

**The Political Economy of “Local Foods” in Eastern
Kansas: Opportunities and Justice in Emerging Agro-
Food Networks and Markets**

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ABSTRACT

Alternative agriculture and counter-cuisine movements have grown to a strong cultural current in Western European and North American societies. In recent years, these movements have begun to converge and coalesce around the concept of localizing agri-food relations and commodity chains as a way of redressing the deleterious environmental, social, and economic consequences of what are seen as dominant globalized food relations. This dissertation reports on a regional study in Eastern Kansas of the political economy of local food relations that has arisen through this producer and consumer response. It is an effort to recognize the regional interplay of disparate forces in constructing local food systems in the interest of framing more contextualized and nuanced questions about the environmental, social, and economic outcomes of alternative agri-food development. Network, conventions, and spatial analysis theories and methods were customized and put into practice in the service of these aims, using triangulation among them to mitigate each of their individual weaknesses in representing the variable embeddedness, politics, and spaces of local food in Eastern Kansas. It was found that local food generally represents a marketing niche in urban consumerism that is served primarily by regional rural producers. The distances, agricultural and food ecologies, forms of organization, and values underpinning local food linkages were all found to vary quite considerably throughout the region, creating a diverse combination of development agendas and impacts from local food networks and making food localization a highly contested concept. Local food development in its current form is thus highly dependent on urban/rural dialectics and projects of urbanization that lack open, transparent, and reflexive governance. Critical acknowledgement of these development interdependencies is important as a step toward encouraging social, economic, and environmental justice through local food development.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

A) Why Local Food Systems Research?

1) The Power and Importance of Food

This project began with an interest in grassroots efforts toward socio-ecological sustainability, particularly in rural environments, landscapes, and communities. I chose Eastern Kansas as a region for the study because I fell in love with the rural Flint Hills as an undergraduate at Kansas State University. As a young graduate student with a physical science background entering a new field in human geography, I struggled to frame the study of social sustainability in adequate terms. Yet, my instincts told me that food must surely play a central role. Indeed, food is extremely powerful – powerful to think, powerful as a center of human socializing, culture, and economics, and powerful as a material and metabolic link to non-human bio-physical processes. As Philip McMichael puts it, “the power of food lies in its material and symbolic functions of linking nature, human survival, health, culture, and livelihood” (McMichael 2000). Furthermore, without abundant food, concentrated human populations and the social differentiation that we call “society” is impossible for more than short period in localized places (Diamond 1999). If the long-term sustainability of human societies requires reconnecting economics with ecology, as I suspect it does, then food relations may serve as an important lens for studying the kinds of values and organizations that can mediate these reconnections in service of socially and ecologically progressive movements toward sustainability.

2) An Early Case Study

The critical role of food was reinforced by encounters in preliminary fieldwork for this project in the rural Flint Hills of Kansas. While investigating the role of a non-profit organization in fostering rural sustainability initiatives, I discovered the now-defunct producer cooperative of 10 family ranches by the name of the Tallgrass Prairie Producers who collectively produced and marketed unique specialty meat products in the late 1990’s. They were tired of seeing the amazingly productive land and extremely healthy

grasses of the Flint Hills¹ exploited by seasonally intensive overgrazing with an eye toward easy profits and participation in the standard livestock-grain-feedlot agricultural complex. Instead, their cooperative pooled their collective ownership of productive ranchland to produce a significant supply of grass-fed/grass-finished beef, which they marketed under the brand name of their cooperative. The result was a distinctive regional product, supported by extensive nutritional testing and labeling, which they attempted to market through national distributors.

Despite being touted by many at trade shows and in the media as a success, 5 years later they closed their doors. Cooperative production and marketing of a niche product to environmentally and health-conscious consumers was supposed to be their savior, the approach that would allow them to treat land, animals, customers, and their own families with dignity and care. Yet, over its five year life, the Tallgrass Prairie Producers encountered structural inequities, even in the niche meat market, that worked against producers at every turn. Processing, distribution, and marketing costs easily devoured any price premium the market afforded them, and five years of self-exploitation ended when their refrigeration system failed in 2000 and they lost their entire stock. As a group, they concluded that they had erred by using their limited time and start-up capital to learn the tricks of the trade instead of using it to leverage larger loans and a professionally crafted business plan from the start. (Wilson 2002) Without sufficient

¹ The Flint Hills occupy a large swath of Eastern Kansas with unique features ideally suited for grazing. The topography of this hilly region has been shaped by the long-term erosion of the alternating shale and limestone layers left over from when the area was an inland sea millions of years ago. The limestone is laced with a type of rock called flint, lending its name to the region. The prevalence of these rocky layers near the soil surface prevented extensive tillage of the native tallgrass prairie during settlement, leaving the Flint Hills as today's sole contiguous expanse of tallgrass prairie in North America. Additionally, calcium from the limestone fortifies the native grasses, making for forage that builds large bone structure and superior weight gain in grazing animals, in addition to the health benefits of an all-grass diet for such animals.

capital and a well-organized business plan, they could not develop to the scale necessary to achieve production and distribution efficiencies in order to earn a small, but workable, profit margin on their specialty product.

This seemed like an overly deterministic assessment and conclusion to me. Questions kept cropping up in my mind: where did this food system structure come from, why did the Tallgrass Prairie Producers buy into this model of production and distribution, why aren't local markets strong enough to sustain a modest cooperative like this? There are no easy answers to these questions, as the 5 year struggle of the Tallgrass Prairie Producers must surely demonstrate. However, the larger question remains of why it is so difficult for rural producers to establish and maintain market niches that deliver them a high proportion of the consumer dollar. Consumers in western democracies are coming to desire healthy, fresh, special, and even local foods, and producers are eager to meet this demand; but there is a great grey area between these two market forces. Efforts by and for consumers and producers to challenge the structured relations of the conventional food system and construct alternative channels, structures, and economies will be the answer to the renewed "agrarian question" (McMichael 1997) of our time. If there is any hope for agrarian lifestyles, rural development, or redefining human-ecological relations with an eye toward progressive ecological and social sustainability, groups like the Tallgrass Prairie Producers must be able to build alliances and economic networks with sympathetic consumer interests and other cooperative producers.

3) The Basic Research Proposal and Thesis

Faced with this renewed agrarian question, this dissertation reports on the results of a research project intended to uncover the economic networks emerging to create new economic foundations for agrarian lifestyles in food production and marketing in Eastern Kansas. Specifically, this research is intended to answer questions about the opportunities and limitations to healthy social, economic, and ecological development in emerging economic networks based on producing, distributing, and marketing "local foods". There is significant tension about the prospects for progressive outcomes from alternative agri-food initiatives in the growing body of social science research into the social relations of these initiatives. This dissertation builds on the thesis that not all

“local food” is equal in terms of the alternativeness of its underlying agri-food relations and its contributions to progressive environmental, social, and economic outcomes. The study investigates the regional scope and diversity of local food initiatives in hopes of highlighting the conditions under which progressive outcomes from local food are favorable.

Later chapters of this work will address questions about what “local food” is, who are its producers and consumers, its geographies of provisioning and consumption, how its producers and consumers coordinate with each other, and how its benefits are produced and distributed. This research has required elaborating new methods for uncovering the complex and plural patterns converging on the term “local food” and producing regional economic networks, and the later analysis chapters will be prefaced with chapters developing these analytical approaches from theoretical and methodological roots. While the analytical methods chosen have both benefits and detractors, the results of this research add to a growing body of conclusions about the contradictory opportunities in development of alternative agri-food systems. The strengthening local food networks featured in this study indeed open the field of participation in food systems to groups that are marginalized by dominant conventional food systems. However, this dissertation will also hopefully show that within this open field of alternative agri-food activity are tendencies toward social and geographical exclusion, concentration and consolidation of power, and problematic relationships with conventional systems in the production of the spaces and networks of local food. Meeting these regressive political economic tendencies with open, reflexive, and democratic political economic organizing will likely be the major challenge of progressive interests in building local food networks that contribute to social, economic, and environmental justice.

4) The Remainder of this Chapter

The remaining two sections of this chapter have been written with two purposes in mind. The first purpose is to discuss the historical development of food systems in North America based on a literature review of dominant food regimes and recent contestations of the current system. The second purpose is to elaborate the research agenda used to

grapple with the research questions mentioned above and discuss the contents of each of the chapters of this dissertation relative to that research agenda. The literature review of North American food systems will reveal the contested nature of food system evolution and will show local food to be a major contemporary mode of contestation of food relations. The research agenda and chapter outline will follow this literature review and make a tentative argument for methodological innovation in answering research questions related to the socio-economic, political, and geographic tendencies of regional alternative food systems. The argument put forth in this chapter is necessarily tentative, in that the performance of the research agenda through later chapters will bear forth conclusions about the utility of the proposed methodological strategy for evaluating the landscape of opportunities in regional alternative agri-food networks.

B) Historical Development of North American Food Systems

1) What Is the Conventional Food System, and Where Did It Come From?

The roots of the contemporary food system in western developed capitalist economies, dominated by globally integrated and highly commoditized food product markets, lie in an extended history of international political economic social relations in agriculture and trade. Competition among European powers in the latter half of the 19th century forced them to invest heavily in the productivity of their colonial empires, establishing a regime of trade between such powers and their colonies for exotic agricultural products and raw materials. The longer term impact of this investment was that the colonies and former colonies (especially in the case of the United States) developed governments and institutions to regulate their own national economies. These emerging states were then free to replicate European agriculture on a larger scale with cheaper labor, supplying growing European working classes with cheap agricultural staples in the first truly international market for agricultural products. This is the first half of the account by Friedmann and McMichael (1989) of the “rise and decline of national agricultures” using a historically periodized political economic framework of “food regimes” heavily indebted to regulation theory (Aglietta 1979).

Agriculture at settlement in the United States played an important role in this early wave of globalization. Extensive growth of agriculture in late 19th century America fed

the new grain markets in Chicago (Cronon 1991), which in turn fed the growing urban industrial populations in the United States and Europe. This extensive growth was fueled by two primary forces: massive availability and rapid settlement of land in the form of mid-continental prairies, and investments in transportation infrastructure that enabled distant marketing of cash crops (Cochrane 1979). These were also decades in which enterprising new companies were able to take advantage of the development of railroad transportation and access to capital to centralize processing a production of new products for upscale and increasingly urban markets dependent on store-bought food. The major grain and produce processing companies like Post, Kellogg's, Nabisco, Heinz, Campbell's, and meat packers like Swift and Armour created and consolidated their markets very rapidly during this period – it was the rise of the food processing industry (Levenstein 2003). The rise was made possible by advances in transportation, access to capital, and national governments that regulated access to resources and markets for producers, distributors, and processors. They were also made possible by the growth of urban populations, especially middle and upper classes, where demand for processed and durable foods spiked and ushered in a radical and extended societal dietary transformation that continues to this day (Levenstein 2003; Levenstein 2003).

The second half of the account by Friedmann and McMichael (1989) describes the maturation of the state system of global agricultural trade after World War I as well as its destabilization beginning in the 1970's. After the extensive development of national agricultures in the late 19th century, the 20th century was characterized by intensive agricultural development featuring radical advances in farm mechanization, seed technology, and chemical inputs, while the state also became active in subsidizing specific commodities (Cochrane 1979). This system quickly led to agricultural surpluses of particular commodities, and there were two significant strategies on the part of core developed capitalist economies to manage the threat of overproduction: 1) to invent new markets for agricultural products, and 2) to use trade policy to the utmost to increase demand from foreign markets and national farm policy to support farm income. These strategies effectively stabilized commodity markets, but they established competitive commodity market conditions that benefited technologically and organizationally

proficient family farmers at the expense of those less skilled at negotiating the technology-intensive treadmill of production in agriculture (Cochrane 1979). This resulted in a perpetual condition of agricultural crisis and restructuring at the same time as relatively cheap commodities were assured for downstream sectors of the food system (Buttel 1980).

Downstream sectors of the food system adapted to these conditions by extending the food processing and marketing activities using basic commodities as industrial feedstocks for the manufacture of durable food goods. The substitution of manufactured sugars and oils for imports from peripheral tropical national agricultures (Goodman, Sorj et al. 1987), and the development of the corn-soy-livestock complex (Berlan 1991; Goodman and Redclift 1991) helped to eat some of the surpluses, and the shift to manufactured durable foods from grain-based raw ingredients helped to expand domestic and foreign markets (Friedmann and McMichael 1989; Friedmann 1994b). The health of international trade in tropical agricultural products was tied to the extent each product was incorporated into the new durable foods (Friedmann and McMichael 1989).

Again, these production shifts were mirrored by shifts in retail marketing and consumer diets. The amazing growth in the U.S. middle-class in the years following World War II had a profound impact on the rise to dominance of processed, durable foods and high-meat diets. Post-war young families surprised economists by defying the edict that with increasing food abundance people spend a smaller proportion of income on food. They were using more and more of their disposable income on food in these years, but spending habits were toward foods with “built-in service,” or partially prepared foods, in addition to higher quality basic foods (Levenstein 2003). In the wake of these spending shifts, the supermarket rose to prominence, as it was able to offer more of the kinds of convenience foods baby boomer families were buying, at the same time as centralizing purchasing power for manufactured durable foods and mass-produced fresh foods. Again, the regulated overproduction of grains set the stage for the technological, industrial, distributional, and retail developments that worked in concert with demographic shifts to further revolutionize American diets.

The second period of intensive agriculture, processing, and marketing has been disrupted in the past few decades, though. These activities have all continued to prosper and evolve, but certain conditions destabilized the hegemony of technological intensification in agriculture, processing, and marketing of foods. The collapse of the Bretton Woods currency system in the early 1970's effectively ended U.S. regulatory hegemony in financial markets and set into motion a chain of events that would lead to a new relatively unregulated international market for money and credit (McMichael 1994). More specific to food systems, climatic variations caused a temporary global shortage of wheat in 1973 that cascaded into a period of inflated commodity prices throughout the 1970's (Cochrane 1979). It became a time of great profitability for American farmers, who made substantial further investments in production technology only to find their profits turn to losses when commodity prices collapsed in the mid-1980's. The result was a farm crisis featuring widespread bankruptcies among those technologically proficient farm families who weathered the post-WWII intensification period.

The enhanced mobility of capital in the post-Bretton Woods era enabled transnational corporations to become dominant figures in the emerging global capitalist food system, the agents of investment of international capital and the driving forces in the restructuring of global agro-food circuits in recent decades (Heffernan and Constance 1994). Nation states are still powerful in shaping agro-food circuits, but mostly as regulatory systems facilitating access to markets for transnational corporations and international capital (Friedmann and McMichael 1989). The United States is functioning in this shifting global food system as a continued primary exporter of basic grain commodities, a site for high value processing and manufacturing of durable foods, and a highly developed market for the consumption of global foods. Global food circuits are especially important for less durable foods, like fresh produce (Friedland 1994), which constitute an increasing share of upper and middle-class diets in the U.S. (Levenstein 2003), and the production of which has profound environmental, social, and health implications for farmers in developing countries (Wright 2005).

In addition to disruptions in the structural powers of nation states, consumers of advanced capitalist economies since the 1960's have been finding "cracks in the façade"

of the apparent cheapness and abundance of global food (Levenstein 2003). Early controversies involved concern about toxins in food stimulated by the highly influential *Silent Spring* (Carson 1962), widespread hunger in America, and world hunger and wastefulness in industrial food (Lappe 1971). A combination of these environmental and health concerns with limited marketing power motivated substantial alternative agricultural innovations among organized producer groups (Lighthall 1995; Lighthall and Roberts 1995). Later, a seeming consensus of nutritionists, doctors, and health experts would persuade the general public that some foods (e.g. fat, sugars, etc.) are, in fact, unhealthy and should be minimized or eliminated from the diet (Levenstein 2003), and a passionate chef in Berkeley, CA by the name of Alice Waters would touch off a culinary revolution with her restaurant, *Chez Panisse*, in responding to these concerns with a new “California Cuisine” based on fresh vegetables and locally sourced quality meats (Guthman 2003; Levenstein 2003). The abundance of the conventional food system did not satiate the public with its supermarkets full of inexpensive durable foods, meat and dairy products, and exotic imported and domestically mass-produced fresh foods. Concerns about nutrition, safety, social equity, and environmental impact made for an amazing paradox that continues to be a powerful force for reorganization in the agro-food system – public discontent amidst an abundance of food. Furthermore, only a small fraction of the 6.5 million U.S. family farms at the end of WWI remain as active productive economic units (Goodman and Redclift 1991; Lobao and Meyer 2001), and the great urban concentration of population has left consumers wanting a connection with the land and processes of production.

This brief and highly simplified narrative describing the historical context of today’s “conventional”, and increasingly globalized, food system is largely the result of what became known in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s as the “new political economy of agriculture and food.” This field emerged out of a convergence in interests among researchers throughout the social sciences in the early 1970’s interested in a renewed focus on the social relations of agriculture. (Friedland 1991) Building on a generation of political and intellectual activism involved in the American civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960’s and 1970’s, especially on American university campuses, the

field employed Neo-Marxist intellectualism and regulation theory (Aglietta 1979) to develop long-term structural accounts of agriculture and food at a global scale.

While the accounts offer an important window into historical structuring of agro-food systems at national and global scales through national regulation, financial markets, and systemic logics of commodity markets and capitalism, there is a sense in which these accounts matured and stalled in the face of contemporary agro-food restructuring.

Research in the late 1990's presented much more spatially/regionally, socially, and biologically differentiated and contingent accounts of agro-food globalization (Goodman and Watts 1997) than those of the "new political economy." Goodman (1997) offers constructive criticism of the field in recommending closer consideration of the extent to which agro-food systems mimic the organization of other global industries, especially as agro-food systems are dependent on biological specificities with which other industries need not cope. Furthermore, the "power of food" is such that quality and value chains may come to mean more in agro-food systems than cost and price criteria as consumers find voice for their health, environmental, and social concerns in the food market.

2) Consequences of Crisis: Surging Public Interest in Contesting Global Conventional Food Systems

There is a significant and growing history of criticism of conventional modern agro-food relations and food products in western democracies. In the United States, much of the criticism has come from an array of investigative journalism into the structure of agro-food complexes and the impacts of these relationships on foods, livelihoods, and consumers. One of the foremost critiques of recent years was the influential book *Fast Food Nation* (Schlosser 2001), offers a relatively comprehensive look at the rise of the fast food industry in the U.S., along with the technologies, farm ecologies, labor relations, and health implications attendant to its rise. It was one of the first works for a popular audience to describe relationships between a conventional food industry, large-scale production methods, and the proliferation of dangerous new bacterial strains in conventional foods and increasingly common outbreaks of food poisoning. Others have noted problematic connections between food industry and public health in the area of food safety (Nestle 2003), but another area of attack on conventional food has come from

recognition of possible relationships between such foods and “diseases of diet” (Levenstein 2003). *Fat Land* (Critser 2003) connects shifts in world grain markets in the 1970’s and government policies promoting cheap food through overproduction of corn to the infiltration of food additives, sugars and oils, derived from this abundance in most conventional foods, and it is this adulteration that is making U.S. citizens on average the “fattest” in the world. The popular documentary film *Supersize Me* (Spurlock 2004) takes this line of thinking to an extreme with a 30 day experiment by the director on the effects of fast foods on his own health, showing startling weight gain and indications of bodily distress. Nutritionists tend to focus on the role of consumer choice in selecting the right kinds of foods (Nestle 2006; Plank 2006), but some are more reflective about viewing food safety and diseases of diet as systemically related to the industrial paradigm of conventional agriculture, distribution, and food production (Pollan 2006).

These popular works create an account of conventional industrialized food systems that is both rich and startling, and parallels many of the work in academic literature investigating uneven developments and crises in global food chains. They indict input-intensive production for creating toxic foods with chemical residues, echoing public outcry following Rachel Carson’s manifesto, *Silent Spring* – the Aldicarb and Alar scandals of the late 1980’s are the most recent and powerful exemplars, leading to the banning of these chemicals for food uses, semi-permanent unraveling of the market for Washington apples, and single-handedly creating a surge of interest in organic foods (Guthman 1998; Guthman 2004). Periodic food scares from E. Coli O157:H7, Listeria, and Salmonella outbreaks have led authors to investigate the role of the conventional food system in creating the conditions in feedlots, slaughterhouses, and farms for the proliferation of these dangerous bacteria and its inability to create safe foods (Schlosser 2001; Nestle 2003; Pollan 2006). Parts of the public have also raged against revelations of the extensive adulteration of modern foods with growth hormones and antibiotics, and also against the unexplored health and ecological impacts of genetically modified crops and foods. For a large and growing part of the public, these food scares collectively amount to a crisis of food safety in their food system.

Food safety is not the only concern, however, as malnutrition is also a growing rallying point for proponents of food alternatives. For a great many, high incidences of heart disease, cancer, diabetes, obesity, and food allergies are all linked to dietary roots, and the modern food system as the foundation of modern diets is complicit in these trends. Transnational food processors and manufacturers manipulate the irrationalities of consumers in marketing processed foods with high profit margins, low nutritional value, and an overabundance of particular sugars and fats. Individual organs and bodily metabolisms are overworked in some ways and undernourished in others with diets founded on such products, and nutritionists and health food advocates claim the modern food system is driving a trend toward systemic malnutrition in the developed world with unprecedented high rates of the above diseases (Nestle 2006; Plank 2006).

All of these side-effects of intensive agriculture and extensive food processing and manufacturing are related to global developments in agriculture and food chains outlined in the previous section and the perpetual crisis of overproduction in such food systems. However, in spheres of public debate and activism on these issues, studies of long-term trends in global capitalism, circuits and logics of capital accumulation in food systems, and the back-door politics of domestic food regulations are abstract and easily obscured. Activism has therefore tended to build on systemic alternatives to conventional food, the building of new food chains, and the agricultural part of food has been of primary interest. Organic agriculture has been the most widely adopted and adapted of alternative agricultural paradigms, and it deserves some discussion in this section.

The Evolution of Organic Production

Organic agriculture has been popular for decades among the U.S. counterculture, but the series of diverse food scares in recent years have drawn concerned consumers to organic foods in droves, driving astounding growth and the creation of the organic foods industry. The roots of the organic movement in the U.S. are in the counterculture movement of the 1960's, with its strong focus on natural foods and away from highly processed foods (Belasco 1993; Levenstein 2003). The organic foods market remained at the margins of the food system for many years, growing slowly through small food

cooperatives and smallholder farms with personalized markets, and largely self-regulated through cooperative third party certification associations (Guthman 2004). The Aldicarb and Alar scares of the late 1980's changed all that, as demand for foods without pesticide and growth regulators boomed in their wake, and demand for organic produce quadrupled nearly overnight (Schilling 1995; Guthman 1998). In the later 1990's, public concerns about growth hormones in milk created demand even more dramatically for organic milk (DuPuis 2000). The astounding growth in the organic sector quickly led to efforts by the state to regulate organic production, first in the state of California in 1991 where organic production had developed faster than any other state (Guthman 2004), and then nationally beginning in 1997 (Vos 2000; Ingram and Ingram 2005). While consumers taking an active interest in the provenance and quality of their food is arguably a very good thing, growth in the organic sector as a reaction to food scares has dealt a blow to core organic movement activists by reducing organic process and philosophy to standards regulating approved inputs, with attendant consequences.

As the father of organic agriculture, Sir Albert Howard developed a system of agriculture dedicated to building soil health through composting and other fertility methods meant to eschew chemical inputs. He was a formative force in the development of the British organic agriculture movement (Reed 2001), and his work on "organic" agriculture was disseminated in the United States by the Rodale Institute, with their experiments furthering Howard's work on composting, and their Rodale Press publishing Howard's works and eventually the *Organic Gardening and Farming* magazine (Ingram 2003; Levenstein 2003). The term "organic" was used because Howard and his disciples considered human health and the health of the soil to be linked through holistic ecological relationships, the violation of which would inevitably cause degradation in the health of both soil and people (Howard 1940; Howard 1945).

Howard's methods and teachings advocated an alternative holistic framework for agriculture, a philosophy of balance and holism. It was precisely this alternative philosophy that attracted those disenfranchised by industrial capitalist production logics and their highly processed and adulterated food products, and the reason Howard's methods became the foundation for the organic agriculture movement. There is still a

strong cultural undercurrent in the U.S. that continues to pursue advanced implementations of the organic philosophy through farming and living in nature's image (Jackson 1985; Berry 1996; Jackson 2002) against what is viewed as a poisonous and extractive dominant agricultural paradigm. At the same time, profound schisms have erupted in the contemporary alternative agriculture movement due to a substantial betrayal of Howard's "organic" philosophy in the institutionalization and growth of "organic agriculture." The expansion of organic methods from the margins to the forefront of agriculture has meant substantial adaptation, and often manipulation, of its core principles to serve growth, and academic and popular literature have been struggling to come to grips with the implications.

The institutionalization of national organic standards has been a major source of consternation and debate in public and academic discourse. The implementation of the 1990 Organic Food Production Act through the USDA has been fraught with controversy, largely through an insular politics of what one review has called the "iron triangle" of agribusiness, special interest lobbies, and parochial congressional subcommittees wedded to conventional agricultural interests (Ingram and Ingram 2005). This insular group was charged with developing rules for national organic agriculture standards, the basis of eventual USDA organic certification, but the rules it proposed in 1997 were met with fierce opposition by the practitioners of organic agriculture. The organic movement was shocked by rules that allowed genetically engineered crops, sewage sludge as fertilizer, and food irradiation ("the Big Three"). It was also dismayed by a shift from process to product-based mentality in the rules, largely eschewing the organic philosophy for input substitutions. In addition, the input substitutes were less than strict, with substantial non-organic livestock feed and confined animal feeding operations (CAFO's) both allowable, ambiguous language regarding the uses of antibiotics in livestock, and no ability for different labels for products produced above and beyond the basic organic standards. The fee structure was derided as regressive, more burdensome for small producers than larger ones, and the certification system itself was criticized for replacing a self-regulated system of checks and balances with an opaque bureaucratic and relatively undemocratic solution. (Vos 2000) In response to

these vociferous critiques, the rules were amended before implementation in 2002, but only in the most egregious cases. The “Big Three” were disallowed, organic feeds became required and CAFO’s were also disallowed. Language regarding antibiotic use was clarified. However, the product-based philosophy was maintained, the fees remained regressive, and labeling differentiation continued to be disallowed. (Ingram and Ingram 2005)

These debates about organic standards were certainly struggles for shaping the future of organic agriculture in the U.S., but they also reflected trends already well-developed trends toward weakening organic agriculture’s claim as a true agricultural alternative. The success of organic foods throughout the food retail arena represented an opportunity for capitalist farmers and contract arrangements to build a profitable organic agriculture industry on the price premiums afforded to organic products. In the growth of the organic industry, there is thus a tension between the original and smaller producers strongly committed to holistic organic principles and those who are willing to engage organic practices while simplifying and standardizing them according to an industrial scale. Buck et al (1997) borrowed the term *appropriation* (Goodman, Sorj et al. 1987) to highlight the process whereby large-scale industrial organic processes co-opt successful organic products by using economies of scale to out-compete smaller producers in the ensuing price competition. This presents smaller producers, even the most committed organic growers, with a powerful dilemma - whether to weaken their organic methods to compete with larger (and usually better capitalized) growers, or to continually change their products as capital constantly seeks new commodities to appropriate into its circuit of production. Some have chosen the latter, and the result has been an astounding consolidation of organic producers from produce (Guthman 2004) to dairy products (DuPuis 2000). This trend toward consolidation has paralleled a trend toward less rigorous production standards among larger organic farms, creating much concern about the *conventionalization* of organic agriculture.

This “conventionalization thesis” (Guthman 2004) has prompted some to question whether markets have the capacity to fulfill the promises of organic agriculture (Allen and Kovach 2000; Guthman 2004). Specifically, the main driver in the development of

organic markets has been consumer distrust of conventional food products, and a sense of the need for consumers to “vote with their dollars” in determining the type of food system they support, in addition to seeking foods that they trust and view as high in quality, a form of reflexive consumption termed “green consumerism” by many. The power of green consumerism can be problematized by considering the influence of Marx’s notion of the commodity fetish (Marx 1967 (1887)) in markets for green consumer products (Allen and Kovach 2000). Marx described the commodity fetish as an obscuring of the social relations embedded in a commodity as it is produced and exchanged through a system with no use for information about such social relations. The concern is that reflexive consumers view “organic” as an oversimplified commodity fetish, representing purity against the backdrop of tainted conventional products, without the benefit of information about production methods, labor relations, or competitive arrangements that are critical for truly reflexive consumption. Strong commodity fetishism within the organic sector would give smaller and less capitalized organic producers little recourse to the unbridled competitive dynamics described in the paragraph above. While the information provided to organic consumers is generally far from ideal for the purposes of fully conscious reflexive consumption, all hope is not lost. Some have noted that even in the most consolidated and capital intensive sectors of organic production, consumer advocates continually work to break down the commodity fetish and inform consumers, and consumers continue to incorporate this information into their decision-making (DuPuis 2000).

The Development of a Counter-cuisine

This quasi-reflexive consumption is a major part of the emergence of some of the larger cultural shifts in food consumption in recent decades in the United States. Specifically, counter-cuisine has been ascendant through the last decades of the 20th century and to the present. In many ways, counter-cuisine was responsible for the emergence of the U.S. organic movement in the 1960’s and 70’s. In challenging the dominant culture of the time, a young generation of baby boomers sought alternatives to the highly processed “white foods” of their parents and of industry in “brown” natural foods – whole grains and brown-colored foods, and a substantial push toward

vegetarianism (Belasco 1993; Levenstein 2003). Eschewing industrial food systems, these counter-culture advocates went back-to-the-land to live together in communes and practice growing their own food without chemicals – organically.

It was never a dominant cultural force, but this counter-culture would converge with other dietary trends in America toward strong dietary shifts throughout the culture and an emergent counter-cuisine. French cuisine was shifting from rich and fatty haute cuisine toward a lighter, leaner nouvelle cuisine with smaller portions, and it was at this time that an enterprising and inspired young chef by the name of Alice Waters opened Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California with a new kind of menu in mind. She featured local organic foods on her menu, and focused on fresh vegetables and simple seasonings to bring out the natural flavors of ingredients. Her approach would become so popular that it would become known as “California Cuisine” and spin off items that would become mainstays of organic food commodities, the best example of which is that of organic mesclun mix (Guthman 2003). At the same time, imperatives of the “negative nutrition” (Levenstein 2003) were prominent in public discourse, advocating low fat and low sugar lifestyles in an effort to combat heart disease and obesity. California cuisine was a perfect fit for these new dietary edicts, offering tasteful, ethical, and relatively healthy upscale dining options. This brings to the fore the final strand of dietary importance to the emerging counter-cuisine, a focus on ethical eating and consumption. Vegetarianism went mainstream in the last two decades of the century, fair trade coffee, tea, and chocolate have become common specialty items, and supporting small farms with food purchases is unconditionally recognized as important. To top it all off, the international Slow Food movement has gained significant traction throughout America, with its emphasis on attentive enjoyment of typical regional foods and a connectedness between food and surrounding socio-economic and ecological relations (Miele and Murdoch 2002). The result is a movement where restaurant chefs are the mavens driving a cultural revival toward fresh foods with ethical provenance and regional flair – a cuisine counter to standardized, disconnected, fast food.

While counter-cuisine emerged as a nexus of multiple oppositional dietary trends in the U.S., its growth and maturation has in many ways blurred the oppositional nature of

these dietary trends. In many cases, the valorized consumption of organic foods or high quality tastes has been used as justification for ethical eating while disregarding the impacts of production on marginalized laborers (Guthman 2003). Furthermore, as upper and middle class consumers develop tastes for the specialty foods of counter-cuisine, markets emerge and are exploited by capital and powerful actors in developing mass markets for such products, as has happened in the case of bagged organic salad mix (Guthman 2003) and specialty coffee in the case of Starbucks (Daviron and Ponte 2005). In each of these cases, a distinctive form of cuisine was developed in a restaurant or café atmosphere, but the popularity of the cuisine led corporate interests to commercialize them. Their commercialization was not in the image of oppositional economics and social relations to match the alternative tastes of the new cuisine, however. Instead, the commercialization of counter-cuisine has developed the substance of “slow foods” into the socio-economic relations of fast food – the ubiquitous Starbucks cafés and bagged supermarket lettuce that we see today. Furthermore, the original interest in such specialty foods among the upper/middle classes is born of an inherent aesthetic disparity between expensive slow foods and cheap fast foods. This disparity is also tied to many of the paradoxes of affluence regarding food, including food consumption neuroses like bulimia and anorexia and a general public fixation on weight loss and dieting, concerns of convenience that more often affect the affluent than the impoverished. The lesson here is that counter-cuisine, left to its own devices, is part and parcel of wider systems of inequity and appropriation – culturally, economically, and politically – despite the origins and motivations of its emergence and continued influence in society.

3) The Third Leg of Alternative Agro-Food Systems

Food activists have become increasingly cognizant of the inabilities of sustainable agriculture and counter-cuisine to remain independent in a globalizing industrial food system. In recognizing the tendency of powerful actors in this food system to out-compete the challenges they are unable to appropriate, many have begun to advocate for completely alternative food initiatives as a way of circumventing these powerful actors. The alternative food initiatives are many and diverse, and they do not all agree on issues of importance – some are more concerned with environmental or health consequences of

agriculture, and others focus on populist or class issues regarding social equity in food systems (Allen, Goodman et al. 2003). At the same time, there is relative consensus that when national and international regulations and trade policies are stacked so much in the favor of the dominant food system, alternatives must be devised from the grassroots with local initiatives to grow in strength and resolve toward a true challenge to the dominant system. Local food has become the rallying cry for this movement toward food system alternatives.

Once again in the growing history of alternative agro-food movements, popular authors have flocked to the local food movement in attempts to draw attention to the next wave of the movement. Like the initiatives that they chronicle, their perspectives and advocacy are simultaneously similar and disparate, agreeing that local food is a powerful and growing alternative to the many problems of conventional agriculture and global food systems, but disagreeing on the benefits and purposes of local food activism itself. Thomas Lyson has promoted “relocalization” as a part of what he calls “civic agriculture” (Lyson 2004), where communities can protect themselves from the global food system through community infrastructure, retained farmland base, and strong local farmer and processor technical expertise to compete in local marketplaces. Frances Moore Lappé and her daughter, Anna, tell a tale of communities around the globe building local food and economic alternatives in the face of institutionalized hunger, economic disenfranchisement, and local environmental destruction (Lappé and Lappé 2002). Gary Nabhan opines on the virtues of embedding oneself in the culture, tastes, and community of a place through the personal struggles of eating locally (Nabhan 2002), and Brian Halweil catalogues efforts throughout the United States to reclaim food systems from the “global supermarket” through alternative local food chains (Halweil 2004). Even nutritionists are joining in the call, as Nina Planck deconstructs many of the presuppositions of the “negative nutrition” (Levenstein 2003) with nutritionally informed arguments for the wholesomeness of unprocessed, often very fatty, “real foods” from local, known, sources (Planck 2006). These authors often build on a reservoir of agrarian populist sentiment dating back to work along the lines of the Rodale Press through their Cornucopia project (Rodale 1982) and other publications, as well as populist writing like

that of Jim Hightower (Hightower 1973). Are “local foods” all they’re assumed to be in these popular populist accounts? Many academic authors aren’t so sure.

Farmers Markets

The farmers market is the quintessential nexus of local food exchange. By 1970, only 340 of them remained in the United States from the thousands that existed before the consolidation of food processing and distribution in the latter half of the 20th century. A rising tide of new farmers markets began to emerge in the 1970’s as alternative markets for the wave of new small organic farms at the time, and US Congress passed the Farmer-to-Consumer Direct Marketing Act in 1976 to regulate the new markets. The popularity of farmers markets has continued to grow since the 1970’s, and there were approximately 3000 farmers markets in the U.S. in 2001 (Brown 2002). Their success in the U.S. has even stimulated their rapid development abroad, especially in the UK (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000; La Trobe 2001). The significant and sustained rise in popularity of farmers markets is the result of practical, discursive, and organizational flexibility, and the appeal of a personal and informal space for commerce; however, the impacts of farmers markets on their participants and their communities are anything but straightforward.

Farmers markets are spaces of exchange, on private or public land – commonly urban parking lots – and organized by any combination of public and/or private groups/individuals, but which feature stalls in which individual vendors stage displays of products. Customers browse the stalls, and vendors decide which products to sell and set their own prices. Due to such individualized and spatially constrained exchange spaces, farmers market stalls are usually not very large and vendors depend on relatively small sales of high value products. They ostensibly give unique market access to small farmers, as opposed to highly commoditized and branded spaces of wholesale markets and supermarkets. They also present the consumer with a supposedly *embedded* (Granovetter 1985; Hinrichs 2000), market space where they can forge personal relationships and gain quality information on products from the producers themselves while at the same time having a more diverse selection of products from a wider variety

of sources than conventional retail stores. This social milieu ostensibly fosters not only individual benefits as above, but it also aggregates social and environmental benefits. Consumers and producers are collectively able to build alternative food chains that support environmentally sound food production, stimulate rural economic development and entrepreneurship through small farm support, and benefit the economic and social health of communities near the farmers markets themselves.

Despite the hopes of many local food advocates for farmers markets, the actual conditions of farmers markets present many challenges to the potential benefits of these institutions. Production methods and the sources of foods at the markets are not always transparent, despite the personalized contact between vendor and purchaser, and markets that try to regulate their spaces in order to meet the desires of organizers for supporting small farms, organic production, or local foods find themselves stuck with profound dilemmas about who and what to include or exclude from the space. If local provenance is important and a limit of 100 miles is set on the source of food, what happens when a farm is 101 miles away? If small farmers are to be privileged, what happens when the rule stipulates all vendors must sell foods from their own farms and some small farmers want to sell some processed foods by another company using some of their products as ingredients? Questions and dilemmas like these greatly contribute to the demographic mix and product selection of farmers markets (Hughes 1992). Ultimately, by establishing the location, timing, and frequency of markets, as well as the types of vendors and products available, market governance affects market access for producers and consumers alike and issues of market governance will only become more important as farmers markets continue to grow in number and popularity (DuPuis 2006).

None of the above is meant to indicate that market governance is not important or needed – it is absolutely critical to the healthy functioning and fairness of farmers markets. Exchange relations in farmers markets are most certainly “embedded” in complex social relations, but merely embedding exchange in social relations is not sufficient to avoid the harmful effects of food commoditization or manipulations in the representation of foods. Vendors may feel compelled to provide more information about the production of their products than a supermarket, but they are perfectly capable of

omitting information that customers might deem offensive. Similarly, customers many times do not know the right questions to ask to uncover production conditions they dislike, or maybe they are too shy to ask probing questions of vendors. As Clare Hinrichs noted (2000), the need for farmers to use markets to make a living, and the necessary competition among producers involved in this pursuit, ground farmers markets in fundamentally economic relations, despite a corollary interest in marketing through diverse social relations. Farmers markets are still markets, after all, and embeddedness does not alter the fundamental commodity relations implicit in the market.

The actual impacts of farmers markets beyond their direct participants are also great unknowns. In fact, there is very little reliable knowledge of exactly how much monetary value is transferred in farmers markets, much less how far this economic impact extends beyond the confines of the market (Brown 2002). Furthermore, while there is evidence of farmers markets helping to “incubate” food producer entrepreneurialism (Hinrichs, Gillespie et al. 2004), the extent to which they facilitate rural development is questionable, as the most vibrant farmers markets are in urban areas and the knock-on economic effects of the markets is most apparent in their immediate vicinity. Direct sales on the farm is much more effective for rural economic development from direct marketing (Gale 1997). Another questionable assumption about the benefits of farmers markets lies in the association of such markets with local food and the further association of “local food” as good and “global food” as bad. Farmers markets are very diverse places, and the products they sell are not necessarily “local,” nor are they necessarily organic or produced with fair labor practices. The mapping of a reductionist good/bad binary dualism to a diverse and evolving social space is problematic, but a very common attitude among farmers market participants and observers (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000).

Community Supported Agriculture

An alternative form of direct marketing has been growing quickly in recent years, especially among producers with diversified farms and interest in dedicated high value customers. These producers often find the competitive arena of the farmers market to

eliminate much of their profit margin, and community supported agriculture, or CSA, has given them a strong marketing alternative. A CSA program is essentially a speculative arrangement between producer and consumer, where the farm sells shares to consumers in exchange for weekly or biweekly allotments of the farm's product. In its most pure form, the share costs are commensurate with the costs of production, including appropriate compensation for the farmer and any paid labor, and all shareholders share the benefits and risks of productive abundance or shortfall for the season. This model was originally adapted in the United States from a Japanese marketing model by an entrepreneurial New England farm (McFadden 2004) and has quickly spread across the country, with around 1700 of them in existence by 2004 (McFadden 2004). CSA's definitely challenge the commodification of food through markets, and they can have economic benefits for producers and consumers, but rather than erasing tensions of exchange, they shift the burdens of exchange in innovative and challenging ways.

CSA's have been shown to be economically worthwhile for consumers as long as they use most of their allotments, with the retail costs of produce significantly higher than the average price per weight of CSA share produce (Cooley and Lass 1998). However, it is not the cost of produce that is the overriding factor in CSA participation for consumers; instead, consumers tend to be interested in offsetting many of the risks and uncertainties of conventional foods, whether they are concerns about chemical residues, bacterially tainted foods, small farm viability, or others. CSA producers also desire to offset uncertainties related to adequate startup finances or insuring against low crop yields. Through the CSA, the producer obtains a more reliable and upfront income and dedicated outlet for products, while the consumer obtains assurances of food safety and quality, and both producer and consumer are able to mitigate their concerns and uncertainties (Lamine 2005). A side-benefit of CSA's is that the close personal contacts they foster encourage the emergence of a kind of community among participants who have made significant financial and personal investments and commitments into the healthy functioning of their CSA program. These relationships and "communities" are a direct challenge to disembodied market exchange relations that do not require commitment beyond the moment of transaction.

Despite the collective personal and financial commitments of their members, CSA's rarely achieve strongly cohesive communities. Instead, CSA's tend to represent "communities of common interest", groups of individuals participating in a common program for common reasons, but not with explicit intent to form an active community (Cone and Myhre 2000). Members can easily come to view their share as a contract, and not as a membership in a community, often leaving farmers burdened beyond the demands of production to coordinate their "community" of members through social activities or even just weekly pickups (Cone and Myhre 2000; Hinrichs 2000). This imposition on farmers can be mitigated by CSA's with a strong "core group" of members that help with marketing decision-making and coordinating (DuPuis 2006), but only about a quarter of CSA's in 1999 had such core coordinating groups (Lass, Stevenson et al. 2003). New tensions can arise for consumers as well, as gaining certainties in terms of food provenance comes at the cost of uncertainties in the amounts and assortments of products in weekly shares, requiring members to adjust their consumption to match the sometimes strange foods in their shares. Both consumers and producers have recourse in close communication and negotiation with each other, one of the benefits of extended commitments to each other throughout the growing season. However, the strains can also prove too great to endure over longer periods, when members may choose not to subscribe for future seasons or farmers may decide that their CSA's are too demanding of their time and efforts.

Despite embodying strong structural challenge to market based exchange, CSA's must compensate for co-existing in competition with market-based systems themselves. If weekly shares do not represent enough value, many members will not re-subscribe in subsequent years because they will seek cheaper alternatives at the farmers market; at the same time the farmer must receive adequate compensation for his or her labor and the costs of production. To compensate for this financial tension, a farm may only commit a portion of their production to CSA memberships, with the remainder being sold in farmers markets or other high value outlets. This may resolve a financial tension, but it also creates potential conflicts of interest for the farmer; with income already received from CSA members, a farmer would benefit financially from selling his or her best

product at a farmers market while providing CSA members products of only moderate quality. CSA's are clearly not devoid of market influences, and they can exhibit instrumental tendencies in supporting farm incomes or consumer demands to the detriment of the other (Hinrichs 2000). Additionally, many food system relocalization advocates point to CSA's as a prime way of pursuing such visions, but European box schemes are proving capable of managing regional distribution distances while still adhering to the hallmark commitments and bridging of producer/consumer uncertainties of the CSA model (Lamine 2005). Any contribution of CSA's toward building equitable localized food systems must address these kinds of issues.

Beyond Direct Marketing

Alternative food marketing has also taken hold beyond the realm of direct marketing in developed market economies. In addition to the interest in North American producer cooperatives and "civic agriculture," social scientists have been investigating with particular interest the rise of specialty food products as a tendency toward rural agricultural restructuring in Europe (Ilbery and Kneafsey 1999). Individual small and medium-sized farms, farm cooperatives, and specialty processors have found strong niche markets for specialty products appealing to concerns both of regional identity and a host of ecological/biological concerns. This has been termed the "quality turn" in food markets (Goodman 2003), and it has been heralded by many as an opportunity for agrarian rural development, environmentally sound production and distribution of food, and foods superior in nutrition and minimizing risks of diseases like BSE and Foot and Mouth. It is against the backdrop of anonymous and opaque globalized corporate supply chains that these claims are made, where specialty food chains offer greater transparency leading to greater trust and confidence in them. Regional product labeling has played a significant role in building this confidence, as well as protecting specialty products against complete commodification in global markets (Marsden, Banks et al. 2000; Parrot, Wilson et al. 2002; Barham 2003). Enthusiasm for the potential benefits of agri-food restructuring in Europe through "quality" specialty products seems justified, as they now represent a substantial proportion of net value added from agriculture throughout Europe (Renting, Marsden et al. 2003).

While these alternative supply chains and networks are also developing in North America, European scholars have taken a more active interest in their development, and their conclusions are in many ways just as applicable to North America as they are domestically. Some conclusions are that these specialty products are being marketed through quality characteristics (Marsden and Arce 1995) along two distinct lines of consumer interest – (1) regional labeling and attributes of place of production, and (2) addressing concerns about “bioprocesses.” Additionally, the production and supply chains being configured to deliver these products can be described as “shortened” in at least one of the following dimensions: physical distance of the chain, numbers of intermediaries or steps in the chain, transparency of the processes in the chain to consumers and other third parties, and decommodified or “embedded” relationships along the chain. As a result, these developments are commonly called “short food supply chains” (SFSC’s), in addition to the more general moniker “alternative agro-food networks” (AAFN’s). While the chains are “shorter” than their conventional globalized corporate counterparts, the degree of shortness can vary from forms of direct marketing like that of the farmers market to intermediate regional chains, or even extended chains that cross regions or even continents facilitated by regional labeling and trade regulation and protections. (Marsden, Banks et al. 2000; Renting, Marsden et al. 2003)

While these direct and more extended “short” food supply chains are making waves in rural areas, retail stores, discussions of agricultural governance and trade debates, and academic circles, there are some that have begun to question whether the excitement at their emergence among alternative food system advocates has not led to important oversights and a lack of critical perspective toward their development. Ilbery and Maye (2005) found in close analysis of 6 small-medium size enterprise supply chains on the English/Scottish border that most failed to comprehensively address basic sustainability criteria, especially regarding the accessibility and proximity of their products and supply chains. In fact, the only common successes of the supply chains were production of healthy foods, strong understanding of their foods, and a reliance on local employment. When it comes to decisions about the sourcing of inputs, reliance on sustainable transportation options, environmentally sensitive production, promotion of animal

welfare, and socially inclusive pricing and distribution, SFSC's cannot be assumed to be of higher "quality" than their conventional counterparts. Others have also noted that there is a tendency to "conflate spatial relations with social relations," (Hinrichs 2000) when it comes to agri-food alternatives countering the damaging tendencies of global agri-food complexes. Without critical stances toward issues of power within and between alternative farm enterprises and their specialty supply chains, as well as the valorization of particular spaces, regions, and proximities, students and supporters of SFSC's do little to encourage evolution toward robust and sustainable alternatives to consolidated corporate food systems (Goodman 2004).

4) Local Food as Common Denominator: Problems and Prospects

There are widespread efforts worldwide to confront the seemingly totalizing nature of corporate globalized agri-food commodity chains. Organic agriculture has proven completely adaptable to appropriation by international corporate capital, as has much of the counter-cuisine movement in addition to its widespread cultural diffusion and incorporation into contemporary nutritional wisdom and assessments of food safety. Contemporary movements in contrast with global agri-food chains find themselves building on the organic and counter-cuisine successes of the past in new ways, working hard to develop what Michael Pollen (2006) has called the "third leg" supporting the establishment of sustainable agri-food system alternatives, local food. Indeed, food system localization seems to be a convincing common denominator among alternative agri-food initiatives.

The opposition to globalized food chains has very little to do with the distance spanned by these chains; rather, the most upsetting aspects of global food chains are the *types* of relationships established and the *means* of creating and maintaining them. As was discussed above in Section 2, the origins of the contemporary globalized food relations lie in highly capitalized and commodified socio-natural-material relations creating overabundance through motivations inherent to the accumulation of capital. These relations are reified, and power over their perpetuation is consolidated into fewer and fewer hands as market share in the value-added activities of processing and distributing are consolidated to extreme degrees (Heffernan, Hendrickson et al. 1999;

Hendrickson and Heffernan 2002). Farmers and consumers both lose out in this kind of economic order, with consumers paying for “value-added” that they may not need and processed foods with less nutritional content, and the share of the consumer food dollar apportioned to farmers being squeezed by the consolidated market power of middle-men. The accumulation of capital under this system has empowered these middle-men to expand markets by tapping into a global consumer base and global production channels, aided by national trade policies geared toward export. By contesting global food chains with efforts to substitute them with “local foods”, it is often assumed that these efforts will simultaneously challenge the exploitative market relations mediated by global capital and sympathetic national agri-food production and trade policies.

It certainly seems an opportune moment, with the contradictions of commoditized corporate industrial food systems appearing in fuller view of the public through food scares, dietary health crises, and the depopulation of rural countryside by farm families. These public concerns are also timely in that power in these corporate agri-food systems has been shifting significantly in recent years away from processors and distributors and toward consolidations in the food retail sector (Heffernan, Hendrickson et al. 1999; Guptill and Wilkins 2002). Global mass retailers like U.S.-based Wal-Mart and Target and European-based Ahold and Carrefour have quickly begun to transnationalize and consolidate grocery retail sales (Heffernan, Hendrickson et al. 1999), putting pressure on traditional national and regional grocery chains to innovate in order to survive. The rise of specialty food products in Europe (Ilbery and Kneafsey 1999) and the U.S. has been aided by this desperation among grocers to develop market niches by appealing to niche interests of customers. The combined forces of shifting consumer affinity for safe, quality foods, restructuring in the grocery retail sector, and the continuing evolution of upscale restaurant demands for fresh, specialty ingredients represent exciting prospects for innovative producers and developing short food supply chains and alternative agri-food networks.

Indeed, these shifts in demand have created exciting opportunities that many producers and processors have been quick to pursue, as the last section presented. The research into the drivers of SFSC’s and AAFN’s have adapted and developed the

concepts of “embeddedness” (Granovetter 1985) and “quality” (Marsden and Arce 1995; Murdoch, Marsden et al. 2000), where SFSC’s and AAFN’s thrive on “embeddings” of their economic relations in multidimensional social relations and are able to represent this embeddedness through multidimensional “quality” of their products. This research has tended to be optimistic about prospective benefits for rural development and the sustainability of new agri-food relations based on high “quality” products “embedded” within “quality” social and place-based relations. More recent literature has begun to question some of the implicit assumptions in this “turn to quality” among alternative agri-food research and advocates of “local food.” While the contradictions of agro-food capitalism have indeed created new spaces for localization (Hendrickson and Heffernan 2002), it is quite a logical leap to assume that sustainable implementations of local food advocacy will be the only entrants into these spaces.

There is a common effort among the critical research of “local” agri-food initiatives to consciously unearth and recognize the diversity of these initiatives, especially noting the ways in which local food initiatives do not fit neat definitions of sustainability or social equity. Michael Winter (2003) found local food purchases in rural England to be motivated largely based on a “defensive localism” concerned with supporting local farms over distant ones instead of a “strong turn to quality based around organic and ecological production” (p. 23). Clare Hinrichs (2003) has found a tension between defensive localism and the encouragement of diversity in food localization efforts in Iowa, where efforts to promote banquet meals from Iowa farm products have introduced new culinary tastes to many despite a defensive emphasis on rural Iowa farm products over others. A study of California alternative agri-food initiatives (Allen, FitzSimmons et al. 2003) found a strong tendency among them to focus on local issues, what Harvey (1996) has termed “militant particularisms”, instead of working toward the “global ambitions” that unite these local efforts toward more equitable and environmentally sound food systems. These studies are really only an introduction to the ways in which the notions of “quality”, “embeddedness”, and “local” are problematic with regard to the diverse politics expressed through the socio-natural-economic assemblages of alternative agri-food initiatives. The tendency of food localization advocates to conflate spatial and

social relations belies the tendencies of local food projects to mirror local socio-economic disparities in terms of both price of and access to local foods (Allen 1999). Rather than signaling a shift toward healthy and sustainable rural development through “quality” foods (Marsden, Banks et al. 2000; Murdoch, Marsden et al. 2000) and a new associational economy (Clark 2005), critical scholarship on these topics recommends investigating the inequalities of access in order to ascertain who are the “missing guests at the table” in these new models (Allen 2004; Goodman 2004).

In order to uncover these complex local assemblages, a number of methods and theoretical perspectives have been proposed. First, it should be recognized that any “localism” will be place-specific, and uncovering the diverse meanings, purposes, and quasi-objects (to borrow a term from actor-network theory, (Latour 1993)) requires methods rooted in place (Selfa and Qazi 2005; Feagan 2007). Second, it is very important to balance producer and consumer perspectives, as both play invaluable and intimate roles in alternative food chains (Goodman and Du Puis 2002). Third, food localization incorporates spatial, social, and quality dimensions (Selfa and Qazi 2005), rooted in meaning, politics, and scales; this makes “local food” absolutely contested and continually under social construction. Fourth, studying the contested politics of space in local food construction should be informed by *relational* conceptions of place and space in order to negotiate the complex dialectics between alternative and conventional, local and global (Dupuis and Goodman 2005). Fifth, AAFN and SFSC studies should not so readily abandon an interest in critical political economy for interests in food “quality” and consumer culture, as the fates of local efforts will hinge on the accumulations and distributions of power which they align and produce (Goodman 2004). With so many dimensions converging in the creation of local food alternatives, it is definitely important to avoid reducing this complexity to dualisms. Only by engaging with methodological and theoretical complexity can representations of alternative agro-food projects do justice to the echoes of the past and the pathways to the future embedded in such projects.

If institutional deserts and constraints, as well as constraints due to the consolidation of meat packing and economies of scale in production and distribution can force a group like the Tallgrass Prairie Producers to slowly self-destruct, I am curious

about what these influences are doing to the larger population of specialty food producers reaching out to new markets with new products. Furthermore, I would like to know how consumers and producers interact with intermediaries in constructing regional alternative food chains and networks. Yet, I am also concerned with the hidden agendas at work in the construction of alternative food systems based on populist agrarianism and a desire to connect urban eaters with food from the immediate countryside. With the remainder of this chapter, I will outline a research program to investigate the development of regional local food networks in a central portion of the United States, Eastern Kansas.

C) Research Agenda

1) Political Economic Network Analysis

The strength and dominance of industrial agriculture and consolidated food manufacture and distribution have definitely been powerful players in creating conditions to which alternative agri-food interests are opposed. However, the agri-food social science research just discussed demonstrates that the motivations, activities, and interests of the alternative agri-food movement are as diverse as its participants and that the movement's ideals do not always match squarely with its results. The potential disconnect between ideals and impacts leads one to question which participants and interests are privileged and which are excluded through the developing local food economy. Implicated in this line of questioning are further questions. What does one mean by "local food" and which foods are being labeled as such? What is the value of "local" food compared with its "conventional" counterparts? Who are the most active interests and participants in constructing this value? How is this value being distributed? What are the effects of this political economy in terms of healthy urban/rural development and ecology? What is the power of local food in terms of contesting and disrupting the exploitative and degrading social relations of conventional food? However, the heterogeneity of alternative agri-food movements introduces a further complication in that the answers to each of these questions will vary along with the geography of local food politics and participation.

Faced with the geographical and social complexity of an emerging political economy of local food, few studies have adequately engaged this complexity in

discussing alternative agri-food social relations. Some studies have emphasized the role of advocacy groups in developing alternative agri-food networks (Hendrickson 1997; Hendrickson and Heffernan 2002; Allen, FitzSimmons et al. 2003; Hinrichs 2003), while others have closely studied farmers markets or CSA programs with the intent of evaluating their organizational politics and economic impacts (Cone and Myhre 2000; Hinrichs 2000; Holloway and Kneafsey 2000; La Trobe 2001; Hinrichs, Gillespie et al. 2004), and some have focused on commodity chain development (Buck, Getz et al. 1997) and the evolution of iconic commodities from niche beginnings in alternative networks (Guthman 2003). Each of these types of research are valuable and important in that they have cumulatively built a foundation of research pointing out some of the complex motivations of alternative agri-food proponents, the conflicting forces defining the key venues of alternative agri-food strength, and the problematic relationships between growth, popular culture and fetishization, and market appropriation. While this research is very valuable for its critical analysis of social relations in alternative agri-food initiatives, it is not as attendant to mapping these social relations into our geographical imaginations through accounts of the spatial relations that ground the social relations. Without such explicitly geographical accounts, it is difficult to ascertain the importance of individual cases and perspectives relative to each other in defining the broader geographies and interests served through alternative agri-food development. What is needed to further assess the political economy of alternative agriculture and food is research oriented to exploring the diversity and scales of participation, as well as the interdependencies enabling alternative agri-food relations, in order to more fully grasp the interplay among competing interests in this emerging political economic field.

Building on previous research, this dissertation is aimed at addressing some of these concerns through innovative methods in identifying and analyzing local food networks in a regional context. The approach used is a triangulation among three theoretical agendas – network analysis, conventions theory, and spatial analysis. Network analysis and conventions theory have both been used in alternative agri-food research, but they have not been used together, nor have they been used in conjunction with a formal spatial analysis framework. Basing this analysis on data from an open form of snowball

sampling, this study's research agenda will attempt to represent the diversity of "local foods" and participant agendas, as well as the interdependence of participants on each other and on their local political economic contexts. Network analysis will highlight interconnections among participants and places based on food flows, conventions theory will provide a means of interpreting the values driving these relationships, and spatial analysis will help in interpreting how values and interdependencies manifest themselves in terms of value and the orderings of space. The rationales for this type of analysis and its contributions will be discussed more thoroughly in the chapters that follow. Together, the combination is intended to enrich our understanding of regional-scale development and differentiation of "local foods", to identify the practices and politics which are empowered through this development, and to provide an adequate basis for further research regarding the environmental, social, and economic impacts of local food development.

2) Justifying the Choice of Study Region – Eastern Kansas

Eastern Kansas is in many ways typical of the United States in terms of growing public support and interest in local foods. It has vibrant concentrated urban populations and large surrounding areas of withering rural communities and farmland devoted to basic agricultural commodities of corn, soybeans, wheat, sorghum, and pasture for hay and cattle. Farmers markets have been gradually growing in size and number there, especially in urban areas, over the past few decades, and CSA programs have made a rapid rise in the region among small farms appealing to concerned consumers in nearby cities. Restaurant chefs are often featured in newspapers for buying from local small farms, and even some supermarkets are beginning to talk about buying "local". These trends are rather typical throughout the United States, with some calling it a movement toward a more "civic agriculture" (Lyson 2004). In these ways, Eastern Kansas is representative of the U.S. Midwest as a land of increasingly commoditized industrial agriculture, marginalized family farms and rural communities, and concentrated urban populations disassociated from the means and culture of food production – where some of these disenfranchised are finding ways to reroute food production and consumption around monolithic conventional commodity food systems.

While it is indeed a good representative of Midwestern food systems, the particular confrontations between conventional and alternative agri-food systems in Eastern Kansas make for an interesting regional case study into the development of local food systems. The Kansas City Food Circle was formed early as an advocacy and networking non-profit helping small farms to connect with concerned consumers (Hendrickson 1997; Hendrickson and Heffernan 2002), and grocery cooperatives in smaller cities to the West of Kansas City fostered some of these same connections in their own cities. However, a recent economic analysis of the demand for farm fresh “local” specialty foods in the region’s central river valley spurred some interesting developments. The study (Burress 2000) showed unmet annual demand of \$100 million for such products among the major population centers of Eastern Kansas, which happen to be located along the Kansas River Valley (Manhattan, Topeka, Lawrence, and Kansas City, from West to East). In response to this report, a non-profit group has used a USDA grant to support new farms in marketing to this demand in the region, and a number of producers have banded together in small clusters to collectively organized new forms of marketing to river valley’s urban populations. The responses of advocacy groups to this report indicate varying levels of organization around local food concerns for each of the population centers, and variable meanings for “local food” as they organize. The geographies of settlement, farming, and alternative agri-food organizing in Eastern Kansas make it an interesting regional context for the local food movement. However, questions about what kinds of alternative agri-food relations are establishing themselves based on the concept of “local food” given this socio-economic and activist historical geography remain unanswered.

3) The Rest of the Dissertation – Chapter Plan

While this Introduction has set forth the research questions, historical agri-food background, rationale, and basic outline of a research proposal for studying developments in local food, my research paradigm and methods require further elaboration before beginning a discussion of analysis and results of this project. Chapter Two presents a detailed discussion of the theoretical frameworks from which my analytical methods have been drawn, noting the extended use of these frameworks in other agri-food research, and Chapter Three will discuss the adaptations of these

frameworks for data analysis as well as methods for gathering and processing data during fieldwork. These two chapters will together detail conceptual and practical adaptations of network analysis, conventions theory, and spatial analysis to complement each other in representing local food networks.

Analyzing field data using the tools developed in Chapters Two and Three is somewhat abstract, and it also assumes some general contextual knowledge of Eastern Kansas. Therefore, Chapter Four is intended to provide some context about agricultural land use in Kansas and about the physical and demographic geography of the state, especially its eastern half. The first half of the chapter discusses this geographical and agricultural context, while the second half of the chapter presents some basic statistical analyses of the dataset I compiled based on my fieldwork, including the number of different kinds of local food participants, the different types of local food, and the proportions of each of these prevalent in and across different parts of the study region. The chapter will conclude with some assessments of what local food is and how it contrasts with the conventional food systems of Eastern Kansas.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven will then move on to analyze data based on the network analysis, conventions, and spatial frameworks developed in Chapters Two and Three. Chapter Five will use a combination of network analysis and GIS to take a closer look at the variations in network structure in different areas of the study region, specifically focusing on urban areas as the confluence of local food activity and the differences among the urban areas in terms of level of local food activity and coherency of the networks. Conventions theory will be the featured framework in Chapter Six, as conventions will help to explain how the network communities of Chapter Five form and whence some of the differences among the communities arise. As the final results chapter of this work, Chapter Seven will employ spatial analysis to closely study the production of space in some of the critical local food sites identified in the other chapters, especially noting the participants who benefit from these spatial arrangements and the impacts on the broader development and evolution of local food systems in the region.

Chapter Eight will offer conclusions in response to basic questions posed in this introductory chapter. These questions include what local food actually is, how it is produced, who benefits from its production and consumption, and what current tendencies indicate about the future of local food systems development. The strengths and weaknesses of the combination of network analysis, conventions theory, and spatial analysis will also be discussed in the process of making these conclusions. In the end, I hope that this research will be useful in framing appropriate research questions to make better use of the analytical frameworks developed in this study, but more importantly to further open the field of debate about the potentials and pitfalls of local food systems by considering the complex regional economic networks at the heart of the burgeoning local food movement. It is only through the study of the political economy of these networks that the social equity, economic viability, and ecological sustainability of local food systems can be adequately assessed.

CHAPTER II: THEORY

A) Theoretical Perspectives in Agri-food Social Research

Local food systems research is part of a long legacy of agri-food research that challenges traditional political economic theoretical stances in coming to grips with new observations of contemporary food system restructuring. Political economic theory has struggled to combine localized social construction of agri-food relations into its frameworks with broader accounts of restructuring and its impacts, echoing the traditional binary rift between structure and agency. The theoretical perspectives that are the foundation of my own research derive from this theoretical struggle, and thus it is important to review the history of agri-food theoretical debates before attempting to establish my own theoretical agenda. The following sections will predominantly focus on telling the story of alternative agri-food theorizing, but they will also conclude by highlighting three key themes within agri-food theoretical work that form the basis of my own theoretical applications. These three themes are, embeddedness, networks, and politics, and I will use these themes to relate my own research to the broader context of agri-food social research.

1) The New Sociology of Agriculture

The late 1960's and early 1970's saw a surge of interest in the social sciences for studying the social relations of agriculture. For decades previous to this time, agricultural economists had narrowly focused on researching methods for expanding commodity markets abroad, while rural sociologists had spent much of their time studying land tenure and agricultural relations abroad. The surge of Marxism and critical theory in the New Left during the chaotic intellectual climate of the 1960's and 1970's fueled new interest among rural sociologists and related social scientists for studying the social relations in agriculture. This surge was termed the "new sociology of agriculture" as it sought to understand the shift toward industrialized and capitalized forms of agriculture away from diversified peasant forms that was "new" to agriculture in recent decades. This early research was informed by Marxist theories of capitalism and its contradictions, and largely concerned itself with an "agrarian question" regarding the role

and future of farming in a system dominated by the modernizing forces of capitalism with regard to agricultural production and the integration of agricultural capitalism vertically and horizontally throughout food systems. The standardizing and homogenizing forces of capitalism were also prominent in the theme of modernity that was rooted in the French school of regulation theory, concerned largely with studying the broad regulation of capitalist social structures.

This first wave of agri-food systems research did much to elucidate some of the broader political economic structures shaping world food systems. Its class-based analysis outlined the general decline of smallholder farming, a diminishment in the size of the peasant class, and the rise to dominance of capitalist input-intensive mechanized monocultural agriculture. Furthermore, the broad contours of this development did not so much lead to a crisis of agriculture or food, rather a societal crisis of surplus labor as technology took the place of human labor in food production (Buttel 1980). Literature debates largely questioned whether to focus on the innovative persistence of smallholders despite adverse market and capitalist forces or to focus on the decline of this peasant class in favor of a capitalist industrial class (Friedland 1991). Commodity systems research was also developed to investigate how the development and regulation of commodity relations played a part in this shift (Friedland 1984). However, the sectoral social and environmental crises of agriculture and agri-food political economy continually remake opportunities for re-structuring in the food system and for activism among its participants. The intellectual wave of what had become a broad sub-discipline, the political economy of agriculture, crested with narratives outlining how the establishment and maintenance of world-scale commodity systems had periodically shifted through a series of “food regimes” (Friedmann and McMichael 1989). The colonial food regime featured Britain as “workshop of the world”, while post-WWII American hegemony in international commodity markets was a feature of the later state-oriented food regime, and the contemporary period destabilized state power due to domestic crises of overproduction and international competition in commodity markets is seen as a transition to some undefined new food regime. Yet, this macro-level account of global food system structuration proved overly structured and ultimately dissatisfying.

The disruptions and disempowerment of nation-states in global agri-food relations in recent decades have brought to light several limitations of traditional political economy of agriculture (Ward and Almas 1997). Critics have argued that food regimes research tends to conceal local and regional differentiation by seeking categorical logics of production and consumption and avoiding the tensions between local and global processes. Another critique lies in the tendency for such research to periodize history into stages of global capitalist development. By describing each period in terms of a single capitalist logic or mode of ordering, the research does not adequately acknowledge the multiple orderings and logics present in the structuring of agri-food systems. A final critique notes that traditional political economy too easily lapses into structuralism with “macro” accounts of structural ties to production and consumption regulation. Critiques about the overextension of Fordist explanations of agricultural modernization brought to light some of these concerns about the industrialization of agriculture and its role in world-scale processes (Page and Walker 1991; Goodman and Watts 1994; Page 1996). This structuralism does not do justice to the heterogeneous actors, materials, and spaces that build and maintain agri-food systems. These critiques have opened the field of agri-food social research since the early 1990’s to include actor-oriented “micro-sociological” research methods and frameworks in an attempt to account for the differentiated and heterogeneous local and global processes shaping contemporary food systems (Marsden and Arce 1995).

The two most coherent theoretical agendas that broke the mold in agro-food political economy throughout the 1990’s were Actor-Network Theory (ANT from here onward) and the neo-regulationist micro-sociological accounts of agri-food relations, most notably Conventions Theory. While ANT studies have grappled with the inclusion of non-humans as well as humans as active social agents and also have painstakingly linked global relations to local roots, Conventions Theory has given character to the heterogeneous and differentiated “embeddedness” that ground agri-food relations in broader social context. As conventional political economists have grappled with the ever-more complex unfolding of “globalization”, these two theoretical avenues have been the foundations of research intended to identify and evaluate the relationships between

global patterns and evolutions in food systems and the localities in which they are grounded. By challenging traditional political economy with accounts of local contestations of global agri-food circuits, they help to short-circuit disabling theoretical dualisms. However, they have also been unable to create credible accounts of change that bridge the theoretical macro-micro divide.

2) Actor-Network Theory and Agri-food Research

Actor-network theory grew from the sociology of science and technology in the 1980's as a challenge to deterministic modernist accounts of scientific innovation. Its proponents developed an eclectic vocabulary to represent innovations as constituted through complex social-material-discursive complexes that defy subject-object dualisms. In fact, one of the core postulates of the ANT tradition is that the binary dualisms so prominent in modern accounts of social research (subject-object, nature-society, global-local, structure-agency, etc.) are deeply flawed philosophically. Instead of seeking to associate research phenomena with one or another of the poles, reality is produced in the middle, between the poles. Actor-networks are the complex orderings, spaces, and assemblages that meet in the middle landscapes between the global and the local, nature and society, and structure and agency. Research on actor-networks focuses on the enrollment and incorporation of heterogeneous materials, entities, meanings, and codes into collectives. These diverse participants are linked together in actor-networks through points of translation and mediation, often through information technologies or codes of socialization which allow participants to "act at a distance" through the "immutable mobility" of such media. Furthermore, actor-networks are defined more by their topological spaces, the spaces of linkages, than the orthodox Euclidean geographical spaces of regions, territories, and surfaces. ANT offers a relational ontology, where actors and networks are part of the same continuous social fabric, each actor a pattern and each pattern capable of agency. With a relational ontology, no set of actors is privileged *a priori* in shaping the patterns of participation and incorporation through actor-networks; the agency of actor-networks depends on the politics of translation, mediation, and mobility in creating the topological patterns of actor-networks. Actor-networks are open, partial, and always-in-the-making, and it is for these reasons that ANT has been

used as a methodology to escape the constrained, totalizing, and always-already present logics of systems thinking so common in traditional political economy.

ANT's application in agri-food research has consistently focused on scientific, institutional, and social orderings of agri-food economic networks. The roots of ANT application in agri-food studies grew from Arce and Marsden (1993) in their call for research methods that represent the "social terms of production and valuation of food" and research into the formation of global food networks that "incorporates the relocalization tendencies and consequences directly engendered by them." (p. 309) While this early work strongly emphasized the local contingences of global agri-food developments, it did not fully entertain the language and fundamental concepts of ANT in representing socialized and locally grounded global networks. In later work, Busch and Juska (1997) demonstrate the use of ANT through their representation of the scientific and institutional networks critical in the development of Canadian rapeseed, where military, agricultural scientific research, and breeding institutions collaborated to alter the nature of traditional rapeseed to create new varieties with qualities amenable to cooking oil extraction. The study underscores the importance and complexity of the techno-scientific networks behind crop innovations that continue to be a driving force in the political economy of agriculture and food. In their account of fair-trade coffee networks, Whatmore and Thorne (1997) describe how British charities, international banking structures, commodity exchanges, commodity certifiers, telecommunications technologies, and more are bound together by their sensitization to the theme of 'fairness'. This theme serves to mediate the network through what they describe as a "mode of ordering" (Law 1994) of *connectivity*, making durable the actor-network and empowering the equitable distribution of money to participants as well as organic production techniques and product certification. Both Busch and Juska, and Whatmore and Thorne, demonstrate the two primary hallmarks of agri-food actor-network research, the examination of information flows and scientific knowledge mediated through technologies and institutions, and also an active acknowledgement of non-human (especially organic) participants in the ordering of agri-food networks.

ANT has also been used by some to emphasize more radical ontological implications for agri-food studies. Fitzsimmons and Goodman (1998) argue for a much more comprehensive incorporation of natural processes and relations in the conception of social bodies, and vice versa. They present anorexia and BSE as two co-productions of food and the human body; one is a wasting disease that is partially transmissible to humans through contaminated meat, and the other is an “intersection of intention, culture, and metabolism” and a struggle to challenge one’s own body. In each case, pathology opens for review “black-boxes” of unacknowledged relationships between materiality, discourse, and socialization. It is argued that the material co-production of food and bodies are intimately tied, and the agency of non-humans is important in a *material* and *metabolic* sense as much as it is in constructing the *meaning* of foods. On his own, Goodman (1999) adds to this argument by noting that a radical re-conceptualization of non-human agency is critical in developing the kinds of conversations between environmentalism and political economy that could develop a radical politics worthy of the “age of ecology.” From the perspective of these works, social-natural-technological relationships in agri-food settings are much more coincident, interdependent, interwoven, and incomplete than traditional political economic accounts, and even most ANT studies, present.

Despite its welcome correctives to the limitations of orthodox political economy, ANT has its own limitations as well. For starters, the non-modernist language and ontology of ANT is quite difficult to operationalize due to its obscurity and high levels of abstraction. A second issue is that ANT is not a theory (Latour 1999). It has trouble developing middle-level concepts to explain the presence of links. Its strong relational ontology imprisons ANT in a house of mirrors, where every relationship is always-only expressed through further (partially) constituted linkages between any variety of humans, non-humans, and other hybrid collectives acting as one. This may be a high price to pay for liberation from the reductionism and essentialism endemic to the systems thinking of traditional political economy. It also introduces a further difficulty, that of determining the extent of an actor-network; where does the network end, when all actor-networks are connected to all others through “coincidences” (Whatmore and Thorne 1997)? A related

problem for ANT is the very issue it is designed to overcome – that of black-boxing relationships (Lockie and Kitto 2000). The researcher must pick and choose which assemblages will endure in-depth analysis, while the un-investigated are reduced to single points or roles based on their functions, or *punctualized* as in the language of ANT, until these roles upend the existing order. In short, ANT's effectiveness depends on successful change so as to expose the relevant actor-networks, and upon micro-level analysis of the complex orderings underlying this change (Friedland 2001).

There is one critique that I have chosen to separate from the above, because it is relevant to the theoretical projects needed in building on the successes of ANT. The crux of the critique is a political one. Tracing flows and networks doesn't help in understanding cleavages, in explaining non-connections, or in accounting for all those who are not present in the actor-network. This issue is both empirical and theoretical; the method of tracing connections ignores non-connections, and the theoretical approach is more attuned to the reasons and roles of connection than to the politics that decide who participates and which links matter more than others (Marsden 2000). The symmetrical assumptions of agency at the heart of its relational ontology thereby neuter ANT with regard to explaining the asymmetries of power encountered in the field. As Marsden (2000) puts it, "one important dimension of (political economy) is to understand more fully how the *unsustainable* is being *sustained*" and "a reliance on 'actor projects' alone is not sufficient. The question is which will succeed and which will fail and why." (p. 25 and 27, respectively; original emphasis) The "why" here is critically important, as it is not sufficient to simply state that politics guide the evolution of actor-networks; the more important issues revolve around what those politics are and how they are incorporated into actor-networks. Actor-network analysis provides some useful tools in dealing with troublesome dualities from a radical relational ontological perspective, and it has made remarkable progress in operationalizing the network metaphor in research, but ANT must be tempered by other perspectives to address the processes of negotiation resulting (or not) in successful relationships, and the politics involved in these negotiations.

3) Neo-regulationism: the “Quality Turn” and Conventions Theory

Neo-regulationism has been the other major theoretical project to present meso- and micro-theoretical frameworks to represent the “embeddedness” (Granovetter 1985) of agri-food political economic orders in contested and local social and natural relationships. Macro-level theorizing took a serious blow in the wake of Goodman and Watts’ critique of Fordist-style political economy (Goodman and Watts 1994), including conventional regulationist work on food regimes such as that of Friedmann and McMichael (1989). Micro-regulationist accounts filled the void by contrasting state-level regulation apparatuses with the negotiation of agri-food relations at the local and individual level. As Buttel (2001) put it, “the heart and soul” of neo-regulationism in agri-food research has been Conventions Theory. The theory was developed by a group of French scholars (Eymard-Duvernay 1989; Boltanski and Thevenot 1991; Allaire and Boyer 1995; Wilkinson 1997), and its use has proliferated in agri-food studies through research into countertrends to standardized and homogenized global food systems as the ‘quality’ of food and its social relations have become organizing principles for a wide variety of product differentiations and producer-consumer networks.

Wilkinson notes in his major review of conventions as a possible new paradigm of economic analysis the indebtedness of conventions theory to the primary theorists of the actor-network, Latour and Callon, as communicated in the foundational work on conventions (Boltanski and Thevenot 1991).

“For conventions theory, rules are not prior to action nor are they elaborated from outside the action but emerge within the process of actor co-ordination. More specifically they represent a response to problems arising within such coordination and should be understood as mechanisms of clarification which are themselves also open to future challenge. They are therefore dynamic representations of negotiation and as such depend on the existence of prior commonalities among the actors involved. Such ‘common knowledge’ or ‘intersubjective identification of the rules’ does not exist in the abstract nor can it be known by an exercise of pure rationality. Rather it has to be recursively interpreted in given situations through the way in which actors relate to a common set of objects which are mobilized through their action. The qualification of objects therefore is simultaneously the qualification of the actors involved. The scope of such collective action is dynamically determined by a process of permanent justification and testing.

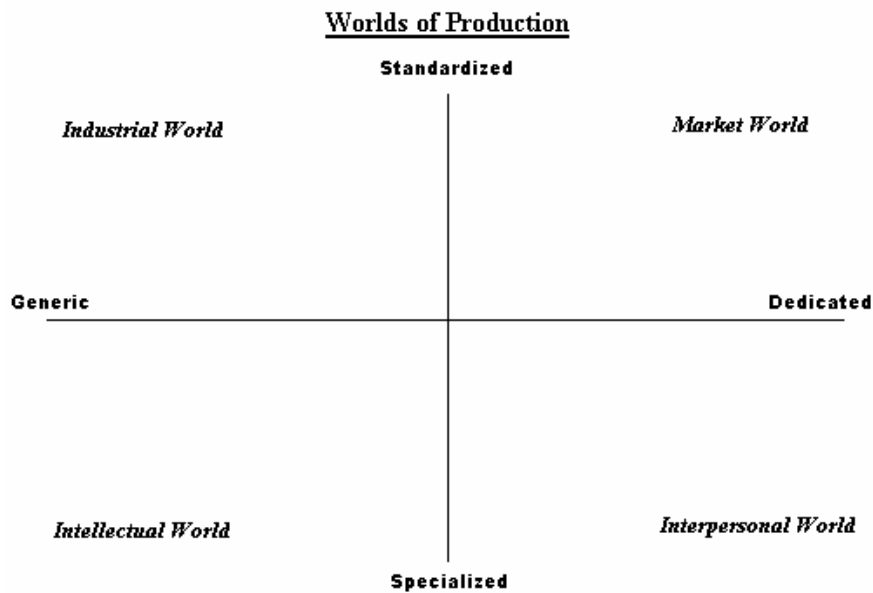
At this point convention theory deploys the same methodology as actor-network analysis in its interpretive rather than explanatory approach, its

insistence on the situational character of action, and its symmetrical treatment of actors and objects.” (Wilkinson 1997) (p. 318)

It is not surprising, then, to find that some of those agro-food researchers who have used conventions theory to inform their studies tend to have an affinity for actor-network theory as well (Murdoch, Marsden et al. 2000; Raynolds 2002). The main benefits of convention theory in economic analysis are stated by Wilkinson (1997) to be its focus on “(1) the quality rather than the price and quantity of products; (2) the uncertainty within which actor co-ordination takes place and to which the emergence of conventions are a strategic response; and (3) the notion of conventions as defining production rationalities for each kind of product which are not reducible therefore to neo-classical profit-maximizing.” (p. 322) Consequently, while actor-network theory and conventions theory share a relational ontology and a basic methodology, their respective objects of research differ. ANT focuses interest on the coincidence and the relational co-productions among materiality, social relations, and discourse. Where conventions theory deviates from ANT is in its explicit focus on the negotiations and compromises among multiple “orders of worth” (Boltanski and Thevenot 1991; Boltanski and Thevenot 1999) in mitigating the uncertainties of agri-food production, exchange, and consumption. This is opposed to ANT’s more topological relationalism, radical incorporation of non-human actors, and focus on points of translation. In short, conventions theory offers frameworks for classifying relationships and the ways in which they are produced, linking these processes to product qualities in a way that ANT’s obsession with symmetry has distracted it from accomplishing.

There are two primary typologies of conventions analysis prevalent in agri-food literature. The first is a framework for investigating the conventions prevalent in the negotiation of productive social relations, and the second involves classifying products and production processes in terms of conventions about product qualities and the forms of production processes. The first is also the direct output of the French school from which conventions theory originated, while the second is an adaptation by the economic geographer Michael Storper. In the original formulation, social relations of production and exchange are negotiated and mediated among actors based on mutually agreed moral

Figure 1: Worlds of Production Framework



**Source: (Storper 1997)*

justifications. This approach does not avoid society-nature dualisms as does ANT, but it does allow more nuanced accounts of the relational production of economic networks through a typology of moral justifications. The most common types of moral justification in agri-food conventions studies have been termed *commercial*, *industrial*, *public*, *civic*, *domestic*, and *ecological*. This typology will be clarified below with examples of its use. The adaptation by Storper (Storper 1997; Storper and Salais 1997) separates economic conventions into four “worlds of production” as the quadrant of a 4X4 matrix (seen above in Figure 1) based on two dimensions of production – “standardized” vs. “specialized” production processes and “generic” vs. “dedicated” intended customer base. The four “worlds” include the *industrial world*, the *market world*, the *interpersonal world*, and the *world of intellectual resources*, representing a rough set of archetypes of production in competitive markets. Agri-food researchers have tended to use both of these typological approaches to link social relations within alternative agri-food networks to new types of products with certain product qualities.

Conventions theory has been used to elucidate a wide variety of objects of research. Commodity chain studies have shown it to be useful in explaining productive niches and product differentiation for alternative quality food products in short food supply chains (Murdoch and Miele 1999; Murdoch, Marsden et al. 2000), where *domestic*, *civic*, and *ecological* conventions have helped artisan producers and industrial producers, alike, to market to large numbers of consumers with specialized tastes and desires for quality. Raynolds (2002) has found conventions useful in “demonstrating that networks based on trust and fairness can be woven on a world-wide scale”, as domestic and civic conventions underpin this weaving of fair trade networks and serve to “‘shorten’ the social distance between consumers and producers even where the products being exchanged traverse substantial geographic distances.” The uncertainty of economic relations at the heart of conventions theory is the subject of Claire Lamine’s work on community-supported agriculture in the United States (Lamine 2005). In her study, conventions underpin a mix of guarantees and promises between farmer and CSA member, helping to mitigate uncertainties in income for the farmer and in the quality and contents of the food share for the consumer-member. Governance issues in labeling schemes have also been usefully theorized using conventions, where food labels support alternative geographies of food that are underpinned by the geography of conventions incorporating participants in regional and food quality labeling schemes (Parrot, Wilson et al. 2002). Finally, Vitterso, et al. (2005) highlight the partiality and hybridity of conventions in their case studies of local, organic food initiatives in Norway and Denmark. The success and growth of each initiative was dependent on balancing multiple conventions simultaneously toward hybrid practices and relations, and the local initiatives were promoted alongside marketing through conventional food systems, demonstrating local food initiatives and alternative agri-food valuations and relations as incomplete, partial counter-trends intertwined with that which they counter. The conventions framework is clearly versatile, informing studies of short commodity chains, international coordination of global value chains, alternative agri-food governance models, micro-coordination of individual initiatives, and the multiplicity and hybridity present in even the simplest of agri-food relations.

As with any theoretical framework, there are things conventions theorizing does well and silences that beg other perspectives. Starting on a positive note, conventions theorizing allows for nuanced depictions of the motivations and justifications shaping products and processes. It is not agnostic on the subjectivity of connection as ANT tends to be. It is also capable of middle-level concepts (as in the “worlds of production” framework of Storper) that invite comparative studies and conclusions about broader geographical relationships between conventions and economic developments. Conventions theory also accommodates a symmetrical sense of agency, where agreement and contestation of conventions both arise from the need of all actor-participants to bridge uncertainties and to justify actions in economic processes. Power is accessible in these processes through the negotiation of uncertainties that leads to conventions, although the processes of negotiation are not as well theorized as the resulting conventions.

Conventions theory also has its fair share of shortcomings. One failing is that despite its capacity for middle-level concepts, few of them have been forthcoming to conceptualize broad processes of food system evolution. The complexity of conventions accounts, like those of ANT, tends toward somewhat isolated case-studies, with only tentative connections with broader processes. It lends itself to short supply chains and relatively uniform networks/assemblages for reasons of practicality in probing the complex conventions coordinating market differentiations; it is easier to investigate coherency in well-established programs than dissonance in only partially established relationships. Another important criticism is that conventions suffers alongside ANT with a focus on successes that does not adequately represent failed negotiations and unbridgeable uncertainties. Furthermore, although conventions theory acknowledges the importance of politics in the negotiation of conventions, there is nothing inherent in conventions theory itself to aid in the representation of power, authority, and politics in negotiating agri-food relationships. With these two criticisms combined, conventions theory has just as much a problem as ANT in neglecting exclusionary politics and strong asymmetries of power. A final negative represents an opportunity, in that conventions

analysis has been largely confined to European agri-food studies, and its usefulness for studying North American and other agri-food contexts remains to be seen.

4) The Emperor's New Clothes: "Development" and the Politics of Alternatives

Where actor-network and conventions approaches have thrived in the representation of previously unseen localizations of agri-food relations and contestations of unifying global processes, the conclusions from these studies have sometimes bordered on excessive confidence of the revolutionary processes afoot through such contestations and localizations. A body of literature has been growing since the late 1990's to critically examine the politics of alternative agri-food practices and advocacy in light of what the authors view as uncritical optimism, particularly with regard to the prospects of rural development, farm ecologies, and food security. This literature provides less theoretical coherency than the previous sections on ANT and conventions, but it engages a rich literature of critical political and social theory in its efforts to bring light to the theoretical silences and optimisms of other theoretical traditions. The high theory of conventional political economy has found expression in this work, but new intellectual projects have also featured prominently, including cultural studies and theoretical grappling with global-local tensions through recent debates on the politics of space and scale. This critical agri-food literature represents a resurgence of politics in the political economic agri-food research, one that heeds criticisms of reductionist and "heroic accounts of powerful actors" (Whatmore and Thorne 1997) at the same time as it asserts the importance of political consideration in the study of food system alternatives, localizations, contestations, and evolution.

In the wake of decades of extractive rural and farm economics, there is much at stake for rural development in the global North with blooming consumer interests for foods with all sorts of qualities, values, and places associated with them. European and North American agri-food social research have both been searching for signs of rural renaissance in these shifting food demands, with "short food supply chains" (SFSC's) the common object of focus in Europe and direct marketing, "civic agriculture", or alternative agri-food networks as the focus in the U.S. Proponents claim that civic

agriculture is an alternative to commodity agriculture, either through direct marketing or other marketing avenues, and thus is an opportunity for alternative non-extractive social and ecological relationships between production and consumption (Lyson and Guptill 2004). Short food supply chains are said to offer “clear signals of provenance and quality” to consumers, to “‘short-circuit’ the long, anonymous supply chains” and encourage a “‘shortening’ of relations between food production and locality, ... re-embedding of farming towards more environmentally sustainable modes of production” (Renting, Marsden et al. 2003) (p. 398) Debate over the validity of these claims has placed critical focus on a number of assumptions relating these alternatives to equitable outcomes based on their potential, not actual development.

The first contested assumption is that urban consumption of rural images, values, and environment along with its food products is unproblematic and should be promoted. Both marginal rural areas and industrial agricultural “hotspots” in the global North have suffered loss of middle-sized peasant family farms and of net farm income, and if urban consumers have become aware of that fact and now wish to support such lifestyles, the consumption of “the rural” is a good way of valorizing them in the market. So the argument goes, at any rate. This argument, while well meaning, ignores the complex ways in which the rural is produced and consumed through direct marketing, agri-tourism, SFSC’s, and other forms of alternative economic networks. Consumption of the rural through food, imagery, or experience melds interests of supporting rurality and agrarian lifestyles with diverse other experiential interests such as fine dining (Miele and Murdoch 2002), exotic and new foods for upper-class sensibilities (Guthman 2003), and whimsical and sterilized/genericized representations of the rural for ready consumption (DuPuis 2000). These and many more are ways in which the rural is translated and produced for ready consumption, and each of them are characterized by a politics of production and consumption. These politics are as diverse as the productions and consumptions themselves, and there is just as much history and future potential for social exclusion and distorted and manipulative representations in the production/consumption of rurality as there is for equitable, win-win relationships between rural production and urban consumption. It should not be assumed that marketing the rural to affluent

urbanites will lead to equitable and sustainable development outcomes before questioning who has access to the rural, what kinds of access are there, and what kind of rurality is being produced and developed (Goodman 2004).

The second assumption is that environmental sustainability goes along with shorter and more embedded supply chains. That the capitalization and industrialization of agriculture has diminished farm ecologies and led to environmental ills is unquestioned, but to automatically equate new forms of commodity chains and economic networks with positive environmental and ecological outcomes is dangerous. Economic development interests and environmental protection interests have rarely aligned, and at least one study shows that the alignment of these interests among alternative agri-food producers is rare as well (Brodt, Feenstra et al. 2006). Even where they overlap, there is ample opportunity for diminished environmental benefits as seen in the conventionalization of organic agriculture through its industrialization, appropriation by capital, and the manipulation of organic regulations by powerful interests (Guthman 1998; Allen and Kovach 2000; Vos 2000; Guthman 2004; Guthman 2004; Ingram and Ingram 2005). Local food movements and embedded supply chains may deliver ample sites and opportunities for synergy between eco-agriculture, better rural environments, and harmonious economic and community development, but the production of these synergies is locally contingent, tied to wider national and international forces of capital and policy, and wedded to the social relations inherent to new producer-consumer networks that shape the rural. Indeed, the interdependence of “alternative” production-consumption circuits with “conventional” ones, as well as other geographies of capitalization and urban/rural development, has led several scholars to question the division of agri-food enterprises and activities with dualistic alternative/conventional labels (Allen, FitzSimmons et al. 2003; Whatmore, Stassart et al. 2003; Watts, Ilbery et al. 2005; Holloway, Kneafsey et al. 2007).

The third and final assumption is that “the local” is inherently opposed to and more equitable than “the global” when it comes to food systems. Traditional political economic accounts have linked negative farm outcomes and the concentration and homogenization of food systems to the growth of global food relations. Efforts have

followed to reassert the local both in theory and in practice as a way of mitigating, and hopefully remediating, many of the socially and politically negative outcomes of agri-food development. Yet, local relations have just as much potential for injustice as do global relations. “Defensive localism” expressed through un-reflexive consumption and production in defense of the local against external agents and forces is a common feature in local food movements, endangering reflexive debate over how to proceed through local development toward progressive outcomes (Hinrichs 2003; Winter 2003). Power and local elites can be problematic as well in defining which relations and products can be included as local and which cannot. Local as a generically applied term also serves to obscure the particular relations, or “militant particularisms”, that underpin developments, production, and consumption (Allen, FitzSimmons et al. 2003). In the end, there is no guarantee that local food relations will be any more just either on-the-farm or elsewhere in the production chain, nor are there guarantees that equitable access to quality food for all consumers will be constructed through alternative agri-food initiatives (Allen 1999; Allen 2004). The “conflation of spatial and social relations” (Hinrichs 2003) in the ideology of food localism is, indeed, troublesome.

Troubling as they may be, these critiques present an opportunity more than they do a rebuke of alternative agri-food research. A number of the key authors of these criticisms have made useful suggestions about possible theoretical lines of inquiry to inform our evaluations of alternative agri-food projects without making such generalizing and problematic assumptions. Evans, et al. and Marsden have noted the potential applicability of ecological modernization for wedding environmental stewardship and continued agricultural and rural production in a conceptual and political sense (Evans, Morris et al. 2002; Marsden 2004). Patricia Allen has usefully adapted the work of Raymond Williams and David Harvey regarding the role of ideology and culture in shaping patterns of consumption and modes of production (Allen, FitzSimmons et al. 2003; Allen 2004), and also in advocating a re-engagement with food security ideals (Allen 1999) for more equitable food systems. Hassanein (2003) has argued for the concept of “food democracy” as a guiding principle for pragmatic and de-centered progress toward transformed agri-food systems based on just relationships, implicitly

noting its prevalence as a potential object of research. Others have noted that the debates over the politics of space and scale in geography and other social sciences over the past few decades could add much value to theories of agri-food development, especially regarding the social construction and politics of space and place (Dupuis and Goodman 2005; Born and Purcell 2006; Feagan 2007). Each of these stimulating avenues of thought holds the potential to enable assessments of the politics of localization alongside its development contexts.

Alternative agri-food developments and networks will produce the same problems of conventional networks if they maintain the same politics. An appropriate theorization of the politics of agri-food relations is necessary toward investigating and understanding the social, ecological, and economic outcomes of alternative agri-food movements. Alternatives may not produce the same spatial tendencies of action as conventional food systems, but the spatial tendencies hint at differential socio-material relationships more than a difference in the politics that produce them (Born and Purcell 2006). Understanding which actors and processes benefit most and in which ways from localization, ecological modernization, and rural development strategies becomes the important focus for alternative agri-food social research. The following section will summarize key theoretical themes that provide pieces to the puzzle of differentiating actors and agendas politically and socially, and it will also set forth a basic theoretical approach for this study before a more thorough elaboration in later sections.

5) Toward a Hybrid Framework for Studying Local Food Systems: Embeddedness, Networks, and Politics

There has been much progress and debate in the past fifteen years toward theoretical accounts of agri-food political economy that do justice to global relations and patterns without alienating or marginalizing the contested local patterning of these relations. The new theories and methodologies offer a wide array of perspectives, but little in the way of comprehensive conclusions. Formalized actor-network theory has risen and fallen, as it has made its mark in opening our eyes to multiple, partial, and contested topologies of relationships while its limitations have gradually been found to outweigh its potentials in practical implementations of research. Conventions theory has

entertained a less radical ontology than ANT, but it has helped in representing the social construction of quality and the mediation of economic arrangements through social relations. Yet, conventions theory has also failed to offer a convincing representation of agri-food politics. Critical analysis of the politics of alternative agri-food relations exposes paradoxes of development for their subaltern participants, but these accounts offer precious few systematic empirical observations of the processes of compromise in building local food networks. Despite the seeming chaos of the recent agri-food theoretical landscape, there are potential complementarities among these multiple frameworks that should be explored toward a more unified interplay between the various perspectives.

The localization of food systems involves actors at each stage of commodity chains and of all different organization types and agendas. A theoretical agenda which seeks to inform strategies toward progressive social, economic, and environmental outcomes for food localization efforts must successfully interpret how local food economic systems are produced. The decisions and motivations of the social actors who construct local foods through commodity chains must be represented, as must the processes of partnership and coalition formation that empower these constructions. The politics of production and access to these processes must also be represented. These theoretical needs in understanding the evolution of local food political economies can be met by careful attention to the social embeddedness of commodity chains, the networks of relationships that are constructed in the process of building commodity chains, and the politics that govern the ability to participate in these networks.

I would like to propose a triangulation among these three theoretical themes of embeddedness, networks, and politics through engaging with three different theoretical literatures in economic sociology and economic geography. The network metaphor has been tossed around and applied toward a number of theoretical and empirical agri-food research agendas. I would argue that there is a way of using it more formally than simply as a metaphor – rather, as an actual interpretative framework – without carrying along much of the radical disempowering analytical baggage of ANT. ANT is by no means the only formal network analysis developed within the social sciences, and recent

collaborations between mathematicians, physicists, and social scientists have offered interesting new techniques for formally modeling and analyzing networks. For all its interesting applications and successes, conventions theory cries out for understanding conventions as produced networked relationships, even if they are constantly evolving. Conventions theory frameworks are middle-level concepts that help to interpret the embeddedness of economic activity in social relations, particularly in the way that practices are mutually negotiated among actors and codified into norms. It is interesting that the term embeddedness derives from one of the forefathers of current social network research, Mark Granovetter (1985). Network analysis can provide a skeletal, topological context, where conventions theory can put some meat on the bones of network analysis, comparing the prevalence of different conventions across different network contexts.

Of course, merely correlating structure with agency, network topologies with mutually produced conventions, is not sufficient for an integrative political economic theoretical framework. Politics becomes the third theme to complete the triumvirate, to help in presenting the reasons why conventions and topologies have co-evolved the way they have. Evaluating individual agri-food initiatives solely on the basis of political theory is rather tenuous, and political analysis can benefit greatly from the kind of social and structural context that conventions and network analysis can provide. Conventions and network analysis also are aided by representing the socially networked embeddedness of economic activity as part of political projects of change and evolution. The complementarity between these three perspectives could prove very effective in determining the kinds of social relations that are enabled and empowered in the alternative agri-food contexts of Kansas.

Adaptations of conventions theory, network analysis, and theorizations of spatial politics can collectively contribute to a more comprehensive regional picture of local food systems in Eastern Kansas than could any of these theories on their own. The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to addressing particular formulations of network analysis, conventions theory, and political analysis that may build on previous agri-food theorizations and successfully form the foundation of the local food system analysis for this dissertation. Each theoretical perspective will be discussed individually, noting the

specific theoretical engagements to be used in this study, the potential complementarities with the other perspectives, and also the potential blind-spots in my adaptations of theory.

B) Theoretical Adaptations

1) Fundamental Agreements among “Embeddedness”, “Networks” and “Politics”

Environmental sustainability, economic development, and social justice are all outcomes of collective action. No individual effort can be assessed as sustainable, progressive, or just without considering the social context of this effort, the relationships it has with broader efforts that cumulatively impact collective goods. The local food movement challenges anonymous, industrial, globalized food systems on the basis that the collective outcomes of these conventional systems are negative, and in the hope that turning to more localized options will re-embed agri-food systems in environmentally, economically, and socially beneficial relations. However, assessing whether the impacts of local food developments are meeting the ideals that have motivated them requires investigating the dynamic interactions among the many different kinds of local food projects as well as their relationships to conventional agri-food systems. A regional context – where groups of food localization efforts collectively construct local food and its impacts through competition, cooperation, and negotiation – is necessary for taking this wider view of local food developments.

My study attempts to expand the sphere of empiricism beyond the level of individual case studies and toward an integral view of regional dynamics in agri-food localization. The more successful programs and agendas within such a regional context could shape expectations and hopes for current local food efforts, and could also serve a more reflexive and geographically informed alternative agri-food activism. However, identifying and assessing successful projects and dominant agenda's among the local food movement is a non-trivial exercise in theoretical development and application – much less linking these agendas to collective environmental, social, and economic goods. As reviewed in the sections above, agri-food research has been grappling with theoretical concerns relevant to assessing local foods for quite some time, especially with regard to

who and what can be consider an actor or agent in agri-food relationships, what can be considered action in socially constructed agri-food systems, how to classify activity, and how to conceptualized power and justice. This research project is an attempt to outline a regional landscape of local food development, and in so doing it needs to consider how to identify local food participants, how to classify the motivations and agendas that bind together local food supply chains, how to perceive the extent to which participants share agendas and the burdens of development, and how to evaluate the opportunities and limitations created by these coalitions of interests. The following introduces a hybrid theoretical framework built on the successes of researching social embeddedness, the applicability of the network metaphor, and the importance of spatial politics for contemporary political economic development in the alternative agri-food theorizing of recent years.

The theoretical hybrid is constructed from elements of conventions theory, network analysis, and political theory in the production of space, and at its foundation are three theoretical agreements between the three theories. My understanding of these three agreements has its root in the work of Doreen Massey in her articulation of a “re-imagining of space” toward an understanding of the “spaces of politics” (Massey 1999). Much as agri-food actor-network theorists, and to a certain extent conventions theorists, have argued, Massey’s work suggests that space is intimately implicated with politics, and that both are profoundly relational. The political economy of agriculture and food has endured a ‘relational turn’ since the early 1990’s in order to grapple with processes and sites of production and consumption which are increasingly viewed as contested and always-in-the-making. Theoretical research themes of embeddedness (in the form of conventions theory), networks (in the form of ANT and other applications), and politics (under the guise of debates on “glocalization” (Swyngedouw 1997) and the social justice of alternative agri-food relations) are all part of this ‘relational turn’, and I would like to highlight three agreements among them that forge a potentially fruitful partnership for studying the mixed, overlapping, and differentiating agendas of local food in a regional context.

The first such agreement is one involving relational ontologies. Conventions posits that actors cannot be understood apart from their justifications for action; actor and action are part and parcel of the same dialectical unity, and compromise is the process of relationally justifying activity. Networks in this study link actors/agents as at least partially constructed through their extensive and intensive relations in the network; the pattern and the individual are dialectically produced. Power is also produced relationally, particularly through the asymmetrical relationships that are the source of difference and disruption. Politics is both the disrupted distributions of power in these relationships and the tendency for these relationships to order and disrupt other patterns of relationship. Conventions, networks, and politics all share a relational ontology uniting actor/agent, process, and structure/context, even as the articulation of that ontology is framed differently for each of the perspectives.

The second agreement involves the characteristics and processes of producing relationships. Any relationship is difficult to characterize, with multiple partial dynamics feeding and disrupting each other. These are the dynamics that challenge conventional relationships and dominant processes, and thus any theorization of alternative agri-food processes must consider the relational contestations that are the sources of alternativeness. Network analysis sees this contestation as performed by peripheral actors within networks establishing links to become more central actors or brokers within the network as well as disrupting the links of dominant processes. No network is immune to such relational destabilizations and shifts. Conventions theory, on the other hand, perceives incompleteness and contestation as embodied in the processes of establishing relationships themselves, as in the negotiation of conventions as agreements among actors that codify and guide the terms of production and trade. These conventions are always under negotiation and are thus always partial and incomplete and vulnerable to new circumstances. Finally, spatial political theorizing sees the actions and presences of each site of agri-food activities as the product of political projects on the part of actor-participants. As multiple actors and processes inhabit these sites, the sites are themselves multiple and contested, and the challenge is to assess the politics of contestation over the sites of alternative agri-food projects to understand their role in promoting or distracting

from alternativeness, however that might be defined. Each of the theoretical perspectives proposed – social embeddedness through conventions, extensive relationalism through networks analysis, and politics as through the contestation of agri-food inhabitations – at least imply some level of incompleteness to agri-food processes and systems.

The third and final agreement between the three perspectives is in the production of spaces and places. Building alternative economic systems of food provision involves engaging and producing new spaces of activity and new combinations of space in places. This statement derives from debates about the new spaces and scales of political economic globalization. The theoretical foundations of this literature hold that shifts in capitalism and in access and equity for participants in the spatial interplay between global and local scales are guided by the political projects of these participants. The new politics of economic development in the post-hegemonic state, post-Fordist contemporary global economy are a result of changing politics of the productions of space themselves. Conventions theory views this spatial dynamic as guided by the conventions constructed by the actors in agri-food relationships, where the resulting spaces and places of production and exchange are co-produced with the practices negotiated among actors. Place and space are products of negotiated relationships from the conventions theory perspective. The network perspective adds another important element to this mix by recognizing relationships as constituting their own abstract space in the form of topology. The establishment and maintenance of relationships certainly entails spatial involvement, but it also entails the production of topological relational space as well.

Local food is part of the broader contestation of conventional, industrial, and global agri-food systems. The contestation is politically, socially, and materially constructed, and a relational ontology helps as a foundation for understanding the interdependency and indeterminacy of the relationships shaping this contestation. At the same time, contestation implies conflict; it is rare to encounter purely conventional or purely alternative foods or agri-food relationships, and perspectives offering partial accounts of alternative constructions are important for reflecting the incomplete processes of alternativeness. Finally, farm ecologies, popular eating districts, direct marketing settings, and grocery store shelves are all examples of the spatial production of

agri-food systems, and they all represent settings where the partial constructions of “conventional” and “alternative” conflict and coalesce. An agreement that the partial social construction of agriculture and food is also a social construction of space is important for grounding agri-food relationships in the places and spaces that are the objects of their design. The environmental, social, and economic impacts sought by the local food movement are a product of the collective projects and relationships driven by its ideals, and questions about whether the impacts live up to the ideals can only be answered through recognition of the spatial and relational productions, and their broader geographical implications, that are the foundations of local food. Each of the three following sections is a closer look at how each theoretical perspective addresses a unique aspect of these general agreements.

2) Conventions Theory: Agendas, Socializations, and Strategies among Local Food Pathways

The value of the conventions frame in this dissertation’s hybrid theoretical agenda derives largely from the work of Boltanski and Thevenot in developing a model for the “orders of worth” (1991; 1999) that economic actors use to coordinate economic activity. One of the primary arguments of conventions theory is that the rational actor model of economic behavior fails when there is uncertainty regarding the quality of products. Such uncertainty requires negotiation and compromise among economic actors to obtain consensus about the proper product qualities. Boltanski and Thevenot have articulated six “worlds” of justification (*inspired, domestic, civic, opinion, market, and industrial*), based on moral framings of worth in various classic texts in political theory that they argue are broadly used by actors to frame negotiations over product qualities and production processes (Boltanski and Thevenot 1999). It is uncertainty that has led to contemporary questioning and contesting of conventional industrial agri-food relations, and it is uncertainty that continues to shape local foods and their social and environmental relationships. The ability to discern multiple justifications for action in the economics of the local food movement could be quite useful, and there are three primary benefits to using conventions theory in studying local food economics.

First, the categories of conventions delineated by Boltanski and Thevenot provide a basis for differentiating local foods from conventional/industrial foods based on the orders of worth that participants use to guide them through the uncertainties of production and consumption. Local food relations must mediate uncertainties for consumers, producers, and intermediaries about the provenance and quality of foods, the complex valuations by consumers of foods, and production methods and ecological relations. By viewing the reasons for participation from a limited set of moral framings, conventions theory offers a vantage from which one can understand the common moral underpinnings of local food alternatives. Furthermore, understanding local food and its moral justifications as constituted through the negotiations of participants, local food and its conventions are best conceived as relationally constituted in keeping with the agreement of relational ontology noted in the previous section.

The second value almost contradicts the first, in that it involves questioning the commonalities of local food activities. Conventions may help us to see the unevenness of local food, both in terms of the plurality of constructions and justifications of local foods and their relations and also in terms of the plurality of justifications incorporated into each individual local food. Indeed, Thevenot sees injustice as arising from incommensurate and competing justifications of action (Boltanski and Thevenot 2000), and organizations and institutions as largely functioning to segment and disperse the justifications necessary for production among different participants so as to efficiently compromise among these justifications (Thevenot 2001). Local food networks could be said to perform the same function in a more informal sense than an individual organization or institution, and assessing the plurality of “orders of worth” present throughout the plurality of productive sites in the networks is vital to understanding and representing the multiple economic agendas of the local food movement. This is, of course, in keeping with the second agreement from above regarding the partiality and incompleteness of contested relational agendas like the local food movement.

Third, conventions can be the focal frame in studying the clustering of ‘local food’ activities into economic networks and through economic spaces. Michael Storper’s “worlds of production” (Storper and Salais 1997) discussed earlier in this chapter is one

way of representing general production strategies that result from common conventions of coordination. This framework is an example of the strategies used to distance production processes from each other in the spaces of production and consumption. It has applicability in the reading of the spaces of local food for product types and strategies, as well as the different “orders of worth” that are part of the production of local food spaces, as Holloway and Kneafsey have shown is of importance in their reading of the spaces of the farmers market (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000). Linking individual foods and supply chains to wider networks through conventions provides a third agreement between conventions theory and the other theoretical perspectives proposed for this study. The community structure network analysis and spatial analysis proposed below are both complemented by reading local food spaces and linking of participants to these agendas and spaces.

The three-fold value of conventions theory to the study of the political economy of local food represents an important contribution toward a theorization of the relational, partial, and spatial constitution of the local food movement. In particular, the notion of “orders of worth” provides a robust model for evaluating the competing priorities at work in constructing alternative agri-food projects. This is in the tradition of Claire Hinrichs’s identification of “marketness” and “instrumentalism” as important values ordering farmers markets and CSA programs (Hinrichs 2000), and also successfully implemented by Laura Raynolds in describing the values underlying the creation of global fair trade coffee networks as an alternative to the conventional coffee commodity chain (Raynolds 2002). This model also could assist in reading spaces such as farmers markets, akin to the work of Holloway and Kneafsey (2000), especially in coordination with a framework like Storper’s worlds of production. Yet, interpretation of collaborative coalitions and spatial projects are still elusive given only conventions theory. The following sections will take up these issues.

3) Networking Local Food

The study of economic embeddedness in dynamic social relations and the use of network analysis in social and economic research both owe a great debt to the same person. In the late 1970’s, Mark Granovetter gave social network analysis a significant

boost with his revelation that weak rather than strong relationships were responsible for most information exchange in social networks, the “strength of weak ties” thesis. This thesis was part of a broader agenda of Granovetter that very soon resulted in a reformulation of Polanyi’s concept of embeddedness in arguing that human action is “closely embedded in networks of interpersonal relations” and that considering the social embeddedness of economics in these networks could avoid the under-socialized accounts of economic activity in the rational actor model of neoclassical economic theory (Granovetter 1985). Since that time, network analysis has been a prominent fixture in economic sociology, and this presence has contributed to the continual development of social network analysis frameworks in sociology and cognate fields such as human geography. Actor-network theory is a part of this research legacy, concerning itself with both networks of relations and the embeddedness of not only action, but also the socio-materiality of actors themselves, in these networks. If notions of embeddedness have been an important corrective to under-socialized economic theory, the network metaphor and network analysis techniques are the means for weaving disparate accounts of extended embedded economic relationships into an interdependent and differentiated whole.

The network is a product or representation of interrelations. There are different ways to conceptualize the nature of nodes and of links, whether to consider the network as a set of conduits for the flow of information or products or to consider resources as fixed and to focus instead on the structures of relation in the network. There is also the matter of consequences, whether the network encourages homogeneity or social differentiation. These different conceptualizations are summarized in Table 1 below, and social research in the past few decades has focused on each of the four classes in this typology. Agro-food research does not fit neatly into the categories below, as the radical relationalism of actor-network studies of techno-scientific innovation (Busch and Jussa 1997) and new global value chains (Whatmore and Thorne 1997) break down the common structuralist/connectionist and homogeneity/variation dualisms of economic network sociology, as they do so many dualisms. However, the important conclusion is that the network metaphor and network analysis are flexible with regard to questions of

ontology, of agency, and of dynamics, able to put more and less reductionist ontologies to use under the same strongly relational framework of consideration. The network is an appropriate framework for noting connections between the production of local foods by network participants and the production of participants by other participants and by the foods themselves.

Table 1: Typology of Social Network Research Frames

	<i>Social Capital (performance variation)</i>	<i>Diffusion (social homogeneity)</i>
Structuralist (topology)	Structural Capital	Environmental Shaping
Connectionist (flows)	Social Access to Resources	Contagion

**Source: (Borgatti and Foster 2003)*

Part of the efficacy of identifying such connections through networks derives from the spatial nature of the network. The network is an alternate space, in itself, an abstract topological space, as opposed to a Euclidean geometrical space. The links of the network themselves create this topological space, and so space is produced through the extension of the network. The network can also be mapped onto geometrical space, thereby relating social space to more conventional geographical spaces such as region, territory, and place. A depiction of such a mapping in an economic network is shown below in Figure 2. The network therefore offers a view into the space of woven relationships that are hidden in conventional Euclidean spatial analysis and that may greatly influence the organization of conventional geographical space. The important research questions in making the connection between the production of networks and the production of local, regional, or global geographies involve identifying the types of relationships most implicated in the geographical phenomena in question for mapping in network-topological space. Conventions theory gives some theoretical grounding toward this end for the purposes of this research project. The flow of local foods in Eastern Kansas will be mapped as a network, but the construction of different local foods through conventions will serve to highlight the social relations producing topology of the network and the geography of local food development in the region.

Figure 1 consists of two maps. The left map is a network graph showing the geographical distribution of countries. Countries are represented as nodes, and lines connect them, indicating relationships or distances. The nodes are colored based on a scale from red (top) to blue (bottom). The right map is a geographical map of the world, showing the same countries as nodes. Lines connect the nodes, representing the same relationships or distances as in the left map. The nodes are colored based on a scale from red (left) to blue (right).

The social spaces of economic networks can be linked to their relational foundations through a structured representation of these relations, a series of nodes and links called the network. Specifically, it is the structural, topological characteristics of this network which translate between individual relationships and the broader spatial patterns of which they are a part. The partiality and plurality of networks is a result of variations among the traits of links themselves, but it results from variations in the social and geographical structure which binds these traits and links together into a whole. Social network analysis has traditionally engaged these pluralities and variations at three scales: the individual link, or *dyad*; the actor-oriented, or *ego-centered*, level; and the collective, or *group*, level. While conventions theory offers a superior framework for dyadic relations, ego-centered and group level network analyses offer ways of studying the extent to which some values, agendas, or strategies are represented throughout the

collective Eastern Kansas local food economic network and the ways in which they shape what can be called local food.

At the actor level, there are a number of ways of conveying the actor's position in the network. *Centrality* is one of the most basic, representing how well connected an individual is. Quantifying centrality involves calculating the number of connections (*degree*) an actor has relative to the rest of the network, or alternatively calculating the average number of links required to connect with other actors in the network (*closeness*). Another measure of centrality is that of *betweenness*, measuring how many other actors on average lie between the actor and any given other actor in the network. Other types of actor-level analysis involve characterizing the position or role of the actor in the network, many times according to an information or resource processing metaphor, variously called *isolate*, *liaison*, *bridge*, and more. These ego-centered measures and metaphors could be helpful in identifying key participants in local food networks, those who play important roles in linking disparate others into a cohesive network of activity and those who disrupt already existing networks, "exchange agents" and "gatekeepers" as some have called them (Ilbery and Kneafsey 1999).

At the group-level, there are a wide variety of procedures in network analysis, so I will simply try to cover a few of the more general concepts here. There are basic abstract properties such as *density* (how many links relative to the total possible number of links in a group or entire network) and *group centrality* (on average does the network contain actors with high or low centrality, closeness, or betweenness measures?), and there are also measures of *centralization* (measuring centrality of a group within an entire network) and the identification of *cliques*, *clusters*, and *cohesive subgroups* (how internally connected subgroups are, and how they relate to the wider network). This brief description is based on the organization of topics by Wasserman and Faust (1994) and does not come close to representing the full complexity and utility of these methods.

Many of the most interesting advances in quantitative network analysis methods in recent years have been in the area of identifying cohesive subgroups. A wide variety of authors have created algorithms based on *betweenness* measures to very accurately

identify cohesive clusters within social networks, and they have been calling these approaches *community structure algorithms* (Moody and White 2001; Newman 2004; Newman and Girvan 2004; White, Owen-Smith et al. 2004; Danon, Diaz-Guilera et al. 2005). The ego-centered projects of individuals feed into the building of cohesive subgroups within networks, and this interplay is a key dynamic in the production of difference in the social spaces of networks and the geographical spaces to which they relate.

Network analysis therefore has aptitudes in connecting individual relationships to the production of space as well as the differentiation and plurality of these relationships and spaces. Furthermore, it can provide a both intuitive and quantitative framework for evaluating the relationships between the production of local food, the production of social and geographical spaces, and the production of environmental, social, and economic impacts. However, too much focus on the topology of relationships can distract from studying the forms of agency and the struggles that produce the topology and that constrain the orders of worth that are acceptable in a given economic relationship. These struggles are ultimately political, in the negotiation of access and forms of production among active participants, and spatial, as the production of space is not symmetrical nor is it abstract. Networks tend to flatten the hierarchies of power and politics, as there is little room for coercion and manipulation in the symmetry of links. Power in networks is usually only expressed through the network structure itself, where those with many links are said to be influential. The ability for individuals to actively and unilaterally produce networks, spaces, and orders of worth is diminished in both conventions and network theories. While no action is truly unilateral, more sophisticated theorizations of politics and spatial play are needed to understand how some local food strategies and agendas constrain or empower others and result in group-level, collective environmental, social, and economic impacts.

4) Politics and the Production of Space

Efforts to build local food systems are implicitly grounded in attempts to re-order agri-food social relations as a remedy for the ills of globalized food systems: rural economic marginalization, environmental consequences of production and distribution,

and lack of consumer access to affordable foods free from food-borne diseases and with high nutritional content. This argument toward localizing agri-food relations frames the politics of this movement in terms of a global/local scalar dualism regarding the paths of agri-food development, and it also assumes that the solution to problems lies in the binary opposite of the systems which have created the problems. Yet, recent debates in human geography over the global/local binary in considering contemporary politics of scale would seem to contradict some of the claims for localism. They note that the relationships between scale, alienation of producers and consumers, and misuse of biological and material resources are anything but linear and predictable, and injustice can be present at any geographical scale.

This scholarship has done much to interrogate the processes of scaling in what many have called the globalization of economic networks and finance. Eric Swyngedouw has attracted much attention with his 'glocalisation' thesis (Swyngedouw 1997; Swyngedouw 2004), positing, 1) that globalization is only one half of a rescaling of economics where institutional and regulatory arrangements at the national scale have been simultaneously shifting toward the transnational and the local, regional, or bodily scales, and 2) that economic activities and orders simultaneously become more localized and more transnationalized in the process. Local orderings are thus dialectically linked to wider activities and orders, all the way to the global scale. Kevin Cox (1998) has developed a basic framework for considering local politics as a negotiation between spaces of dependence and spaces of engagement, where local orders are based on spaces of internal dependences within the local, and that these dependencies are solidified through extensive networks that reach out from the locale to engage in other territories and scales. Spaces of dependence are the locus of material and social processes upon which orderings depend, and they construct the local through the production of space in sites within the local, while at the same time being fuelled by broader spaces of engagement from beyond the local. Whether or not the distinction between spaces of dependence and engagement holds water, it is clear from both the work of Cox and Swyngedouw that the processes and politics of scaling, whether local, national or global, are closely related to the processes and politics in the production of space. In her review

of literature on the construction of scale, Marston (2000) summarizes the implications of this conclusion in the following: “As geographers, then, our goal with respect to scale should be to understand how particular scales become constituted and transformed in response to socio-spatial dynamics.” (p. 221) Indeed, in her most recent work, Marston has even challenged the very notion of scale as problematic in obscuring spatial processes (Marston, Jones et al. 2005). When local cannot be viewed as an ontologically identifiable scale, it seems that careful attention should be paid not just to the social and material relations in the production of local foods, but also to the spaces created and sustained through the connections of localism.

What, then, of the politics of localism? If the local cannot be viewed as ontologically separate from the global, or from bodily corporeality, is localism always fundamentally exclusive, unnecessarily bounded in the valorizations of interrelationship? Castree (2004) has argued against any simple association between defensive localisms and regressive politics. Far from simply misguided attempts to seek borders in a borderless world, the indigenous rights efforts Castree discusses engage in a politics of partially justified cultural and ethnic exclusivity, even as they engage in multi-scalar political associations to support their localist cause for a geographical space all their own. The successes and failures of these movements are more expressions of the extended and multi-scalar political networks than they are expressions of self-determination among displaced peoples, leading one back to the conclusion that any resultant purified indigenous space will remain disrupted by the relationships that constructed it. In light of the lack of consensus about any particular likely politics of localism, some have argued that agri-food research should not seek to assess whether or not localization strategies result in an equitable politics. Rather, the questions should be asked to ascertain the kinds of politics that are enabled through localization strategies toward a more reflexive politics of localism (Dupuis and Goodman 2005; Born and Purcell 2006).

The critical social theory which has informed many of the critical assessments of alternative agri-food politics has largely stemmed from investigations into the spatial productions of capitalism, even as it has contributed to debates about the construction of geographical scale. David Harvey’s writing has featured prominently in these accounts,

as one who has paid particular attention to tensions between local and global discourses, issues of justice, and the geographies of difference produced through spaces and in places. With regard to the politics of localism, his stance is adequately represented by a common quote in the above critical agro-food literature, “the contemporary emphasis on the local, while it enhances certain kinds of sensitivities, totally erases others and thereby truncates rather than emancipates the field of political engagement and action.” (Harvey 1996) p. 353 in (Winter 2003) Harvey’s elaborations of this truncated field have involved adaptations from the cultural theory of Raymond Williams in differentiating alternative from oppositional social movement aims, and also a chapter articulating the danger of allowing local “militant particularisms” to disrupt collaborative projects among multiple locales toward progressive “global ambitions” (Harvey 1996; Harvey 2000). These critiques have been the foundation of analysis by Patricia Allen and associates (Allen, FitzSimmons et al. 2003; Allen 2004), noting that alternative agri-food initiatives tend to espouse common global ambitions of confronting conventional agri-food relations with alternatives, but that the militant particularisms that underlie local food prevent these many initiatives from collectively opposing the global processes of capital at the foundation of conventional food systems. As prescient as Harvey’s arguments are for agri-food alternatives, especially given the conventionalization of organic agriculture, Dupuis and Goodman (2005) recommend a broader engagement with literature on the “new politics of scale”, represented by scholars such as Michael Watts and Doreen Massey, in addition to David Harvey, who see place-making as relational, open, and incorporating a variety of scales and spaces through external trans-local ties.

These authors share a common understanding of politics as rooted in space, and of space as the product of social relations. It is an understanding indebted to Lefebvre’s work on the production of space (Lefebvre 1991 (1974)). As Lefebvre describes:

“groups, classes or factions of classes cannot constitute themselves, or recognize on another, as ‘subjects’ unless they generate (or produce) a space. Ideas, representations or values which do not succeed in making their mark on space, and thus generating (or producing) an appropriate morphology, will lose all pith and become mere signs, resolve themselves into abstract descriptions, or mutate into fantasies.” (pp. 416-17)

In light of relative consensus in contemporary critical human geography of space as politically and relationally produced, Doreen Massey (1999) has argued that for a three-fold re-imagining of space: 1) as a product of interrelations, 2) as a sphere of multiplicity, and 3) as disrupted and as source of disruption. Alongside these three spatial tenets are three implications for a view to the politics of these spaces: 1) a radical commitment to the openness of the future (in contrast to any meta-theoretical or teleological narratives internalized in current narratives), 2) a recognition of the power of multiplicities and difference, and 3) a general alertness to dangers of essentialist modes of thinking. By recognizing the interrelations that construct spaces, the interrelations and construction of space become open to investigation, and the ‘power geometries’ that organize the production of space through these interrelations also become open to study and critique. It is also important to keep in mind that power itself has many modalities (Allen 1999), mimicking the multiplicity of spatial projects.

While this relational, spatial perspective on politics is demonstrably appropriate for the study of local foods, operationalizing this perspective is fraught with difficulty. There is always the tendency to default to scalar thinking, even as we recognize interdependencies between place-centered and widespread patterns of politics and development. Recent debates in human geography that have begun to erode the primacy of scalar thinking do offer some guidance for political economic inquiry, though. The relational re-imagining of space can be the foundation of a non-territorial, non-scalar, non-linear interpretation of space and place where place is a site of plural politics and multiple spatialities of involvement, and socio-material networks cross-cut and nest in these places through the production of spaces of involvement (Amin 2002). Marston, et al (2005) have argued for a human geography without scale that would pay attention to the sites and places of relational ordering, extensive to other sites and places, as well as intensive to bodily politics and social reproduction, through space. They claim that such a non-scalar human geography would not *a priori* partition research and knowledge the way vertical scalar axioms and horizontal network flows tend to do. These works point us toward studies that emphasize place-based sites that are relationally constituted and nested among and within each other.

While this is all very much under debate, for the purposes of this dissertation it will simply be assumed that scale and scalar thinking are contested and problematic, but that relationally produced space is critical to the political economic development of local foods. Even with a scalar frame, Harvey (2000) emphasizes that it is the shifting allegiances of interrelations that are important in co-constructing the local and the global. It is these shifting allegiances as represented through produced spaces that interest me in local food networks, and there is a strong resonance here between network analysis and a relational ontology for the production of space. In one sense, the production of local food is also a production of a network of relationships; in another sense, producing local food requires the production of space as well, as in the quote from Lefebvre above. If the production of space is implicated in the production of local food, the question arises, which kinds of space are produced in the processes differentiating local foods from one another? Conventions theory presents the multiple and intersecting agendas producing local food through competing values. The conclusions about space in this section would suggest that these values are part of the production of spaces ordered around these values, an expression of politics to be sure. Yet, the politics of producing and ordering spaces must take place in grounded sites of activity. Nigel Thrift's account of places as shaped by an ecology of influences, simultaneously real and imagined, suggests that places are the product of convergences, intermingling, and disruptions among plural spaces (Thrift 1999), consistent with the leanings of both Harvey and Marston, et al. The guiding questions for my own research from this literature on the politics and production of space are these: which are the successful spatial projects in the places and sites occupied by local foods, and what are the politics determining the presence of local foods in the places of Eastern Kansas?

C) Summary and Conclusions

Critiques of the political economy of agriculture have left agri-food research in search of a comprehensive theory. The political economy of agriculture developed throughout the 1970's-80's was critiqued as overly structural and systems-oriented, incapable of representing the dependency of its global commodity systems on contested and localized agendas, rather preferring accounts of powerful state and corporate actors

instead. Actor-network theory and conventions theory have been two significant theoretical approaches that have attempted to grapple with the nested and differentiated sites of power within global agri-food systems at the same time as giving voice to alternative project contesting and disrupting these powerful systemic orders. They, in turn, have been critiqued as lacking adequate conceptualizations of power through a politically disabling emphasis on relational symmetry and less-than-critical accounts of accounts of alternative agri-food projects. Critical theories of the production of space and scale have begun to take hold as a corrective to the political silences of ANT and conventions theories, but these criticisms have yet to put forward their own middle-level concepts for organizing empirical studies of conventional and alternative agri-food projects. In light of the continuing theoretical debates attempting to balance producer/consumer relations, power and social embeddedness, innovation, and more, I have opted for a hybrid theoretical stance triangulated between conventions theory, network analysis, and the production of space for the purposes of this study.

A host of important questions beg to be asked regarding the current growing cultural emphasis on local food as a means of redressing the ills of conventional global foods. Who stands to benefit from local foods? What kinds of politics are inhibited by these local foods? What are the probable unintended consequences of local food projects? What are the prospects for progressive environmental, social, and economic outcomes in the growth of local foods? In order to respond to these questions, we must first seek realistic depictions of the political economy of the local food movement. Although each of the theoretical developments in the study of alternative agri-food political economy are inadequate on their own, there are a number of resonances and agreements between them that should guide the construction of realistic depictions. The agreements used above to organize these depictions are that agri-food orders should be understood as relationally constituted, as always partial, plural, and incomplete, and as represented through the production of space. With these agreements in mind, one must restate the questions above alongside new questions. What are the different modes of local food production? Which are the more successful and/or prolific of these modes and what kinds of political economy are entailed in their production-consumption

circuits? What are their alignments and disagreements with conventional agri-food relations and with other local food orderings? How are do they both mitigate disruptions and create sources of disruption for others? Finally, how might we promote the right kinds of local food development in order to obtain progressive outcomes?

Triangulation has been recommended as a method for developing reflexive theoretical insights from multi-scalar economic relations where a single theoretical vantage is inadequate (Yeung 2003). In this chapter, I have presented a rationale for using adaptations of conventions theory, network analysis, and the politics of spatial production to triangulate the political economy of local food in a regional context. The choice of this theoretical triad is based on their respective abilities to represent different perspectives of local food development. Conventions theory helps to see the mobilization of values in individual local food chains, revealing the differentiation of the economics of local food into multiple agendas and strategies. Network analysis helps to see the alliances and fractures among local food economic relationships as they extend to form the differentiated structure of the network, and which may or may not align with the different local food agendas encountered through conventions theory. By investigating the productions of space in particular places where local foods are prevalent can give voice to the localized politics and networked mobilizations of values of local food. In this way, a theoretical triangulation of conventions theory, structural network analysis, and an analysis of the politics of spatial production can enliven an account of regional local food development as plural, differentiated, and relationally constituted in terms of individual intents and collective agendas. This perspective can help to develop more informed research questions for investigating the progressive effects of particular agri-food localization strategies.

The triad also enables a practicable methodology for studying relatively hidden alternative agri-food relations, which will be the focus of the following chapter. Researching actual local food networks must be done directly, as spatial relations are not a component of agricultural economic datasets and most local food economic arrangements to not fit neatly into conventional categories of economic activity. Discovering who are the local food participants is a challenge when there are no existing

databases with such information, and network analysis as a theoretical framework allows one to rely on identifying a few key informants who can largely reveal the network through their relationships with the other network participants. Conventions theory provides a set of orderings and values upon which to focus in the tracing of these networks, while the politics of space dictates attentiveness to alignments between network relationships and other produced spaces. Time and resources limit the researcher to studying less than the entirety of spaces, network participants, and conventions involved in the growth of local foods, and these constraints require compromises in developing a research methodology. The following chapter will outline the research methodology of performances and compromises in data gathering, analysis, and representation of local food relations used in this study based on the hybrid theoretical stance developed in this chapter.