

CHAPTER VII: SPACES AND PLACES IN THE LOCAL FOOD ECONOMY

A) Introduction: Spaces and Power in Local Food Networks

The regional evolution of local food systems features projects that challenge powerful corporate intermediaries, develop alternative agri-food networks, and negotiate new ways of relating among alternative agri-food participants. However, each of these projects is also a political effort to redefine and (re)produce spatial arrangements. It was noted in Chapter Two that all political projects must produce or order space, and this ordering is a permanence and expression of power. Together, the previous two chapters present local food networks as plural and differentiated, both structurally and in terms of the values and motivations of participants. Chapter Five identified cohesive network communities and highlighted important network hubs, key actors, and powerful entities that seemed to strongly influence the differentiation of Eastern Kansas local food relations and geographies. Chapter Six used conventions frameworks to analyze the social construction of local food pathways in an attempt to grapple with some of the internal processes defining local food and joining participants in common supply chains. However, network analysis is too structural and reductionist to grapple with the nuanced interpenetrations that constitute links in the network, and conventions theory does not provide any framework for understanding the socio-material basis for the negotiation of values. This chapter will use a relational spatial ontology and an ad hoc spatial classification system to present the place-based contexts of local food developments, as well as the productions of space required for such development.

The spatial classification system is concerned with the overlapping production of four types of space through the networks of this study: associational, physical, representational, and material-metabolic. These types of space were chosen to represent the distinct dimensions of spatial relations important in the ordering of innovative local food economic relationships. Physical spaces are the spaces of facilities and structures – typical three-dimensional Euclidean space. Associational space indicates the abstract space that binds the physical spaces of local food – the stores, farms, processing facilities, etc. – together through social relations; this is topological network space.

Representational spaces are the spaces of discourse surrounding local food – in-store advertisements, news media, visual spaces of product packaging, etc. Finally, material-metabolic spaces are the spaces of the complex bio-physical processes that constitute the materiality and metabolisms of foods, bodies, and inorganic materials. There is obviously substantial overlap and interdependence of these ideal spatial types, and none of the spatial types ever exist in isolation. However, by using this classification system it is possible to begin to understand the production of local food as the production of hybrid places and sites through specific manifestations and co-minglings of spatial types.

These spatial dynamics are another vantage from which to view the uneven development of local foods. They are at the root of struggles for small farmers to gain access to markets; of efforts by consumers to access quality foods; of the abilities of key participants and key places to order the networks, flows, and materialities of local foods; and of the types of power that are created and expressed through each of these spatial projects. Earlier discussions of types of participants and food, of networks of food flows among these participants, and of the values organizing these networks all preface this chapter's discussion of spaces and places. The focus of this chapter is to relate the politics of producing space and place to the negotiation of value in local foods and the construction of local food geographies through values and spaces/places. Just as in the previous two chapters, the local food network communities will serve as the relational contexts within which this spatial analysis is performed.

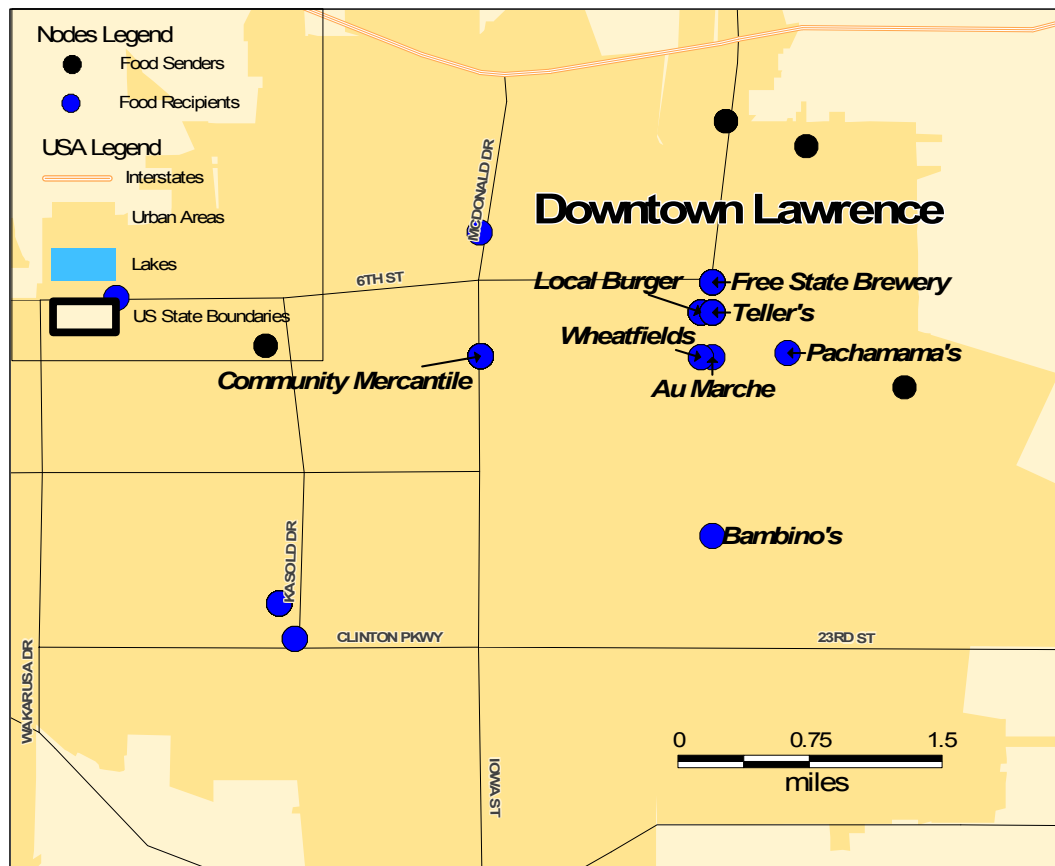
B) Collaborative Spaces of Lawrence

The previous chapters present Lawrence as an important geographic center of local food networks in Kansas, and they also suggest that these are relatively decentralized and interdependent developments compared with other networks. Chapter Five suggests as much by commenting on the strong interconnections throughout its network community, especially in a level of interconnection between restaurant and retail sectors that are not found in other network communities of the region. Chapter Six also emphasized the commitment of the prominent retailer, the Community Mercantile, to collaborations throughout the community based on promoting ecological and civic well-being for local food participants. The Lawrence farmers market was mentioned as a potential uniting

force in the local food network, although this study's network and conventions analysis were not designed to incorporate direct producer-consumer relationships very effectively. These analyses and my perceptions during fieldwork all suggest a more cohesive and collaborative culture of local food in Lawrence than in other Eastern Kansas locales. However, the interconnected networking and diverse values among local food producers, retailers, restaurants, and consumers all depend on the geographies of urban development in Lawrence for the sites of plural local food developments.

Commerce in Lawrence is centralized in districts along major highway corridors through the city. The more recent commercial developments at the peripheries of Lawrence have hosted mass-retailers, chain restaurants, and fast food establishments in the food sector. These box-store strip malls rely on values that are usually subordinate in local food relations: price sensitivity, standardization, and scale. Instead, local food is predominantly found in sites throughout the older districts, especially the historic downtown shopping area. With the important exception of the major retailer-participant, almost every other key participant in the Lawrence-area network described in previous chapters has made space for themselves in downtown Lawrence. Figures 47 and 48, below, illustrate these general geographical patterns of local food development, while Figures 49 and 50 depict the historic Lawrence downtown as a setting for the sites and spaces of local food.

Figure 48: Close-up Map Locating Lawrence Local Food Participants



Caption: Downtown Lawrence is the primary area of engagement for local foods. The Community Mercantile cooperative grocer is located at the periphery of the higher density and pedestrian accessible downtown residential district, but most of the face of the local food movement in Lawrence is found in the downtown shopping district. The cluster of restaurants above in blue is an indicator of the density of local food activity in this shopping district. By contrast, 6th Street to the West and Iowa Street to the South both host major mass-retailer shopping districts, with Wal-Mart and Target as the primary retailers. Wedged between them in Lawrence's western half is the primary residential growth area of Lawrence, featuring mostly low-density sprawling housing districts.

Figure 49: Elite Spaces in Downtown Lawrence



Caption: *Upper Left – the downtown building housing Teller’s upscale Italian restaurant in the foreground and a new building of upscale condominiums illuminated in sunlight in the background; Upper Right – the condominium building in the background and the newly relocated Pachamama’s upscale Pan-American restaurant in foreground at right. Below – the downtown parking lot hosting the Lawrence Farmers Market immediately adjacent to Pachamama’s, the condominium, and out of view, a small selection of other new upscale restaurants participating in the gentrification of downtown Lawrence. The farmers market fosters a population of producers, many of whom are increasingly successful at marketing through other avenues in the thriving historic downtown Lawrence shopping district, such as Pachamama’s, Teller’s, Local Burger, and Free State Brewery.*

Figure 50: Downtown Shops and the Future of Lawrence Local Food



Caption: While the growth of local foods in Lawrence is certainly attributable to dedicated efforts toward food community by longstanding community institutions, the successes of local food in Lawrence are also tied to the wider success of downtown Lawrence as a regional commercial center. The fate of local food in Lawrence may well be tied to that of commercial fast food establishments like Chipotle and conventional department stores like The Gap in this town.

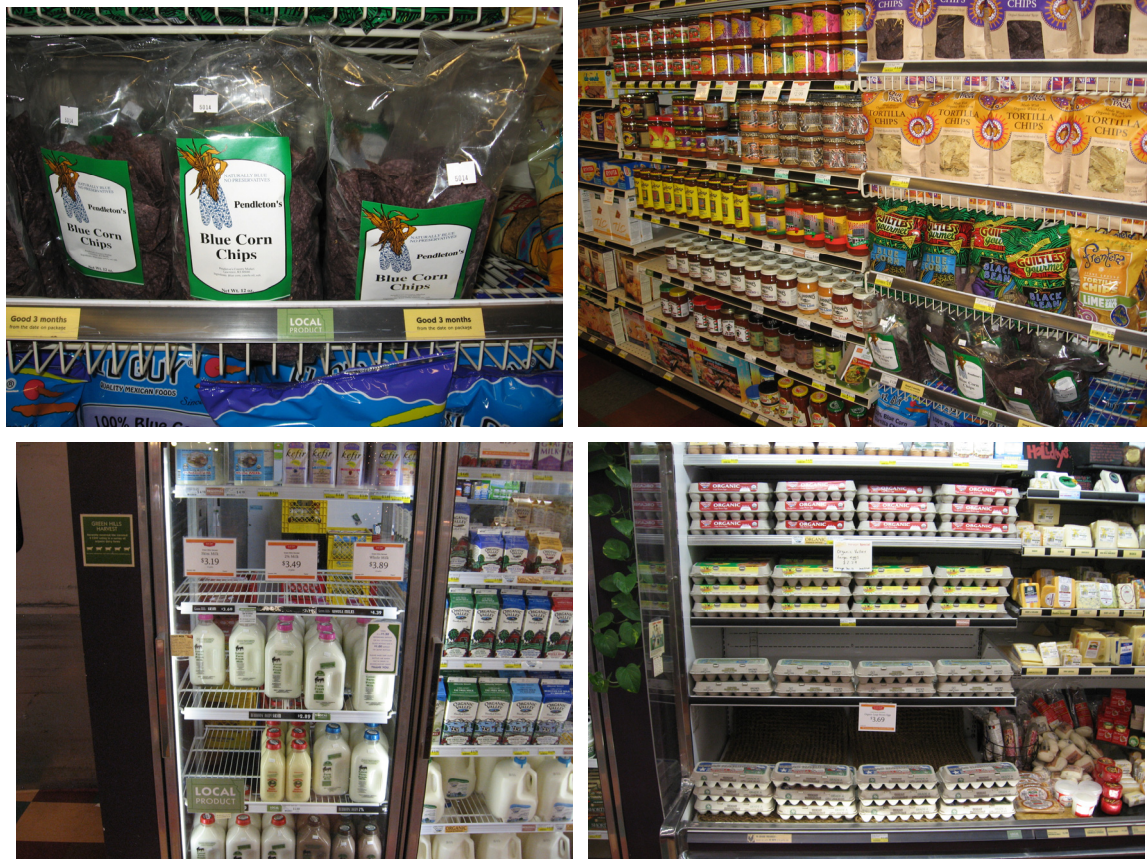
The differentiated commercial areas of Lawrence provide an important context for local food development here. The historic downtown shopping district is a place of boutique consumption through pedestrian window-shopping and small shops, as well as vibrant arts and entertainment activities. It is a place that thrives on innovative and small-scale energies, as opposed to the standardized and mass-consumption of new Lawrence commercial districts. However, the development of local food in Lawrence involves rather unique and particular nestings of agri-food relations in important sites of Lawrence. In particular, the Community Mercantile cooperative grocer, several restaurants in downtown Lawrence, and the Lawrence farmers market are vital sites of local food insurgency. The incorporation of local foods into these sites is a spatial process, and the following considers some of the spatial developments of local food in these sites.

As the most interconnected participant in the network, Lawrence's Community Mercantile is both a critical place of activity and an actor relating to and ordering other spaces in Lawrence community. It is a sizeable natural foods cooperative grocery store which has weathered competition, grown in size, and maintained financial viability for over 30 years. Discussion of the cooperative in Chapter Six revealed substantial emphasis on civic values through community education and service and ecological values through adherence to natural products principles. However, a food retail store is a complex assemblage of many types of space, and the exchange of value that sustains such stores in an economic sense relies on the production of value through translating the values and image of the store into real spaces. The ways in which local foods are incorporated into these spatial projects translate between the values promoting local foods and the production of economic value through the foods.

Figure 51: Insurgent Spaces of Local Food at the Community Mercantile



Figure 51 (Continued): Insurgent Spaces of Local Food at the Community Mercantile



Caption: Local foods have been gradually asserting themselves in the spaces of the Community Mercantile. Local produce is hard to find in December (when these pictures were taken), but the year-round products tell the tale. The Community Mercantile is primarily a full service natural foods grocery store, with shelves stocked with largely organic and all-natural fresh, processed, and bulk foods. Local foods are labeled as such (foods from Lawrence's Douglas County or neighboring counties are considered local), and shelves are increasingly stocked with these products. The fresh meats selection is almost entirely sourced from Kansas, although this is not likely an astounding accomplishment given the strong meat industry in Kansas, but it is notable that the local meats are all from small farms using conscientious production practices. Local milk and eggs likewise have their own shelf-space, and in times of shortage, that shelf-space remains empty, as indicated by the empty shelf awaiting new stock of Green Hills Harvest organic milk from a small farm in nearby western Missouri. The summer of 2006 was extremely hot and many chickens died in the heat – there were entire weeks in the summer and fall of 2006 when the lower section of eggs was completely empty where the local ones are stocked. Conditions like these convey the vagaries of food production to the consuming public and to the store managers as well, surely testing the commitment of each to local foods but also encouraging an appreciation for the processes of procuring food.

Each of the four spatial types in this chapter's analytical framework is evident in the spaces of local food at the Community Mercantile. Physical space is allotted to local products through dedicated spaces on shelves alongside similar non-local products,

dedicated in the sense that when a local product is out of stock, its shelf-space is not filled with other products. Discursive spaces are also important products of local food's presence, with signs indicating all local and regional products and with other signs describing general store policies and priorities toward sustainability and local foods. In some cases, the metabolic space-times of products are also important in the representation different colors, textures, and even smells of local foods, especially in the case of produce, eggs, fresh meats, and fresh bread. Associational space is also produced by linking local foods to the farms that produced them, enabling consumers connect these foods to farms with which they may be familiar from restaurant, farmers market, or other direct marketing contexts in the area. A sample of these productions of space is represented in the pictures above in Figure 51, representing the plurality of spaces within the Community Mercantile as well as the plurality of foods commingling through these spaces.

There are important implications of these productions of space in the Community Mercantile. The willingness to make special designations of local foods within the store through physical and discursive spaces reduces barriers to entry for new and smaller producers, while the spaces are also flexible so as to accommodate growing local supplies and/or increased demand. This partially explains why so many producers have been participating in the store's local food spaces. However, the Community Mercantile is a single store and its capacity to sell local products is limited, despite the inherent commitment of its membership to civic aims of supporting local products whenever possible. It compensates for this limited effect in the store by encouraging links between the products it carries and other places in Lawrence where these producers have a presence, and it also uses its educational staff to promote various local food contexts in Lawrence at events outside the store and during special member days. Promoting local food contexts that would seem to compete with the store's sales interests is seen through the Community Mercantile's strong civic guiding principles as reinforcing the diversity of products available in their store by helping to develop a diversity of local producers. Yet, it also communicates a sense of authenticity to consumers that is the true value for Community Mercantile by incorporating local foods through cooperative promotions and

productions of space. It builds customer faith and loyalty in the store that have helped it to weather competition in the past.

It was noted above and in Chapter Five that the hallmark of the Lawrence-area network community is its interconnectivity among disparate local food economic interests. The Community Mercantile is certainly a powerful force for promoting this interconnectivity, but other Lawrence sites are equally important. The most important Lawrence producers who bridge the gap between the retail and restaurant sectors of the network all started their marketing through the farmers market and later diversified. Pendleton's Country Market, Wakarusa Valley Farm, Hoyland Farm, and Irick Farm are all included in this group and can be viewed in the Lawrence-area network diagram above and in previous chapters. The governance of the farmers market spaces plays an important role in enabling certain types of producers and links to other marketing outlets for these producers. The market's organizing body determines who can access the venue as a vendor, how much space each vendor is allowed, and what kinds of products are allowed, and its rules are some of the most strict in Kansas (Hughes 1992). Vendors must only sell products they have grown/produced themselves, those with retail stores cannot also sell through the farmers market, and artisan crafts must be made from "natural" materials and pre-approved by the farmers market board. In doing so, the farmers market has helped foster a specific food culture in Lawrence.

This food culture is built on the small-scale producers, organic produce and pastured meats, special heirloom varieties, and premium prices for these specialty products that thrive in the farmers market context. The farmers market occupies a parking lot in downtown Lawrence with limited space on Saturday mornings from April to October. Saturday mornings are the beginnings of busy weekends of boutique shopping in downtown Lawrence, so the farmers market sees a high flow of customers willing to pay premium prices for the value they seek. In this kind of environment, vendors create boutique settings at their vendor stands to fit with downtown culture, using discursive spaces to colorfully signify the distinctiveness of their products and their farms, and letting the products speak for themselves with creative displays of produce to appeal to the sensory experience of passers-by. Samples are common in further enabling

metabolic interplay between product and patron. Associational space is also important here, as local producers put a face to the names of their farms and products found elsewhere in Lawrence, especially in the Community Mercantile or in some of the restaurants featuring local foods. Small-scale ecologically-oriented production is thereby stimulated in and around Lawrence by its farmers market, in contrast to other farmers markets that will be discussed later in this chapter. The strong domestic and ecological values translate into economic value by forging a culture of boutique alternative food consumption in a shopping district noted for other forms of affluent boutique consumption.

Ordering the spaces of alternative food consumption in the farmers market in line with the broader culture of consumption in downtown Lawrence has certainly stimulated the popularity of the farmers market. This has encouraged small-scale boutique producers, but it has also reinforced other elite spaces in this commercial district. In fact, the downtown Lawrence merchant's association is the primary sponsor and organizer of the farmers market precisely because it reinforces consumerism downtown. The broader food culture in downtown Lawrence especially feeds on the farmers market through many of the upscale and boutique restaurants that populate its commercial rows. As was discussed in the previous chapter, restaurants that purchase specialty local foods must be committed, but this commitment does not always afford primacy to alternative values in ordering farmer-restaurateur exchange relations when the restaurant's design is ill-suited to such community-building relationships. Pachamama's and Teller's restaurants in downtown Lawrence accommodate local foods in small quantities in instrumental and marginal ways that are similar to what was discussed in the case of Frondizi's in the previous chapter. The co-location of elite food spaces and settlements in Lawrence feeds this upscale market instrumentalism, as exemplified in (Figure 49). At the same time, Free State Brewery and Local Burger, also downtown eateries, offer two less elitist examples of restaurants with a greater relational synergy between restaurant design and their emphasis on farm-fresh specialty foods.

Free State Brewery¹² benefits from the distinctive hometown appeal of local sourcing. It was the first legal brewery in Kansas for over 100 years when it opened in 1989, and it has become a very popular bar-and-grill style eatery by featuring quality and unique in-house beers and custom ingredients in alternative renditions of traditional bar and grill foods. Its owner is a devout local food supporter who lives in a co-housing settlement within town with a large garden that supplies much of the restaurant's summertime produce needs. Others of these needs are fulfilled by nearly a dozen small farm suppliers in or very near to Lawrence; some of them are self-provisioning and Free State is their only restaurant customer. These relationships are taxing on the restaurant's resources, but the owner's perspective on local sourcing and personalized supply relationships reflects an extended sphere of moral valuation: "I don't know that we can justify a lot of what we're going to say and do in classic economic terms...is it a rational and economically justifiable thing to do, probably not...it's a religious belief on my part that composting and connection to the ultimate food cycle is a good thing." The relationship between these suppliers and the restaurant remains relatively hidden from restaurant-goers, with the distinctive micro-brewed beer having the limelight (see right) as a way of driving the economic engine of the restaurant. However, discursive spaces in the menu on table pamphlets reinforce associations between the restaurant and notable producers from the farmers market and the Community Mercantile, and they betray the more diverse ethical stances of its owner in supporting community food systems.



¹² The owner of Free State Brewery and Wheatfields, Chuck Magerl, participated in an extensive interview and conversation on alternative agri-food efforts on 25 July 2005, while I have extensive first-hand experience dining there.

Local Burger is another restaurant that has benefited from the farmers market and downtown local food culture. It was newly established in September 2005, dedicated to making quality local foods cheap, fast, and accessible. In the words of the owner, Hilary Brown, “The concept of Local Burger is slow food – fast,” in reference to the Slow Food

Figure 52: Spatial Multiplicity and Spatial Access in Local Burger



Caption: Local Burger is the active nexus of many different types of space and modalities of these spaces. The menu as representational space indicates the alterity of Local Burger’s associational and material-metabolic spaces, where the conditions and ecologies of farms directly affect the tastes, textures, and nutrition of the foods. Ecological variations also impact the discursive space of the menu when it must accommodate supply variations. To allow, and even embrace, this interplay is a political act of allowing access to the restaurant space and actively negotiating with participants in the construction of that space. This moves beyond food provision, as well, as a small table informs participants about the material-metabolic processes that are the foundation of the restaurant’s concept and vision. When Local Burger becomes host to a farmers meat market when the downtown farmers market season is over, the customer’s space of consumption is disrupted and melds with associational spaces and the modalities of retail exchange.

movement. The vision of the restaurant really grew out of Hilary's personal troubles with food allergies, her culinary training as a chef, and the tremendous access to local food suppliers at the farmers market. Due to this community resource, Hilary found accessing local foods to create her menu to be the easiest part of establishing the business, where obtaining financing was certainly the hardest. Approximately 60% of foods sold through the restaurant are local including all of the burger meats, the tofu, the potatoes, and much of the produce, and these foods have predominantly come from contacts made at the farmers market. In addition, Hilary's concern about the affordability and access to good food led her to the casual dining model: "I want to feed everyone, not just rich people...I want everyone to know what they are eating, how it was raised, what's in it, no hidden anything – I feel like that is a right everyone deserves." The menu and pictures of the restaurant spaces are shown above in (Figure 52) as an indicator of the openness and transparency of the spatial project that is Local Burger¹³.

Each in their own ways, Local Burger and Free State work to bring local food to the masses by re-defining the terms of access to their restaurant spaces. Free State Brewery has challenged the cheap and easy full-service restaurant ingredient distribution system by making space in its kitchen, in its planning, and in its menu for distinctive ingredients, locally obtained where possible. On the other hand, Local Burger simply abandoned the basic restaurant distribution model from the start, instead only seeking ancillary ingredients and services from distributors and relying on local suppliers for the bulk of its needs. Local Burger also builds collaborations among physical, discursive, and associational spaces well beyond other restaurants, with mini-farmers markets on Wednesdays for local all-natural meat producers that directly relate the burgers consumed to the farmers that produced them and the frozen meats they have for sale. These innovative spatial engagements are enabled by appealing to civic, domestic, and ecological ideals at the same time as delivering unpretentiously distinctive fare for

¹³ The owner of Local Burger, Hilary Brown, was interviewed on 7 September 2005 just before opening the restaurant, and extensive pictures and information has been gathered on subsequent visits and dining experiences.

reasonable prices and collaborating with the other local food agendas ordering the farmers market and Community Mercantile spaces.

While these restaurants in some important ways take local food provisioning a step beyond what can be seen in Kansas City restaurants, their capacity to do so is affected by serving the overall promotion of the downtown Lawrence commercial district. Local Burger and Free State Brewery are both able to impart greater information, meaning, and value to the consumer by collaborating with producers active in and known through the farmers market and/or Community Mercantile. This contributes to the legitimacy and authenticity of their claims for supporting local food and alternative food values. However, legitimacy and authenticity are required in order to finance these alternative orderings of restaurant spaces in a high rent boutique commercial district with a loyal clientele. The two restaurants simultaneously feed on the window-shopping public of downtown Lawrence, and they also contribute to its culture and political economy in both alternative and conventional senses.

Together, the Community Mercantile, Lawrence farmers market, and downtown Lawrence restaurants anchor a network of spaces and participation in producing, consuming, and defining local food. The network as represented by food flows is more coherent than other network communities in this study, reflecting synergies and collaborations in Lawrence that exceed the other Eastern Kansas contexts. The cooperative grocer, the farmers market, and a number of downtown restaurants all share producer suppliers due to many of their shared values and governance principles. Democratically governed spaces in the form of the cooperative grocer and the farmers market help to minimize barriers to entry for small farmers and reinforce collective decision-making and civic ideals. This has supported the growth of a vibrant small-farm population near Lawrence, enough that it has self-organized collective events like an annual area farm tour. Restaurants that align themselves with these principles can also afford to compromise the pretension and elitism of upscale dining for more humble and inexpensive dining spaces due to strong demand for specifically civic, ecological, and domestic ideals. The local food culture of downtown Lawrence that is the source of this demand does demonstrate a tendency toward defensive localism in desiring to sustain the old-style downtown shopping atmosphere and boutique consumerism. Yet, defensive localism is counter-poised to reflexive localisms through those local food participants