responsibility to broader food system change. Rather, the personal responsibility they gained from trusting and being reconnected with producers seemed to be more immediately connected to making sure the food they got was healthy. Chapter Five made clear that trust, for slightly
differing reasons to each group, was a highly valued part of reconnection in local food initiatives. However, integrating this conclusion with findings on the challenges and motivations of each group does point to a certain tenuousness in the reconnection project, discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.
Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

The intention in this final chapter is twofold: first, to step back from the specifics of individual lines of inquiry to draw out connections, contradictions, and the conditionality of producer-consumer relations; and second, to summarize major insights, limitations, and future opportunities for research. In so doing, this chapter contributes substantively to Objective Three: to assess the value of reconnection for producers and consumers and to discuss the implications of their shared and differing opinions and experiences. An attempt is made to reveal how different actors experience, negotiate, and mutually construct expectations and values for the merits of local food and to identify areas of weaknesses and strengths in newly formed direct producer-consumer relationships.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the process of ‘reconnection’ is assumed to provide benefits for each party involved in local food initiatives (producers and consumers). These benefits are multidimensional and can be economic, social, environmental, and health related. The “encompassing nature of the ‘reconnection project’” (Ilbery et al. 2005, 117) however, needs to be questioned and there is little well-documented evidence that social, environmental, and health-related benefits are necessarily a result of direct contact between producers and consumers in ‘good food’ networks (Sage 2003). My research therefore seeks to question the logic and durability of ‘reconnection’ in local food initiatives. Drawing on the results from Chapters Four and Five, Chapter Six considers the question of reconnection as a foundation for success, or as a temporary fix and is divided into four main sections.

Section 6.1 will discuss the varied nature of reconnection in two ways. Firstly, in that the diversity of farm operational structures creates different incarnations of ‘direct’ contact or reconnection between producers and consumers; and secondly, in that reconnection for producers
and consumers is valued for different reasons. Section 6.2 will focus on how producers and consumers negotiate responsibility and develop governance frameworks in LFIIs. Specifically, questions of scale and legitimacy, as well as the challenges and rewards highlighted in the findings will be used to demonstrate tensions that arise as actors mutually negotiate their own roles and expectations. Section 6.3 will focus on the theoretical and practical implications of reconnection as a foundation for agricultural change, and attempt to identify where the reconnection narrative fits in terms of conceptions of ‘strong’ or ‘weak’ food system alternatives. Section 6.4 will highlight the scholarly and practical contributions of this research, outline its limitations, and identify areas for future work on local and alternative food systems.

6.1 On the varied nature of reconnection

In this section, I will suggest that in the presence of so many different forms of direct marketing, reconnection loses meaning and provides little in the way of a foundation for strengthening local food systems. I will also suggest that each party is primarily motivated by self-interest and appreciates the benefits they experience based on their fulfillment of self-interested concerns. This potentially undermines the idea that “social embeddedness” (Sage 2003) necessarily “works to mediate self-interest” (Sage 2003) within initiatives where producers and consumers are reconnected. These impressions are based on a modest data set and preliminary analysis and thus should be treated in just that way: as impressions. They are, nevertheless, intriguing.

Diversity among direct-sell initiatives

All of the producers interviewed for this project considered themselves to be selling direct to the consumer in the sense that there were no middlemen doing marketing, processing (besides butchering), or distribution. Although all farms sold their product in more than one way,
each usually had a primary selling strategy: the one that brought them the most customers or allowed them to sell the most product (illustrated in Table 12 below; see also Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farmers’ Market</th>
<th>Pre-order and Delivery</th>
<th>Through Veg. CSA</th>
<th>Farm Store or Specialty Stores</th>
<th>Pre-order and On-farm pick up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12: Primary selling strategies of farms

The level and nature of the contact between customers and farmers varied between selling strategies and, because farms employed more than one selling strategy, therefore also varied within the same farm operation. When selling primarily at farmers’ markets, producers saw many, but relatively unknown, customers. Similarly, producers operating an on-farm store had contact with customers, but customers remained somewhat anonymous. In other cases involving pre-order and delivery, farmers connected with their customers online via email and had customer email lists. However, their in-person interaction with customers could be infrequent, especially if someone other than the farmer made deliveries. In many cases, farmers didn’t know all of their customers personally, but sold to them through word of mouth. The diversity of selling strategies, even within individual farms, suggests that reconnection happens in many different ways as the nature of ‘direct’ contact ranges from regular in-person encounters, to irregular meetings and frequent emails, to only one face-to-face meeting with the farmer, to word of mouth connections and no real contact with the farmer.

The varying nature of direct contact between producers and consumers suggests that reconnection can take on many forms as long as each participant is getting the benefits they expect (as negotiated and understood in each unique operation). The broad concept of reconnection does not appear to be singularly descriptive of actual varied experiences in local food initiatives. The importance is that reconnection, in whatever form, brings about certain
assurances for both parties. Research results suggest that for farmers, this assurance is primarily economic and ecological, while for consumers it is health-related.

**Profitability and health: Social embeddedness and self-interest in producer-consumer value propositions**

As shown in Chapter Four, producers most generally associated ecological benefits and the chance to operate more profitably with their direct-sell operations. However, it was difficult to identify any clear or universal ‘starting point’ for the decisions that eventually led to the creation or adoption of a direct-sell strategy. Specific farmer interests and initial motivations to sell direct were multi-faceted, unique to individuals and situations, and illustrated the complexity of farm-based decision-making as described by Smithers and Johnson (2004). For example, farmers transitioning from more conventional farming to direct selling were more explicitly motivated by the possibilities of gaining more economic return and improving farm profitability. New farmers were more likely to emphasize ideological reasons such as ecological concern, sustainable farming, and food security. This is not to say that ‘new’ farmers did not want to run profitable businesses, but they were less likely to cite economic reasons behind their decisions for selling-direct; this contrast between new and transitioning farmers would be an important area for further understanding the conditionality of farmer motivations. For all, it was a complicated process of negotiating between ecological goals, family life, partners working on or off the farm, reacting to market crashes like BSE, and creating a certain lifestyle. Despite the challenge in pinpointing what might have come first for farmers (economic or ecological motivations/concerns) and perhaps an unfruitful exercise anyway, it was clear from the findings that the need and desire for greater profitability informed producer motivations and attitudes in some capacity.
Consumer interests and motivations were primarily health-related and were easier to identify as common amongst all consumers. Although some briefly mentioned that they were happy that their purchasing local meat could contribute to ecologically-run farms and a healthier community in which local farmers were supported, their top priorities were finding a healthy product from a trusted source and being reassured that the animals were cared for ‘ethically’. Ideas of ‘ethical’ animal care were generally not well articulated however, and people spoke with the most detail about the health of the product. This attention to health and the very specific expectations in terms of the qualities of the product contrasts both with Smithers and Joseph’s (2010) findings that at farmers’ markets some customers may be motivated primarily by ‘social interaction’ and the novelty or ‘alterity’ of attending the market, and Guthman’s (2002) notion of consumers valuing ‘symbolic’ qualities over the ‘material’ qualities in organic foods. Social interaction or valuing qualities such as novelty, rarity, or distinction did not seem to be significant motivations for customers sourcing directly from farms (although a few producers thought otherwise given the trendiness of being a ‘foodie’). This could be because buying direct from the farm does not offer the same social experience, sense of noticeable ‘alterity,’ or the ‘seeing and being seen’ expectation that farmers’ markets do. In addition, most customers seemed generally educated and well researched at least about the health benefits of the food they were buying, and especially about grass-fed beef. Producers tended to agree that customers came to them with a certain amount of base knowledge that had allowed them to find a farm in the first place. Thus, customers participating in local food buying through farm delivery systems or farm pick-up, were perhaps more committed to and appreciative of the ‘material’ value of their foods (at least in terms of health benefits), than those frequenting farmers’ markets. However, the ‘material’ value of food also encompasses more practical producer-related economic concerns. It
was not clear from the research whether in their focus on healthy foods, consumers considered this other ‘material’ value as carefully or as part of their own motivations for buying meat direct from the farm.

Although specific motivations differed between producers and consumers, and producers and producers, all stemmed more generally from either dissatisfaction or mistrust of the status quo. In most cases, the reconnected relationship between producers and consumers was mutually beneficial because it fostered trust. Through gaining the trust of consumers, producers could disengage with the conventional system and pursue more profitable business opportunities while consumers could gain certain assurances regarding health and quality of food that they did not find in the conventional system. These two distinct benefits arguably fall most fittingly into ‘self-interest.’ So where was Sage’s (2003) ‘social embeddedness’ narrative if there was one?

Chapter Five suggested that producers also valued trust and reconnection because, through encouraging consumption change, such qualities might help to establish a more ecologically and socially resilient food system. This type of broader or collective concern links to the idea of social embeddedness in alternative food systems, where actors (in this case farmers) consider and are willing to “offset purely personal financial incentives against social criteria involving collective, community or environmental benefits” (Sage 2003, 48). It was also suggested in Chapter Five however, that consumers were much less likely to seriously consider food system change in their own ‘local’ food narratives. At best, the idea of supporting a farmer was present, though overshadowed by healthy food motivations. In addition, the results from Chapter Four regarding producer motivations and challenges call for some reconsideration about whether social embeddedness can outweigh immediate self-interest: financial need. This tension is described well by Alkon’s (2008) study of two farmers’ markets in San Francisco Bay, where
social justice and collective change were clearly at odds with small-farm economic needs and profitability.

Alkon (2008) found that food buyers and market managers regarded farmers more highly if they (food buyers) perceived farmers to be making economic sacrifices for the sake of larger social or environmental goals. The study also found that farmers experiencing “lack of sales” (495) at a market catered towards lower-income communities (i.e. more socially just), would switch to selling at a more lucrative upscale market to make more money. Thus, the process of pursuing collective or aggregate change (like food system change) while also needing to ensure individual profitability became somewhat of a contradiction despite participants’ naïve wishes:

Social justice priorities . . . are necessarily at odds with increased profits. But because participants construct the economic success of local, organic farmers as a pathway to just sustainability, they are unable to understand the contradiction (Alkon 2008, 495).

Much of my own findings echo these tensions, with producers being more acutely aware than consumers of the necessity of business needs. Despite their ever-present economic concerns, producers did also seem aware of the larger aggregate value or benefits that reconnection and trust may have in food system change; much more so than did consumers. Thus, the value proposition that producers and consumers wanted began with the same thing (reconnection), but it seemed to end in two different places. Based on my small data set, I suggest that there were two conversations or narratives in play. They were not deeply in conflict with each other, but they did not exactly overlay with each other either:

**Producer Value Proposition**

Reconnection → Trust/Credibility → Gain Control → Profitability (+ some food system change)

**Consumer Value Proposition**

Reconnection → Trust/Credibility → Choice/Personal Responsibility → Health

**Figure 4: Producer-consumer value chains**
That these two value propositions end in different places is not necessarily damaging to the local food contract or to the concept of reconnection, but it does suggest that chief among the perceived and real benefits of reconnection are those that satisfy self-interest. It also suggests that when producers and consumers interact, they don’t necessarily hold or negotiate the relationship for the sake of a common goal.

6.2 Negotiating responsibility and changing governance frameworks in local food initiatives

The twofold value proposition (Figure 4) brings to mind Mount’s (2012) notion of negotiation and the extraction of actor-specific ‘value’ being important components of the local food contract. In order to achieve the desired outcome for each value chain, producers and consumers engaged in ongoing negotiations and rearrangements of expectations and duties; negotiations arguably made possible by their direct contact. In this section, I will suggest that the question of scale and the challenges created (in tandem with the benefits) by negotiating two differing value propositions highlight important tensions experienced not only by individual producers and consumers, but also by the broader local food systems movement.

Scale and legitimacy in direct-sell operations

In addition to ‘direct’ contact taking on different forms between farms and between selling strategies within each farm as mentioned in Section 6.1, the ability of farmers to maintain that direct contact was brought into question as they considered expanding their operations. The four largest operations in terms of acreage all employed other people beyond the farmers themselves. One of these operations paid a delivery driver, one a full-time herdsman, one paid three market-garden managers, and one paid 10 in-store staff members. This extra labour suggests that at a certain scale – in this case 200 or more acres – the producer(s) had to choose to focus either on the production and farming or on the marketing and selling and hire out work for
the other. Whatever the decision, this could also change the nature of their ‘direct’ contact with customers.

In changing the nature of producer-consumer interaction, operating at a larger scale, as Mount (2012) suggests, might also affect the perceived legitimacy of farm operations; a perceived legitimacy that lies in the implied expectation that farmers be hands-on throughout each step of the food chain. However, the ongoing tension between being the producer and the face that the customer sees raises the question of whether it is realistic to expect farmers, depending on their scale, to be both the people directly involved in production and selling. Smithers and Joseph (2010) reveal the same type of negotiation between scale and legitimacy, or, “regulating authenticity while maintaining the commercial viability of the market,” at farmers’ markets (241). Producer negotiations with customers then, incorporated considerations of scale in order to meet both their own needs and certain consumer expectations. Not only did producer-consumer value propositions end in different places, but the basis for negotiating mutually acceptable arrangements or propositions (direct contact) was called into question as producers contemplated expanding or attempted to expand.

**Balancing rewards and challenges in local food systems governance**

The negotiation between scale and legitimacy in direct-marketed meats is evidence of a shift in governance in developing local food chains and reflects what Roep and Wiskerke (2012) outline as an ongoing balancing act between Governance, Embedding, and Marketing (GEM). Their conceptual framework suggests that at each step and with each change - be it in scale, product, management, organization - farms and buyers within local food chains must reassess and rebalance three key factors: GEM. If direct-market farms along with their customers represent a certain type of food supply chain, then issues of Governance (in terms of production
methods, network organization, responsibility for food safety/quality, distribution). Embedding (in terms of offering/creating a product that comes with social, cultural, and material qualities beyond the economic), and Marketing (in terms of being able to then actually promote and sell that product) must be negotiated between farmers and customers. Findings from my research suggest that in order to successfully negotiate and meet mutual expectations, and with the absence of any ‘middlemen’ in these direct-sell operations, both parties were expected to take on new responsibilities. Many new tasks highlighted in this research project illustrate the continuous balancing act of GEM in food chain development at the individual farm scale. In addition, my own research suggested another dimension to balance: Distribution. For the sake of simplicity, I have included ideas of Distribution in the discussion of Governance more broadly.

In terms of Governance and Marketing, new producer roles or responsibilities included marketing, customer relations, and education. For consumers, though they did not speak explicitly about their ‘new roles’ like farmers did, it became clear that they too took on new tasks within local food initiatives. Primarily, these consisted of getting informed and gaining some amount of knowledge about farming and production methods as well as taking the time and putting more effort into the procurement of food in general (driving to different farms as opposed to one grocery store). They also, according to farmers, took on a marketing role simply by vouching for farmers and advertising their products by word of mouth. Distribution was negotiated differently for each enterprise: sometimes producers were responsible for delivery and sometimes consumers were responsible for coming to the farm or farm store. Often, a combination of these strategies was employed with both producers and consumers meeting each other at delivery points.
In terms of Embeddedness, new producer roles also centered around building and maintaining contact and trust with customers. Since economic systems (like food chains for example) “operate within a network of relationships, institutional arrangements, and cultural meanings” (Roep and Wiskerke 2012, 209), strengthening these relations gave farmers more control and the opportunity to run a profitable enterprise. And, although this research provided limited findings on consumers, preliminary trends seemed to align with Meyer et al. (2012) in their assertion that the reconnection of producers and consumers, helps to rebuild consumer trust. Bringing producers and consumers closer together then, acted as a way to increase knowledge (and thereby trust among consumers that their food was healthy), and enhanced producer control and profitability. As discussed in Chapter Five and illustrated in Figure 4 above, reconnection seemed to be valued primarily for its ability to enhance trust. That trust then led to two different benefits: one satisfying the self-interest (profitability) of the producer and the other the self-interest (health) of the consumer. In order for these benefits to be realized, producers had to take on new tasks in communicating with customers and consumers had to take on more responsibility in seeking out healthy food options. However, the new roles that emerged for farmers and customers were also the source of many of the challenges they experienced.

As shown in Chapter Four, producers indicated that their new roles as marketers, educators, and having to deal with customer relations posed challenges both in terms of developing the necessary skills and in terms of having the time to attend to those demands. Similarly, new consumer tasks surrounding finding information and doing more driving were also identified as prominent challenges, and revolved around the general idea that sourcing food direct from farmers was inconvenient. The customers’ desire for convenience in terms of price
and variety, based on their being used to conventional food systems (Mount 2012, 111), meant that farmers took on the task of trying to meet at least some expectations of convenience in order to stay in business and be appealing to customers. Simultaneously, they were trying to change people’s general perceptions about what was convenient or what was worth experiencing ‘inconvenience’ for. These challenges reflected ongoing producer-consumer negotiations over responsibility in individual farm operations as questions arose over who could or should step in to fill positions like marketing, distributing, and educating in the absence of traditional ‘middlemen.’ In addition to the differing value chains for producers and consumers then, these practical challenges in governance help to illustrate important tests for ‘reconnection’ in local food initiatives.

6.3 Conclusion: Theoretical and practical implications of reconnection as a foundation for agricultural change

Based on my localized sample of producers and consumers, two broad sets of findings seemed to emerge as undermining the goals and ideals of ‘reconnection’ as it has been conceived of in the literature and promoted in local food procurement campaigns: 1) reconnection is valued by both producers and consumers for its enabling the satisfaction of primarily self-interested concerns: profitability and health, respectively. 2) The practical limitations to satisfying those expectations or needs may destabilize newly formed producer-consumer relationships. Namely, the new roles and responsibilities for each party in regard to marketing, customer relations, distribution, and (in)convenience might predispose participants to be in favour of other more amenable arrangements (without direct contact) if they became more readily available and were capable of guaranteeing both profitability and health. Although preliminary and somewhat speculative, these situations are reason for pause in considering what we really mean by
‘reconnection.’ This section (6.3) will present theoretical and practical considerations and implications in terms of broader food system change and the ‘reconnection’ narrative.

**Nothing inherent about ‘local’, nothing inherent about ‘reconnection’**

‘Local’ as a descriptor for food production is imprecise and mostly non-informative. The term has been the target of critical skepticism by scholars (Born and Purcell 2006; DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Hinrichs 2003) and many interviewed farmers acknowledged this and avoided using ‘local’ as the primary way to frame their operations. These farmers tried to market their goods based on other qualities, like specific production methods, because they viewed those as the more important factors for consumers seeking a healthy product. They attached no inherent goodness or value to ‘local’ and seemed aware of the ‘local trap’ (Born and Purcell 2006). Consumers on the other hand, were more likely to continue to ascribe value to the concept of ‘local’ but were “only mildly inclined to calibrate its boundaries” (Darby et al.in Smithers and Joseph 2010). My research suggests that the same process of valorization without scrutiny was at play with the concept of ‘reconnection’. Consumers valued ‘reconnection’ (which is perhaps yet another stand-in for ‘local’), but did not look past the quality of the food itself to see the other value(s) it might bring. Producers valued ‘reconnection’ for its connection to increased profitability and although they were more aware of its potential influence on food system change, they were largely skeptical of that being achieved given consumer attitudes and their own practical limitations. Although thought to bring a whole host of benefits, the focus on health and profitability as primary beneficial outcomes of ‘reconnection’ might undermine the achievement of other systemic change.
According to Watts et al. (2005) alternative food systems based on a turn to quality food are in fact weaker than food systems that emphasize networks (alternative food networks vs. alternative food networks), precisely because they focus on the food itself. They argue that the focus on foods instead of on networks made alternatives “vulnerable to incorporation and subordination” by the conventional food supply chain (30) in part because of the difficulty in concretely defining the subjective nature of ‘quality’. Concern about ‘conventionalization’ was present in my study in terms of ‘healthiness’ instead of ‘quality’ and echoed Mount and Smithers’ (2014) discussion of ‘scaling up’ local beef marketing groups. One producer hinted at the potential weakness of promoting simply a ‘healthy product’ on the basis that ‘healthiness’ could be provided quite easily by others besides him. Instead, he emphasized that there had to be something stronger to tie customers to him as a specific producer, be that by providing ecological services or strengthening local economies. However, the general consensus among producers was that customers “aren’t there yet” in terms of thinking seriously beyond the food itself to issues of food security, sovereignty, strengthening food networks and/or local farmer-owned distribution channels. Most producers seemed to know implicitly that the best way for them to market was on the basis of a ‘quality’ or ‘healthy’ product. At the same time, the necessity producers felt to educate customers was perhaps to help consumers ‘get there’ in terms of understanding food networks themselves instead of food networks; to encourage them to support and desire not only the healthy food, but the particular “networks through which the food passes” (Watts et al. 2005, 22) in order to protect against coercion by larger players.

Another way to make the distinction between a food system poised for longevity and one with a ‘weaker’ or more vulnerable basis is to look through the lens of consumer-citizenship.
Scholars seem to disagree on whether socially conscious consumption can act as an agent for collective and altruistic social change, or whether, with its fundamentally capitalist, economic, and consumption-driven model, it is necessarily at odds with any kind of social good. For Atkinson (2012), consumer ability to “reframe” potential barriers to socially conscious consumption (being overwhelmed with information, spending more money, taking more grocery trips, and limited choice) as rewards or pleasures allows them to purchase food in a way that satisfies both personal and social gain. For Alkon (2008) however, the tension between farm economics (farmer profitability) and social justice priorities (food for those without access) is not relieved through “sustainable consumption”. Rather, consumers actually valorized farmers who they perceived to be making economic sacrifices for the sake of social justice goals, pointing to the irony and contradiction inherent in sustainable food consumption transactions.

Manifestations of both alternative *food* networks and consumer-citizen rhetoric were present in producer attitudes in this study and illustrated the ever-present question of how to construct an economically viable, socially and environmentally just food system. Producers seemed to note two potentially contradictory things simultaneously. First, that there was always a risk of other, presumably less ecologically-minded and not embedded in the local economy, food production operations coercing the marketplace and piggy-backing on the ‘local’ and ‘healthy’ food “marketing handles”. This points to the concern mentioned above – that a food system based primarily on the product itself is weak and susceptible to ‘conventionalization’ (See also Guthman (2004) on conventionalization of organics and Mount and Smithers (2014) on conventionalization of local foods). Second, that the “consumer dollar drives everything.” This pattern of looking to individual consumers as the actors that can enact change in the food system by choosing to spend their money on particular foods (in this case often grass-fed, ecologically
and ethically produced meats) is problematic when taken in conjunction with producer concerns that they could be ousted by larger players as soon as those larger players catch on to what the consumer dollar is supporting (not to mention the potential exclusion of lower-income consumers from this ‘consumer dollar’ equation). To understand this contrast, I suggest that producers do hope other aspects beyond the food itself become part of consumers’ food buying equations because they believed that consumer choices to spend their dollars needed to be founded on a stronger basis than healthy food in and of itself. They thereby adhered to their beliefs that the consumer dollar has a lot of power while offering some caution about shallow marketing trends. Although this research was able to gain some insight into whether consumers were indeed motivated by a larger collective concern for social and ecological systems, much more would need to be done in order to present conclusive findings. The most this research project can do is to suggest that in direct-sell operations, given the challenges and motivations cited by producers and consumers, a more robust basis for food system change is perhaps, as the producers said, “not there yet” for consumers (in terms of mindset) and potentially practically out of reach for producers.

6.4 Moving forward

Hinrichs (2003) asserts that shifts towards local food systems depend “on the meeting and melding of producer and consumer interests” (43). However, the “multi-faceted priorities of farmers and consumers” (Mount 2012, 115) means that the reconciliation of these interests – or any significant ‘reconnection’ in the sense of shared goals/interests/mindsets – cannot be assumed to be automatic within local food initiatives. This research provided insight into the diverse perceptions and expectations of LFI participants as they shaped important processes of ‘reconnection’ (or not) within individual direct-sell farm initiatives and pointed to possible
trajectories of broader local food systems development. Consumers seemed primarily motivated by the healthiness of the product and there was little evidence to suggest that other ties or qualities would keep them stomaching ‘inconvenience’ if another option for healthy meat became more readily available in grocery stores. For producers, the logistics around doing both farming and customer relations might lead them to sacrifice customer contact if their economic stability (and ability to run their farm ecologically) could be ensured in other ways. If, in the pursuit of healthy foods and profitable farms other strategies emerge and prove successful, then the ‘reconnection’ project is perhaps not as robust.

**Contributions**

This research builds on previous work in local and alternative food systems literature by interrogating and questioning the idea of reconnection between producers and consumers. Findings contribute to the ongoing discussion and inquiry into what ‘reconnection’ means, and if/how it exists within local food initiatives. Importantly, this project’s focus on producer perspectives and experiences contributes to filling an important gap in the literature: farmer lived-experiences and motivations in becoming involved in the ‘local’ food narrative, and their opinions on being reconnected with consumers. In relating producer experiences to commonly held assumptions about the benefits and rewards of local foods and to the experiences of their own consumers, this research was able to provide concrete examples of producer-consumer negotiations and the challenges that came with such ‘reconnection’. Specifically, highlighting challenges in direct-sell operations and the inherent ‘self-interest’ of each party provided grounds for questioning whether local foods and reconnected producers and consumers provide a stable foundation for addressing larger food system change.
In addition to contributing to the academic discussion of local foods, my research also provided actors within local food initiatives with an opportunity to express their own experiences, insights, and recommendations. Engaging producers in this way led to a series of practical concerns and suggestions regarding current agricultural policy’s bias toward large-scale agricultural operations as well as insight into distribution and infrastructure shortcomings. Findings on how producers experienced government subsidies and regulatory systems were preliminary and beyond the scope of this particular project to further validate or explore; however they do contribute to a better understanding of how existing policy is seen to affect, shape, or hinder a particular segment of agricultural development. And indeed, their prominence in the research findings indicate some opportunity to interrogate more closely how producer perceptions of policy affect their own decision-making processes. Add to this the potential need to more deliberately explore the conditionality of producer decision-making based on their circumstances (for example: new/established direct-sellers and/or farmers, transitioning/stable, farm as sole or part income), a larger sample would be informative to the producer-focused literature.

**Limitations and future research potential**

Significant limitations of this project mostly surrounded access to newly formed producer-consumer relationships and the inevitable subjectivity of participant opinions. Because of the relatively recent emergence of direct-marketed meats as a desirable and growing market and the newness of many of the producers to direct-marketing, findings from this project are fairly preliminary and as operations change, expand, and develop new marketing or selling strategies, reconnection will again transform and take on new qualities. The newness of direct-marketed meats also meant that there was a limited participant pool, and as such, results should
not be taken as representative of direct-sell initiatives elsewhere in Canada or North America. However, the increasing market demand that producers noted indicates increasing potential to study and learn from ongoing developments in this particular local food niche. Access to customers was also a significant limitation. Although this was not entirely problematic for this project as the focus was meant to be on producers – further study into producer-consumer relationships would require a more robust sample of local food consumers, and more in-depth interviews in order to really gauge their levels of knowledge or commitment to direct producer contact.

In terms of participant-driven and interview-based research, the subjective and anecdotal nature of evidence must always be taken into consideration. While personal in-depth interviews allow for rich information on the nature of unique experiences, their inherent subjectivity make it difficult to draw universal conclusions. The often anecdotal personal experiences and views of participants were offered as evidence of broader trends, but it was beyond the scope of this research to verify or necessarily validate the connections made between personal and universal experience in local food initiatives. As such, some claims and views throughout the research are taken as assumptions. One of the most prevalent assumptions on both consumer and producers’ parts had to do with the inherent connection between locally sourced grass-fed beef and ecologically run farms. Although some producers hinted that larger grass-fed beef players might not adhere to ecologically sound production practices as adamantly, the assumption that direct-marketed meats led to ecological benefits was accepted as prevailing opinion, but arguably warrants more empirical study.

In terms of the value propositions for farmers and customers, the establishment of trust was taken mostly at participants’ words in this project. However, it was not clear how consumers
really judged the trustworthiness of the farmer (with some seeming to take for granted the virtuousness of ‘the farmer’), or how much prior knowledge consumers had compared to what they learned from farmers. Within the direct-sell operations I studied, producers played a role in consumers’ continual education and consumers tended to form/re-form their ‘knowledge’ of what was ‘best’ to align with the particular farm they sourced from. It was especially difficult to judge the level of knowledge among consumers surrounding ideas of ‘ethical’ animal-raising and specific production methods since their knowledge tended to focus on the health benefits of grass-fed or pastured meats and not necessarily on specific animal husbandry or treatment. Assessing how consumers come to know, what they come to know, and where they look (besides or prior to farmers) for knowledge about local foods, animal husbandry, health benefits, and production methods - as well as how they confirm trustworthiness in farmers - indicate potential areas for future research that might wish to focus on consumer knowledge or consumer-citizenship perspectives.

On the producer side and in connection to the most prominent challenge cited by producers but largely outside the scope of this project, current agricultural policies as they relate to ‘alternative’ farm development need more research. Since such policies are, according to this project, largely viewed as unsupportive in developing ‘alternatives’, individual and diverse farmer innovation and creativity also warrant further investigation, as these will likely provide the groundwork for developing a more resilient food system in the interim. In addition, and as mentioned at the end of Chapter Four, the relationship between producer-experienced challenges related to policy, infrastructure, and distribution, and consumer-experienced challenges regarding convenience and price were not fully explored here. Finally, the challenges described by producers (and experienced by consumers) in terms of taking on new roles and responsibilities
play well into the growing area of academic research into food hubs as a new strategy for connecting producers and consumers together more conveniently.

One final limitation for research, and one that will perhaps continue for any research in the Southern Ontario region, is the prevalence of conservative or Old Order Mennonite farmers in the ‘local’ food system. Although this project’s producer sample was largely open and cooperative, some Mennonite producers were reluctant to provide detailed personal and farm information or engage fully with the project’s aims. They were however, happy to speak generally about local foods and their relationships with customers. It became clear as they discussed connections within their own communities, that Mennonite farms and farmers were a significant part of the region’s local foods landscape. Interrogating this pattern in agricultural development in Ontario will be an important part of understanding the local food trajectory, but could prove challenging due to the group’s reserved and private nature.


Foodlink Waterloo Region. Local food map: http://www.foodlink.ca/index.php?p=food_maps/map.SearchResults&search=farm


Guelph-Wellington Local Foods. Local food map: http://www.guelphwellingtonlocalfood.ca/map


Huron-Perth Farm to Table. Buy local, buy fresh map: http://huronperthfarmtotable.ca/consumers/where-to-buy-local-food/home


APPENDIX A – PRODUCER INTERVIEW GUIDE

General Information

1. Approximately how long have you been producing food for local buyers/customers?
   - Less than 1 yr
   - 1-3 yrs
   - 4-6 yrs
   - 7-10 yrs
   - more than 10 yrs

2. Approximately what percentage of your goods do you sell on-farm or at local markets?
   - Less than 10%
   - 10-19%
   - 20-39%
   - 40-59%
   - greater than 60%

3. How old are you?
   - 20-29
   - 30-39
   - 40-49
   - 50-59
   - 60-69
   - 70+

Question Set 1: Structure

4. Please describe your farm/initiative.

   Prompts
   - Is everything you sell produced on your farm/by you?
   - Do you work with other people/partners/family members?
   - Where do you sell your product? What is your supply chain? How far does your product go?
   - What are your main on-farm income streams?
   - Are your products specifically branded/marketed as ‘local’?
   - Did you transition from a different type of farm/business to your current operation?

Question Set 2: Scale

5. What is the ‘size’ of your farm operation?

   Prompts
   - Approximately how many customers and how much product (weekly/monthly)?
   - How many acres do you farm?
   - Do you have any on-farm processing facilities?
   - Is this a full or part time venture for you? Other sources of income?
**Question Set 3: Motivations**

6. Why did you start selling locally?

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

7. Sustainable farming and conscientious environmental/animal stewardship are important to me.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

8. My aim is to produce a healthier and more nutritious product than what is offered at conventional grocery stores.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

9. I began producing ‘local’ because I saw the consumer demand and wanted an opportunity to gain more economic return for my products.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

10. I want to contribute to regional food security and food sovereignty and help create a more resilient food system.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Question Set 4: Perceptions/Expectations of Local Foods**

11. What makes something a ‘local’ food? Please check any/all that apply and rank the three most important (1 as most important).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Check</th>
<th>Attribute or Indicator</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grown/produced within 100km</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grown/produced within region/county</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grown/produced within province</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grown/produced within country</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grown/produced using organic or natural methods</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grown/produced at a small-scale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sold direct from farmer to customer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please explain)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
12. What makes your product different from something found in a typical grocery store? Please check any/all that apply and rank the three most important (1 as most important).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Check</th>
<th>Attribute or Indicator</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fresh/in season</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organic/natural</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No antibiotics/growth hormones</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Healthier (no pesticides)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hands-on/personal production methods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decreased food miles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other (please explain)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

13. Small-scale farming is of central importance to producing a high quality local food product.

   Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

14. Local foods are too expensive and need to be made more financially accessible to consumers.

   Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

15. The higher price of local foods reflects increased food quality and is central to profitability for farmers.

   Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

**Question Set 5: Perceptions/Expectations of Participants**

16. Is there a typical local food customer? How would you describe the customers you interact with?

17. How much of your customer’s weekly groceries do you think ‘local foods’ makes up?

   Less than 10%  10-20%  20-40%  40-60%  greater than 60%

18. Is your view of a typical local food customer different from your view of food consumers in general?
19. Why do you think consumers buy their food locally? Please check any/all that apply and rank their importance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Check</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sustainable farming and conscientious environmental/animal stewardship are important to them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They want to know where their food comes from and who produces it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They want a healthier and more nutritious product than what is offered at conventional grocery stores.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They want to contribute to regional food security and food sovereignty and help create a more resilient food system by supporting local farmers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They want to meet people, socialize, and get to know the area.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Their family and friends all buy their food locally.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other (please explain)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20. Do your customers ask about certain attributes? Is there anything you are surprised that customers do or don’t ask you about your product?

21. My role as a local food farmer is….

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Check</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Farmer/producer first and foremost</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marketer/promoter of my product</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advocate/Educator on local foods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting/listening to customer demands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other (please explain)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22. Does your own role change depending on the selling point/strategy?

23. I expect customers to…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Check</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pay on time/regularly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide input/feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pick-up product</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recruit more customers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other (please explain)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
24. Do you have different expectations of, or interactions with, customers depending on the selling point?

25. What do you think customers expect of you? Do these change depending on the selling point?

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

26. My customers are passionate about local food but are unaware of challenges or limitations I face as a producer. Please explain.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

27. Producing food locally has increased/changed my awareness of consumer needs and demands. Please explain.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Question Set 6: Open-ended Questions**

28. What do you value/appreciate most about selling food locally?

29. What are some of the biggest challenges or limitations to selling locally? What about for consumers buying locally?

30. Have you sacrificed profitability for other environmental/social goals as a producer of local foods?

31. If you could communicate one important message to consumers, what would it be?
APPENDIX B – CONSUMER SURVEYS

Consumer Survey In-Person Version

1. How long have you been buying meat locally? From this farm?

2. Do you buy from one farm/farmer specifically? (other farms, grocery stores)

3. What kind(s) of meat do you usually buy?

4. How much do you usually buy? (freezer/quarter/half animal/specific cuts/weekly)

5. How do you usually get your meat? (order online/farmgate or store/farm pick up/CSA/farmers’ market)

6. Do you have children? If so, how old?

7. What is/are your main motivation(s) for buying local meat? (for example, environmental stewardship, animal welfare, healthier food for family, quality, food security, knowing farmer, supporting farmer).

8. In your opinion, what are the most important differences between the quality of meat you buy from this farm/farmer and meat found in the grocery store? (e.g. fresh, pastured, organic/natural)

9. Is it important for you to personally know the farmer producing your meat? Why or why not?

10. Why do you think farmers choose to sell their meat locally or direct to customers? (e.g. customer demand, economic return, animal welfare, food security).

11. In your opinion, what makes something a ‘local’ food? (e.g. distance, production methods, interaction with farmer).

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

12. Local meat is too expensive and should be made more financially accessible to consumers.

   Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

13. In cases where local meat is more expensive, the price reflects increased food quality.

   Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

14. In cases where local meat is more expensive, the price is important for farm profitability and farmer livelihoods.
15. As a customer buying locally, I think it is important for me to… *(pay on time, market/promote/advocate/educate/provide feedback/visit farm)*

16. Do you think that farmers selling meat locally are aware of challenges or limitations you face as a consumer? What are the biggest challenges or limitations you face as a customer?

18. Do you think that buying food locally has increased/changed your awareness of producer needs and demands? What do you think some of the biggest challenges or limitations are for farmers selling meat locally?

Consumer Survey Online Version

**General Information**

1. What is the name of the farm that you buy meat from?

2. How long have you been buying meat from this farm?

3. What is your age?

4. Do you have children?

5. If yes, how old are they?

**On Local Meat**

6. What kind of meat do you buy from this farm?

   - Chicken
   - Beef
   - Lamb
   - Pork
   - Other: _____________________

7. Which best describes how you get your meat? Please check any that apply.

   - I am a member of their CSA program
   - I order their meat online/over the phone
   - I buy their meat at the farmers’ market
   - I buy meat from their on farm store or at the farm gate
   - Other:

8. Which best describes the volume of meat you buy from this farm?

   - I buy a freezer-full once or twice a year
   - I buy by the ½ or ¼ animal once or twice a year
   - I buy specific cuts on a monthly or weekly basis
   - I buy meat occasionally when it is available
☐ Other:

9. Is this the only farm you buy meat from or do you shop elsewhere as well? (other farms, farmers’ markets, grocery stores).

10. In your opinion, what are the most important differences between the quality of meat you buy from this farm/farmer and meat found in the grocery store? (e.g. fresh, pastured, organic/natural)

**Motivations for Buying Local Meat**

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

11. I buy meat locally because I want to support ecological farming and conscientious environmental stewardship.

   | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
---|-------------------|---------|---------|-------|---------------|

12. I buy meat locally because I am concerned about animal welfare.

   | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
---|-------------------|---------|---------|-------|---------------|

13. I buy meat locally because I want to buy healthier and more nutritious meat for my family than what is offered at conventional grocery stores.

   | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
---|-------------------|---------|---------|-------|---------------|

14. I want to contribute to regional food security and food sovereignty and help create a more resilient food system by supporting local farmers.

   | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
---|-------------------|---------|---------|-------|---------------|

15. I buy meat locally because I want to know where it comes from and who produces it.

   | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
---|-------------------|---------|---------|-------|---------------|

16. For you, what is the most important thing to know about the farm/farmer producing your meat?

17. Why do you think producers choose to sell their meat locally or direct to customers? (e.g. customer demand, economic return, animal welfare, food security).

18. In your opinion, are farmers who sell meat locally different from those who sell through more conventional commodity chains? Why or why not?
What is local?

19. In your opinion, what makes something a ‘local’ food? (e.g. distance, production methods, interaction with farmer).

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

20. Local meat is too expensive and should be made more financially accessible to consumers.
   
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

21. In cases where local meat is more expensive, the price reflects increased food quality.
   
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

22. In cases where local meat is more expensive, the price is important for farm profitability and farmer livelihoods.
   
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Follow-up: Are you willing to pay more for the sake of other environmental/health/animal welfare concerns?

23. As a customer buying locally, I think it is important for me to… (please check any that apply)

☐ Buy meat and pay on time
☐ Market and/or promote local foods
☐ Advocate or educate others about local foods
☐ Provide feedback and input to farmers
☐ Visit the farm
☐ Other:

24. I expect farmers selling locally to… (please check any that apply)

☐ Be available to contact directly
☐ Maintain regular prices and have product available consistently
☐ Listen to my concerns or feedback
☐ Use organic production methods
☐ Offer delivery options
☐ Other:
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

25. Farmers are passionate about providing local food.

   Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

26. Farmers are unaware of challenges or limitations I face as a consumer.

   Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

Follow up: What are the biggest challenges or limitations you face as a customer?

27. Buying food locally has increased/changed my awareness of producer needs and demands. Please explain.

   Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree
APPENDIX C – RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

Producer Consent Form

UNIVERSITY
of GUELPH

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Geography

Consent to Participate in Research

Investigating Producer-Consumer Perceptions of Value in Local Food Initiatives
(Producer Consent Form)

Thank you for considering this invitation to participate in a research project exploring producer and consumer questions relating to local food. The main investigator is Cayla Albrecht, a graduate student in the Department of Geography at the University of Guelph. The academic advisor for the study is Professor John Smithers. Results will contribute to the completion of the student researcher’s (Cayla Albrecht) master’s thesis. This research project has been sponsored by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Purpose of the Study
To investigate and understand how producers and consumers perceive and obtain “value” through their involvement in local food initiatives and how these may vary depending on the type or scale of local food initiative. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Complete a one-time interview carried out either in person (est. 30-60 min) detailing what type of local food initiative you are involved with or produce for, why you choose to be involved, and what kind of expectations you may have both of your role and the consumer’s role.

- Willing and interested participants may also be invited to recommend possible ways to connect with their customers in order to complete complimentary consumer interviews. Such follow up assistance, like the interview, is entirely voluntary.

It is now normal practice at the University of Guelph to inform all study participants of their rights and our obligations. Please note the following items:

- There are no risks or discomforts associated with this research.

- There is no payment for your participation.

- Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study. All answers connected with the surveys and follow-up interviews will be kept confidential and will be used solely for the research purpose.

- Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may request to have your answers removed from the study. You may refuse to answer any question and still remain in the study. The researcher reserves the right to disregard your data should circumstances arise which require this.
Audio Recording
If you consent, interviews may be audio-recorded for purposes of preparing accurate summaries and will be erased within 6 months of the interview. Participants will have the right to review transcripts, change/withdraw answers from the interview at any time during the research process, or stop the interview.

I agree to be recorded during any interviews in which I participate. Yes ☐ No ☐

Rights of Study Participants
You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue your participation. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

Director, Research Ethics
University of Guelph
437 University Centre
Guelph, ON N1G 2W1

Telephone: (519) 824-4120, ext. 56606
E-mail: sauld@uoguelph.ca
Fax: (519) 821-5236

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I have read the information provided for the study “Investigating Diverse Producer-Consumer Perceptions and Expectations in Local Food Initiatives” as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in the study. I have been given a copy of this form.

________________________  ____________________  ___________
Name of Participant (Print)  Signature  Date

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

Cayla Albrecht
MA Candidate, University of Guelph
cayla@uoguelph.ca

Professor John Smithers
Department of Geography
University of Guelph, Guelph ON
519-824-4120 ext. 56722
jsmith@uoguelph.ca
Consumer Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Geography

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Purpose of the Study
To investigate and understand how producers and consumers perceive and obtain “value” through their involvement in local food initiatives and how these may vary depending on the type or scale of local food initiative. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Complete a one time survey carried out in person (est. 15-20 minutes) detailing what type of local food initiative you are involved with, purchase from, or support; why you choose to be involved; and what kind of expectations you may have both of your role and the producer’s role.

- Willing and interested participants may also be invited to participate in a one-time follow-up 20-30 minute interview at a later date to elaborate on responses provided in the survey. Such follow up, like the survey, is entirely voluntary.

It is now normal practice at the University of Guelph to inform all study participants of their rights and our obligations. Please note the following items:

- There are no risks or discomforts associated with this research.

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I agree to be recorded during any interviews in which I participate. Yes ☐ No ☐

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Guelph</td>
<td>E-mail: <a href="mailto:sauld@uoguelph.ca">sauld@uoguelph.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>437 University Centre</td>
<td>Fax: (519) 821-5236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guelph, ON N1G 2W1</td>
<td></td>
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MA Candidate, University of Guelph  
cayla@uoguelph.ca

Professor John Smithers  
Department of Geography  
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519-824-4120 ext. 56722  
jsmith@uoguelph.ca