

CHAPTER VI: THE MEANING OF “LOCAL FOOD”

A) Introduction

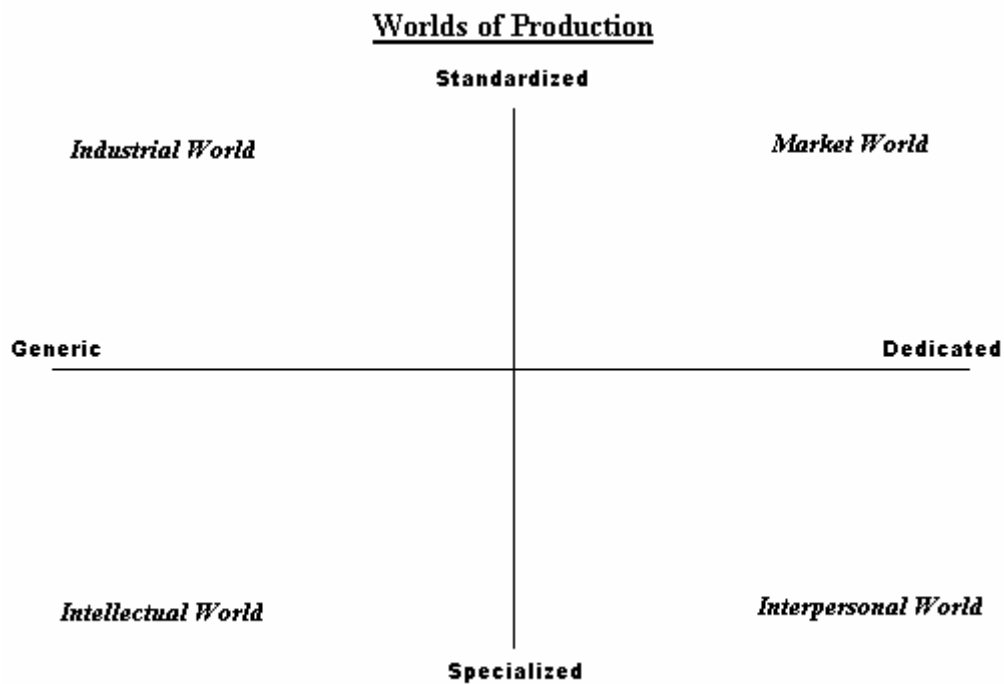
As was explained in Chapter Four, producers and consumers each have plentiful reasons for challenging conventional agri-food systems. The local food movement in Kansas, as elsewhere, seems to be a collective effort by producers and consumers to address their mutual concerns with conventional systems by shaping alternative food pathways and knowledge of foods. These food pathways nearly universally short-circuit food relations around the powerful middle-men – the processing, manufacturing, and distribution conglomerates – that have benefited most from the consolidated commodity relations of post-war twentieth century food systems. One important aspect of understanding the local food movement involves understanding how local food participants are taking over the functions performed by these middle-men, producing foods and coordinating their exchange, in constructing their alternative local food pathways.

Uncertainty is rampant within these alternative agri-food relations – uncertainty regarding what practices, foods, and participants can be considered alternative and uncertainty about the means of constructing supply chains based on such uncertain alternatives. This chapter is intended to investigate the forms and results of these attempts by various local food participants to mitigate their respective uncertainties and define local food values. Conventions theory has been useful in reflecting the different values at the heart of contested agri-food relations in Europe (Murdoch and Miele 1999; Murdoch, Marsden et al. 2000; Ilbery and Maye 2005), and it has been chosen as a set of frameworks that could be helpful in studying similar contestations of value in the North American agri-food context. At the heart of conventions theorizations is an assumption that economic actors negotiate mutually acceptable behaviors and norms, conventions, as a way of mitigating the uncertainties in their relationships with each other and in productive activities (Thevenot 2002). Building local food supply chains to the extent shown in the previous chapters involves establishing relatively consistent patterns of behavior and representation, despite the uncertainties of building new forms of agri-food

relations without a reliable template upon which to build such relationships. Conventions theory provides a perspective from which to study how local foods are being defined, how local food pathways are being developed, what the more successful definitions and pathways of local food might be – all based on the uncertain negotiations of values and methods among economic participants.

In what follows, a two-fold analytical approach is used to investigate the differences in values and productive strategies among different local foods in Eastern Kansas. First, the values and strategies will be studied through two distinct types of food pathway – restaurant-farm and retail-farm pathways. Interpretations from fieldwork and network analysis distinguish these two pathways from each other and support a hypothesis that the requirements of systems of provision for each of the pathways are quite different, producing different sets of uncertainties and balances of power for participants of each. Second, the “orders of worth” and “worlds of production” frameworks from conventions theory discussed in Chapters Two and Three will be used to study key representatives of important strategies ordering each of the food pathways. The “orders of worth” framework classifies the moral values underpinning economic conventions, labeled in terms of *civic*, *domestic*, *ecological*, *inspirational*, *market*, and *industrial* values. Some research has shown alternative agri-food supply chains to generally embody greater emphasis on civic, domestic, and ecological values than those of the market and industrialism (Murdoch and Miele 1999; Murdoch, Marsden et al. 2000; Ilbery and Maye 2005), but this evaluation will focus on the variable implementations of these values. The “worlds of production” framework will be helpful in representing distinguishable production and marketing strategies in each local food pathway, as the engagement of values affects the position of given participants in the market for local foods. These two analytical approaches together allow for the simultaneous representation of difference and multiplicity, as well as common patterns and values, within the economics of the local food movement.

Figure 36: Worlds of Production Framework



Caption: *A two-dimensional articulation of production and market spaces by Storper (1997). The standardized/specialized axis refers to characteristics of the product and production methods. The generic/dedicated axis refers to the intended market of consumers for the product.*

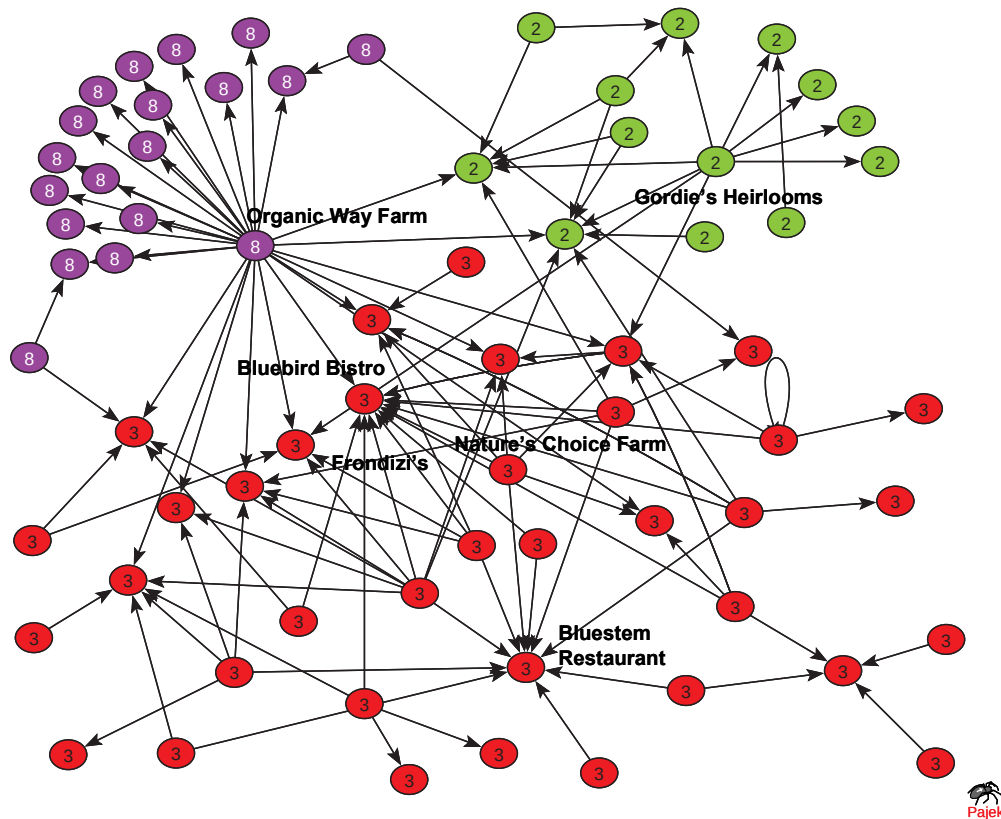
The following two sections discuss the conventions emerging to order each of the two local food pathways, one section for each pathway. In the first of the two sections, the restaurant-farm pathway is examined through a comparative evaluation of two upscale restaurants and their associated producer-supplier networks. The second section provides a comparative analysis of two regional supermarket chains, as well as a set of cooperative grocers, and their respective relationships with their producer-suppliers. Individual cases in each of these sections have been chosen either due to their key location in the network or their representation of a common role in the network, and also based on their relative level of participation in local food relations and the amount of information gathered about them during fieldwork. This chapter attempts to describe the most representative examples of each local food pathway through this combination of network and qualitative data.

B) Restaurant-Farm Pathways

Foodservice represents about half of all food sales in the United States, and a little less than half of sales in Kansas (Bureau 2005). Franchised full-service and partial-service fast food restaurants are the norm, utilizing centralized menu development and supply chain management in national or regional headquarters for most procurement decisions. However, there is still a strong population of independent and upscale full-service restaurants, especially in larger urban centers, where individual restaurant style and customized menus and ingredients are important. It is these upscale independent restaurants that often lead cultural shifts in food and dining preferences, as in the growth of nouvelle cuisine since the 1970's from a few innovative restaurants in California (Levenstein 2003), most notably Alice Waters' *Chez Panisse* in Berkeley, CA (Guthman 2003). As the leaders of culinary culture, many of these upscale restaurants have been leading the charge toward local food systems by featuring farm-fresh foods, and often the identities of the farms that produced them, in their menus and their marketing to the public.

This trend is no less prominent in Eastern Kansas than it is in other parts of the U.S. and Europe. The predominant amount of local food restaurant provisioning occurs in Kansas City, but it is a growing emphasis in the smaller cities of Lawrence, Manhattan, and Salina as well. Embracing local foods for these restaurants involves withstanding a tension between greater control over ingredients and often higher ingredient quality of local food versus more reliable and simpler ordering from consolidated foodservice distributors. The response of individual restaurants to these stresses is dependent on a number of things, most notably the style of the restaurant and the motivations of the head chef. This section presents two restaurants that epitomize the two distinct approaches encountered among those restaurants in Eastern Kansas engaging local foods, and it also explores the implications of these archetypal restaurant agendas for local food producers and consumers.

Figure 37: Kansas City Restaurant-Farm Pathways



Caption: Labels indicate key organizations in tying the network together. Partitions 8 and 2 are held together largely by the marketing efforts of key producers (Organic Way and Gordie's Heirlooms, respectively), while partition 3 is bound by key restaurant purchasers, Bluebird Bistro and Bluestem Restaurant as the most connected examples. The Bluebird Bistro and Frondizi's local food relations are analyzed using conventions theory in this chapter.

These cases were chosen on the basis of their network position (see Figure 37, above), their level of participation in local food relations, and on the quality and quantity of information gathered about them. As mentioned above, the primacy of the Kansas City restaurant scene in terms of local food networking deserves focus in this section as an example of the diversity and differentiation of a mature market for restaurant-farm local food strategies. The first of the sections discusses Bluebird Bistro as an example of the few Kansas City restaurants with more than a few local producer-suppliers. The second section presents Frondizi's Ristorante as representative of a larger population of

upscale restaurants with only a few local suppliers each. Each of these restaurants⁵ was chosen by virtue of its generous participation in extended interviews compared with their peers. The third section will feature two highly active farms in marketing to upscale Kansas City restaurants – Organic Way Farm as a dominant figure in the network in Figure 37, and Campo Lindo as similarly dominant (although not included in the figure above for technical reasons) in terms of chicken and egg sales. This collection of sections shows some of the value-tensions and developmental logics coursing through restaurant-farm relations.

1) Local Food as a Paradigm

Bluebird Bistro is one of only a few Kansas City restaurants which place local food at the core of their organization and identity. The chef, Liz Huffman, and owner, Jane Bell, made a commitment to each other and their customers when they took over the restaurant in the late 1990's that they would source as much as possible of the restaurant's food locally. More than just local, these two have an ecologically driven vision for the restaurant, where the foods they serve are "organic, all-natural, sustainable, and local", criteria expressed prominently in their restaurant's advertising synopsis. The restaurant is an upscale white-tablecloth restaurant with an understated homely atmosphere, located in the building of a former 19th century drug store in the heart of an art-centered neighborhood. Commitment to the qualities of local food fits well with the increasingly artistic culture of the neighborhood and the values of Liz and Jane, leading them to source ingredients directly from 18 local producers.

As Chapter One summarized, local food is often a response to consumer and producer uncertainties related to environmental, bodily, and socio-economic concerns about the viability of agrarian lifestyles, the condition of land and rural landscape, and the healthfulness and safety of food products. Yet, many uncertainties rear their heads as

⁵ Discussion of Bluebird Bistro based on a detailed interview with Liz Huffman on 21 April, 2005, several visits to the restaurant as a customer, and follow-up conversations with Liz over the course of summer 2005. The chef of Frondizi's Ristorante participated in an extended phone interview on 23 June 2005, and I dined there in August of the same year. The average data gathering among restaurants involved roughly 10 minutes on the phone with the chef and a short visit, so the two examples chosen here were more extensively sampled than most others, while still representing two rough archetypes of local food participation among restaurants.

Figure 38: Bluebird Bistro – Exterior & Interior



Caption: *Quaint, but artistic décor fitting in with the increasingly art-focused neighborhood.*

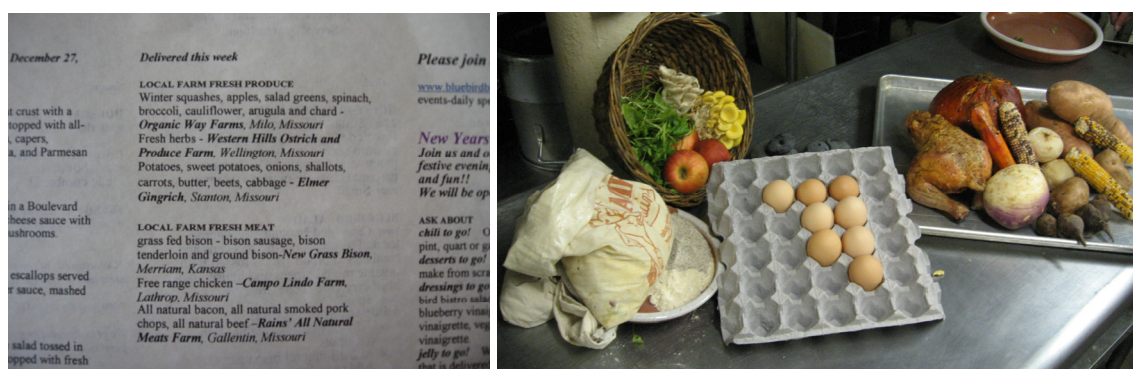
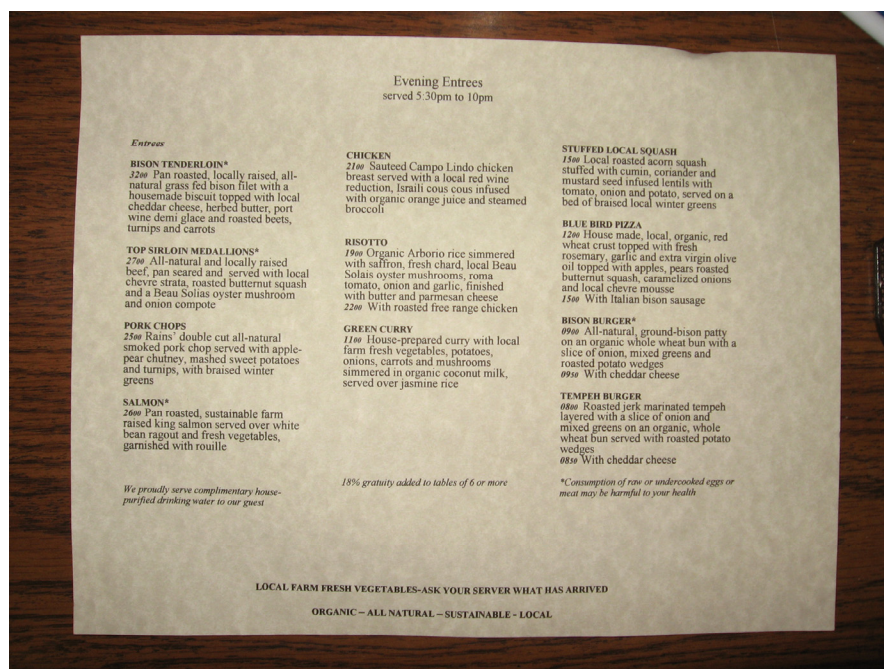
restaurants like Bluebird Bistro seriously shift their systems of provision toward direct farm relationships and small-scale producers. Local sourcing revives variables that were rendered mute by industrial production logics, commoditization of products, and scientifically managed distribution logistics. Variable food quality; farmer reliability; annual, seasonal, and weekly variations in food availability; and higher costs are all major concerns raised by local restaurant purchasers. Variations in any of these criteria manifest themselves to the consumer as variations in food quality, in menu options, and in customer service, while producers find themselves with much more demanding and temperamental customers in restaurant chefs.

Bluebird Bistro has developed a number of conventions in concert with their producers in order to mitigate these uncertainties without betraying the core values motivating their efforts toward localization. One set of uncertainties, that of local food availability, is mitigated by cyclical planning. The productive capacities of local farms vary according to several natural and business cycles, which Bluebird mitigates through matching their planning cycles to these productivity cycles. The chef coordinates with their more substantial farm suppliers in the off-season to request crop varieties and guide the planting decisions of farmers, in line with annual crop cycles. The crops also are harvested at different points in the growing season in order to be fresh, requiring chef knowledge of crop cycles to plan seasonal menu variations. Continual weekly ordering cycles keep the chef abreast of the upcoming deviations from off-season planning and

assumptions of seasonality so as to make more or less minor menu adjustments on a week-by-week basis. Strict weekly ordering times minimize the risks of wasted time through missed calls, where both chef and farmer are rarely near a telephone and direct telephone conversations are necessary to convey the complex information above. Planning in three cycles – annual, seasonal, and weekly – is therefore important for making local food a large part of the restaurant’s ingredient list.

Other conventions are developed in the menu and the restaurant kitchen to further

Figure 39: Bluebird Bistro – Menu & Display of Local Foods



Caption: Pictures taken in December, illustrating that local foods are available throughout the year, but winter availability is limited to flour, red meats, poultry, eggs, root vegetables, and limited fresh vegetables from a farm with a heated greenhouse. Menu options reflect the varying availability of local foods and explicitly informs the consumer of the current crop.

cushion these variations before they affect the restaurant customers. Not all types of product are as variable as others along the three cycles above, with flour, dairy products, meat, and eggs, commonly available throughout the year, while fresh fruits and vegetables are highly seasonally dependent and susceptible to productive shortfalls and bumper crops. Bluebird Bistro smoothes these variations by anchoring its menu in options like sirloin medallions, bison burger, pizza, and chili that are not affected by the more variable local food ingredients. Other menu items like the risotto are flexible enough to feature whatever ingredients are in-season and currently fresh and of high quality. The chef is then enabled through this product mix to make creative adjustments on a weekly basis without too much difficulty. New menus are printed on a weekly basis so as to incorporate these adjustments and effectively communicate them to the consumer.

This brings up the other major struggle, representing localness to the customer. With weekly variations in menu options, the Bluebird Bistro customer is one who must expect new options with each visit. The wait-staff are fluent and communicative of each of the nuanced variations on any given day or week and communicate these in the form of restaurant specials. The menus also list the farm-fresh ingredients obtained that week, giving the customer a sense of the menu's composition based on local foods. With this information, the customer can more easily make the connection between menu variations and the supply of local foods. In addition to these daily methods, there are seasonal Farmer Nights, where a prix fix menu is presented, reservations are required, and the menu features the products of an individual farm supplier who also happens to attend and converse with the guests. These Farmer Nights are another way of connecting customer and farmer through food, and are a chance to communicate more profound connections between ecological farm processes and restaurant foods. Finally, variations in food choice are grounded in a sense of creative expression that resonates with the artistic culture of the restaurant's neighborhood. Menu variations and supply disruptions are not presented as inadequacies of an uncertain and unpredictable supply chain; rather, the chef's ability to create fine dining from constrained local ingredient choices can be respected by those who appreciate the food as art as much as it is nourishment. Bluebird

Bistro is thus an artisan restaurant in an art-centered neighborhood, where uncertainty drives artistic expression.

Local food tends to cost more than even high quality conventional foods from specialty distributors. Mitigating the financial risks of higher ingredient costs is a substantial challenge. Bluebird tackles this challenge largely by passing costs onto the customer. However, it is able to keep menu prices competitive due to its location in an older and less upscale neighborhood, where rent is much lower than the locations of other upscale restaurants. The building is also diminutive and the kitchen is located in a furnace-like basement area – not a very appealing workspace, but it helps keep overhead low. The menu options, while creative and variable, are not particularly exotic. At a superficial level, prices seem inflated in that they are about the same as for more exotic and larger upscale restaurants in more upscale neighborhoods. The equalizing force that helps Bluebird to be a growing success in the Kansas City upscale dining market is in embedding its foods with value. The value to which I refer is not that of taste or presentation that is over and above the competition – Bluebird Bistro is not as meticulous in these areas as others – but rather in the values that the restaurant uses to order its operations and which resonate with the customers.

The values to which I refer can be represented quite well using the “orders of worth” (Boltanski and Thevenot 1999) framework of conventions theory. At the heart of Bluebird Bistro’s values are *ecological* and *civic* orders of worth. It offers “organic, all-natural, sustainable, and local” food for the “discerning” upscale diner. The implicit message is that “organic, all-natural, sustainable, and local” food is more tasteful because it is more ecologically beneficial on the farm as well as in the taste-buds and the metabolism of the diner. The restaurant, and the diner, are linked in a healthful web that supports the common environmental and social goods, as well as the individual bodily desires and goods, of diner, restaurant, and farm. Ecological and civic values are thus inextricably linked and mutually supportive, as well as the core framing of the restaurant for both customer and farmer supplier.

Engaging these two core sets of values also has implications for the engagement of other important values. Most notably, the *domestic* order of worth is essential to the successful incorporation of the *ecological* and *civic* orders in a restaurant setting. The cyclical planning, the weekly communications between restaurant and farms, and the translation and communication of this information for the customers all require establishing strong personalized relations and conventions of communication. The reputation of the restaurant hinges on its ability to forge lasting and mutually supportive relationships with its local suppliers. Conventions based on domestic worths of dedication to personalized relationships, communication, and cooperation thus feed the operational needs of the restaurant in engaging ecological and civic values.

The appeal to art and creativity noted above is the other major value implicated in adjusting to ecological and civic orders. The “orders of worth” framework refers to this value set as an *inspirational* order, valuing nonconformity and creativity, and motivated by passion. The embrace of civic and ecological worth by Liz and Jane causes them significant hardship, but their passion drives them toward innovative relations with their local suppliers and with their customers. Diners who appreciate these creative expressions will indeed discern a difference between Bluebird Bistro and most other upscale restaurants, even those who also source from local farms, in the ordering and representation of the restaurant through creative *inspirational* value.

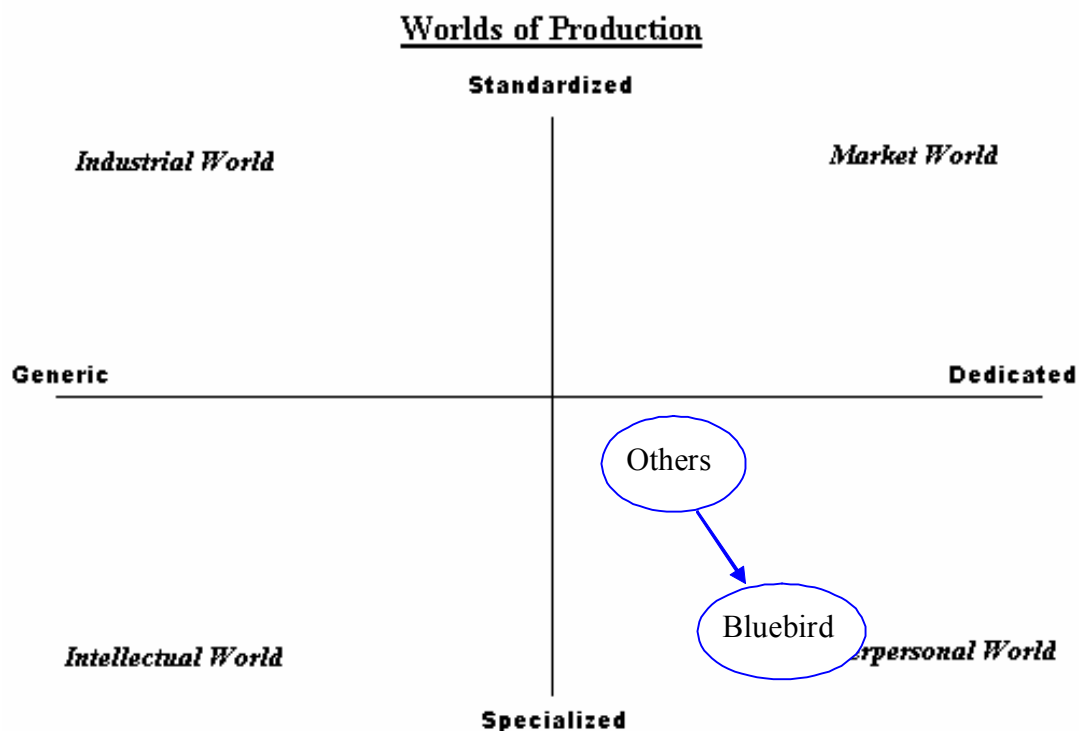
Bluebird Bistro is a stark contrast to most franchised, or chain restaurants. These restaurants have menus designed infrequently in nationally centralized offices to make the most efficient use of the invariance of global ingredient commodity chains and the abilities of consolidated distributors to develop and manage uniform access to these commodities for all the chain’s restaurants throughout the year. The *industrial* order of worth characterizes these relationships based on efficiency and standardization. These values directly conflict with the needs for variation and cyclical supply of ecologically orderings and the many diverse local food participants of civic orderings.

Market values are not as de-emphasized as *industrial* values at Bluebird Bistro, but they are expressed through very different conventions at Bluebird Bistro than in chain

restaurants. Chain restaurants find that industrial orderings enable large-scale purchasing and planning, both of which empower highly precise menu development and ingredient sourcing, which in turn enables precise management of profit margins. Instead of precision being the tool enabling profit, Bluebird Bistro instead looks for quality as a way of garnering its profits. It is more flexible in purchasing decisions, paying more or less for higher or lower quality foods based on the chef's ability to create value with the ingredients, not based on her ability to negotiate lower prices for the ingredients. *Market* values are still critically important in managing the fiscal needs of the restaurant, but the comparative worth of the restaurant in the market is based more on the *ecological*, *civic*, *domestic*, and *inspirational* values that create the unique sense of quality at the restaurant.

Within the image of Bluebird Bistro, *market* orderings are not as powerful as other

Figure 40: Bluebird Bistro in the Worlds of Production Framework



Caption: Relative to other independent upscale restaurants in Kansas City, Bluebird Bistro offers a more specialized menu appealing to dedicated clientele intent on organic and “local” ingredients. This distinguishes Bluebird Bistro from other restaurants by locating it deeper in the “interpersonal world” of the “Worlds of Production” framework.

orders of worth. However, there is a sense in which these other orders of worth are heavily dependent on the role of Bluebird Bistro in the market of restaurants. The “worlds of production” framework (Storper and Salais 1997) is a helpful way of considering this aspect of *market* value. Bluebird Bistro’s place in the worlds of production framework (discussed in Chapters Two and Three) is represented below in Figure 40 as deep in the interpersonal realm of restaurant production. Independent restaurants generally fit this category of production since they rely on specialty ingredients to create a custom mixture of offerings (specialized) to highly selective diners (dedicated). Bluebird takes this general approach to another level with its highly specialized sourcing and menu construction and dedicated array of products reaching out to a very limited niche clientele, especially for Kansas City, who care deeply about food sourcing, sustainable agriculture, and health food.

Despite positioning its image apart from other upscale independent restaurants with more specialized products dedicated to serving a niche clientele, Bluebird Bistro’s identity and appeal is somewhat tenuous. The appeal of specialized creativity and dedicated passion of Bluebird Bistro toward the agri-food ideals of ecologization and localization of food systems belies the contested meaning of “local” and its relationship to the themes of “natural”, “organic”, and “sustainable” through the restaurant. Local does not refer to any consistent literal sense of spatial proximity, as the supplier farms range from 10 to 150 miles away from the restaurant. Similarly, the ecological processes on the local farms are rarely as ideal as the restaurant suggests, with cage-free instead of pastured poultry, grain-finished as opposed to grass-finished beef, heirloom and pesticide-free but not certified organic produce, and greenhouse-grown winter produce rather than fully seasonal ingredients. These are all practical compromises in production and procurement, but their variety and variations from the ideals of “organic, all-natural, sustainable, and local” raise questions about the authenticity of such ideals. The restaurant-farm and restaurant-diner relationships are mediated by a cultivated sense of authenticity and trust in the *values* and judgment, if not the performance, of the restaurant’s proprietors.

Bluebird Bistro certainly makes a genuine break toward holistically integrating diverse and unconventional values into its organizational structure. Yet, it only has the power to affect a few dozen farms at most, and only to partially support each of them. Economic development of the local food movement through restaurant-farm pathways entails cross-linkings between numerous restaurants and numerous farms, as seen in Figure 37, above. Not all restaurants that source local food – in fact, very few – are motivated by these same sets of values, nor are they as dedicated to local food.

2) Accommodating Local Foods

Most upscale restaurants these days acutely perceive the growing cultural importance of locally sourced foods in American culture and cuisine, and local sourcing of at least some foods is nearly universal at such establishments. However, the relative quantities of local food and relative strength and kinds of restaurant-farm relationships are generally diminished and instrumentalized relative to the Bluebird experience. Frondizi's Ristorante in Kansas City is a good example of this form of incorporating local food.

Frondizi's uses local food to enhance the quality of its highly stylized food and atmosphere rather than as a priority in itself. It is an Italian restaurant intent on presenting an authentic Tuscan experience, highlighted by a perfect mating of wine with food. Fresh, quality produce is important for the authentic exotic dining experience at Frondizi's, and Linda, the chef, relies on around a half-dozen local farms for high quality specialty produce during the growing season. At the height of the season, about 20% of her produce is sourced locally, while the only non-produce local food sourced is some raw milk goat cheese. This represents a substantial effort and emphasis, but this emphasis only serves other priorities.

Frondizi's is located in Kansas City's premier upscale shopping district, the Country Club Plaza, a center of affluent consumption where a plentiful number of restaurants all compete for upscale diners' dollars. This basic economic setting enforces a very strong paradigm of market competition on shops in the district – while they all receive high prices for their products, there is great competition for upscale spenders who

tend also to be quite picky. As a result, Frondizi's has carefully constructed a distinctive authentic Tuscan atmosphere, a very large wine selection, highly professional staff, and overlooks the district's famous fountain and park. This carefully planned and choreographed atmosphere is designed to attract patrons through a strong reputation for high quality food, excellent wine, and refined atmosphere.

There is little room for mistake when the identity of the restaurant rests on refinement and the flawless execution of meals. While Bluebird Bistro benefits from a neighborhood and restaurant culture of creative expression to mitigate the vagaries of local sourcing, Frondizi's faces these uncertainties from a different perspective. The chef's producer contacts are a medley of farms with which she has become acquainted as assistant chef at other area restaurants, and although she does put time and energy into these relationships, she does not actively pursue new local suppliers. Ephemeral producers and higher prices are two of her biggest concerns with local foods, but there is a more systemic uncertainty limiting Frondizi's use of local foods.

The focus of the restaurant on creating an authentic exotic experience requires the use of authentic exotic ingredients. The most expensive parts of the meals are locally unobtainable, while the expense of local foods is prohibitive for their widespread use as sides and garnishes. Therefore, it is not surprising that Linda feels increasingly constrained by increasing prices for local produce; she is relying on that produce to be relatively inexpensive to balance expensive exotics. To afford "the local" to a really high degree, she would have to somehow balance a dual image of the restaurant, one of authentic Tuscany expressed through authentic Kansas City. This is a much more fundamental conflict and constraint for a restaurant than that of time management or even personal interest.

To justify the current use of local foods, even if it is marginal compared to the efforts of Bluebird Bistro, requires careful mitigation of these uncertainties through customized conventions for integrating the foods into the restaurant atmosphere and image. Noting on menus that Frondizi's "*proudly emphasizes the use of locally and organically grown produce*" (Ristorante 2007) evokes the feel-good factor for

consumers. Yet, goat cheese is the only local ingredient noted in actual food descriptions. This leaves customers almost wholly ignorant of the role of local food in the restaurant's food choices, and potentially misled if they assume that "emphasis" on "local and organically grown produce" means that all produce is local and organic. The unjustified claim puts Frondizi's in a highly competitive frame of quality vis-à-vis other upscale restaurants, while allowing it to choose local foods with whatever characteristics and incorporate them into menus without any grounds for criticism.

The chef looks for local foods that will suit the authentic Tuscan dishes of the restaurant. These menu options are not designed in concert with the seasonal availability of local foods; rather, the use of local foods varies seasonally with the local availability of the specialty heirloom produce ingredients needed for particular dishes. Similarly, Linda coordinates only with the local producers who can grow these specialty produce varieties, leaving those without the capacity for such specialized production without access to Frondizi's as a potential customer. To the extent that these arrangements can be made between restaurant and farm, local foods benefit the quality of the restaurant's offerings through enhanced freshness, flavors, and textures. Yet, this is a matter of local provisioning fitting into an abstract produced restaurant identity, rather than allowing local foods a role in producing this restaurant identity.

The "orders of worth" expressed through the above conventions and relevant uncertainties at Frondizi's are also a clear departure from the values ordering Bluebird Bistro. Ecological and civic worths are the core motivations for the conventions at Bluebird Bistro, but these values might only be found in personal viewpoints of Linda or some of the staff of Frondizi's. The institutionalized values at the heart of Frondizi's are more in line with the *opinion-based* and *inspirational* orders of worth articulated in conventions theory. Frondizi's thrives on its reputation for high quality food, excellent wine selection, and refined atmosphere. The quality of food and wine selection are largely a result of the creative abilities of the head chef, Linda, and they in turn feed the reputation of the restaurant. Therefore, opinion-based and inspirational orders of worth resonate strongly at Frondizi's similar to the resonance of ecological and civic values at Bluebird Bistro.

Also similar to Bluebird Bistro, Frondizi's employs other values in the service of these its core values. *Domestic* values are expressed through a very professional and knowledgeable wait-staff which is prepared to aid in menu and wine selections for personalized meals. This expression of value reinforces the core opinion-based and inspirational values of the restaurant, while the relative lack of domestic values present between restaurant and local supplier makes sense in that this context is irrelevant to the reputation of the dining experience itself at Frondizi's. *Market* values also affect restaurant-farm relations, where Linda is mindful to minimize her local suppliers and negotiate the best prices she can. Less time spent coordinating local foods allows her more time to perfect meals, while less expense on the foods leads to lower meal prices and more room in customer pocketbooks for the unique wine pairings that make the restaurant unique and competitive. The bottom line at Frondizi's is the restaurant meal experience, not the wider ecological and civic footprint of its operations, and the above values ordering the restaurant are consistent with this focus.

It would be remiss to ignore the market context within which these negotiations and orderings of Frondizi's take place. As opposed to Bluebird Bistro, local food does not differentiate Frondizi's from other restaurants so much as solidify its competitiveness as a restaurant with an identity featuring exceptional food quality and professionalism. Local food serves the needs of high quality food without imposing its ecological and civic variables. In the "worlds of production" framework, Frondizi's would be located in the *interpersonal world*; it offers a variety of specialized Italian dishes with personalized wine pairings, and it does so catering to dedicated customer desires for authentic Tuscan Italian food. Yet, its focus on uniform and precise meal production and presentation places it more toward the *market world* than Bluebird Bistro, while the latter's diverse vegetarian and vegan offerings along with more standard meat dishes place it deeper in the *interpersonal world*. A representation of this distinction is shown above in Figure 40 while discussing Bluebird Bistro.

Bluebird Bistro and Frondizi's thus have very different means of incorporating local food into their restaurant orderings. They are representative of two distinct restaurant strategies with regard to local food, with implications for the meaning of local

food and the types of growth encouraged in this sector of local food marketing. The first strategy, represented by Bluebird Bistro, places a priority for local food at the core of its image. It treats local food sourcing as a way of acknowledging the dialectical relationships between food production and consumption regarding bodily health, taste and food quality, ecology and environmental quality, and the right socio-economic roles for linking these qualities. Although the meaning of local food is contested and shifting, this first strategy places an emphasis on exploring this meaning through practical compromises where local is at least on equal footing with other priorities. The second strategy views local food as a specialty food like any other. It is something that consumers care about, and thus must be taken seriously as a matter of appealing to their tastes. However, the strategy does not seek to cultivate this taste in any way. Instead, it constructs limited compromises of its internal operational conventions to incorporate local foods, while at the same time making shallow representations of local food relationships to consumers. In this second strategy, local food is a fetish, and appealing to it as such reveals that the complex consumer preferences for local food are subverted under the rubric of the market.

While most restaurants in this study engaged local food primarily through the second strategy, the limited reorientation of restaurant orderings by local food does not necessarily mean that no good can come from this strategy. First, restaurants tend to blend these strategic archetypes in one form or another, and no restaurant featuring local foods completely fetishizes such foods. Second, as most upscale restaurants use local foods to differentiate themselves in the market, this resulting competition among all restaurant strategies amounts to an ever-increasing alternative market for specialty food products. A growing population of marginalized small-scale producers is using this market as one of the bases for sustaining agrarian lifestyles and economies. The following section will consider some of the implications of restaurant-farm local food pathways for this new agrarianism.

3) Opportunities and Complications for Farmers

Restaurants primarily source two types of local foods: produce and fresh meat products. These are the two types of foods that are most conspicuous in meals, and also

the ones that suffer the most in terms of quality through the growing and handling practices of large-scale agriculture, meat processing, and consolidated global-national distribution systems. It is therefore no surprise that the upscale restaurants that survive based on the high quality of their foods would seek high quality alternatives for these sorts of foods locally. The local farms that directly supply restaurants with these foods are able to do so because they are also relatively low volume and high value products, where small-scale production has a chance for revenues that support its costs.

Yet, a farm specializing in high quality produce and/or meat products must contend with a number of critical uncertainties in basing their farm operations on local marketing to restaurants. In some ways these uncertainties mirror those of their restaurant customers and are opportunities for cooperation in mitigating them. Farms share with restaurants the uncertainties of climate and pest impacts on crop yields and livestock production, as well as other factors affecting the available supply of local foods. Identifying crops that are more resilient and yet serve the needs of restaurants is one way of mutual cooperation between restaurant and farm in mitigating this issue. Open communication between restaurant and farm can also help the farmer to learn which techniques and timings improve the quality of their products. These cooperations require intensive relationships between restaurant and farm. While both parties have vested interests in helping each other, the two restaurant strategies exemplified by Bluebird Bistro and Frondizi's will have different capacities and styles for engaging in these types of relationship. The majority of local food purchasing restaurants will have little patience for truly supportive relationships along these lines.

Despite the difference in cooperative capacities between the two restaurant strategies, there are many uncertainties where these differences are less relevant in that the vested interests of local farms and restaurants do not align. Exotic and rare crops can impose productive hardships on farms, with steep learning curves for cultivation and needing special attention, even as upscale restaurants seek them for their own internal reasons and market rationales. By a wide margin, no individual restaurant represents enough demand to support any given farm, forcing producers into wide-ranging marketing efforts even if they have strong relationships with a few restaurants.

Restaurants have a vested interest in minimizing their purchases of high value, high cost local foods, whereas producers are highly sensitive to fluctuations in demand for their products. The onus of mitigating uncertainties like these lies squarely on the producer, as there are limits to the ability of restaurants to be able to assist their local farmers with these issues, no matter their level of civic and ecological commitments.

Mitigating the above uncertainties tends to involve relatively unilateral efforts by farms. One such response to productive variations is investment in farm infrastructure that allows better control of growing conditions, examples being high tunnels and greenhouses for plants and indoor facilities for livestock and poultry, especially chickens. Responding to price fluctuations can involve a number of value-adding activities, like specializing in rare crops, branding the farm and its products, and partially processing products to reduce restaurant labor requirements and enhance the uniqueness of the product. Supply and demand mismatches are also resolved by diversified marketing by local farms; fresh meat producers tend to rely on supermarket sales in addition to upscale restaurants, while produce farms tend to focus more on farmers markets, CSA programs, and other forms of direct consumer marketing to prop up demand for their products.

These practical responsibilities toward mitigating uncertainty create conflicts among the values ordering the production of local foods through the restaurant-farm pathway. *Ecological* values are very common among local food producers, as local marketing is a way of supporting more ecologically sensitive production methods. *Domestic* values are also very important for creating an even playing field in marketing relationships where the producer is traditionally marginalized. Personalized relationships is part of the appeal of local for consumers, and also for restaurant chefs and producers, as many other forms of avenues of producer marketing and restaurant procurement leave little room for variation and personalized attention. However, farm capitalization through rent, infrastructure, and the costs of production all impose a strong *market* ethic; indeed, local food draws producers primarily as a means of alternative marketing. It is interesting that *civic* values are expressed by such producers in terms of providing high food quality rather than broad and equal consumer access to their foods. Although the personal relationships and alternative crops entailed may bring ancillary pleasures, it is

unclear that many of these local producers would produce as they do without the necessity of marketing.

As with the restaurant examples in this chapter, the imposition of market values leads to engaging other values as instruments in competing in the market. Many farm infrastructure investments are driven by *industrial* values manifested in the desire for season extension or year-round production. Early, late, and off-season production of seasonal crops yields large price premiums due to the lack of supply, but investing toward exploiting this market condition involves betraying a strict adherence to *ecological* ordering by manipulating or disrupting ecological cycles on the farm. *Inspirational* values can also come into competition with ecological ordering through the creative production of exotic products that are ill-suited to the eco-region of the farm. *Opinion-based* values can be important in terms of building a reputation for product quality and professionalism, and it is also important in creating a farm identity that can be marketed alongside the products. These marketing efforts resonate with domestic values, and they can help the farm to obtain price premiums or access to greater customers, but they can also reduce the time and resources available for serving ecological values on the farm. *Market* values are thus a foundational justification for other values on the farm, but they are also disruptive of these values through the need to compromise values in service of the market.

A couple examples here can help illustrate these compromises. Organic Way Farm⁶ is very active in marketing organic produce to restaurants – the most active farm in my study, with over 30 restaurant customers – and this level of activity draws from strong personal values. Organic Way Farm was started in the late 1990's by Dan May and his family after Dan recovered from a violent attack and wanted to build a positive legacy for himself. The family sold its Kansas City home and took out a sizeable loan to purchase the farm. Dan's health recovery instilled in him both a vibrant and dynamic level of personal energy and a strong love of life and living things. *Ecological* values figure prominently in this personal mission, and organic vegetables is the marketable

⁶ Comments on Organic Way Farm based on a farm visit of 11 June and a phone conversation with Dan May on 14 June 2005.

product the family chose to support their farm. Dan is also very talkative and cares deeply about personal connections, an expression of *domestic* values. Yet, Dan also must compromise these *ecological* and *domestic* values in making the farm economically viable. With a size of 25 acres located 100 miles from Kansas City, the farm must market higher volumes of product than would smaller and closer farms. This requires diversified marketing to many restaurants and a CSA program along with farm capitalization for high productivity of high value crops. Distant personalized marketing to many customers requires compromises between *ecological* and *domestic* values, where substantial energy use and farm inputs substitute for a strong commitment to seasonal production and more intensive self-sufficient fertility methods. *Market* values also impose themselves, as year-round farm mortgage and equipment expenses also encourage strategies to earn year-round income, despite the questionable environmental impacts of producing salad greens in the dead of winter. In addition, most of the farm's restaurant customers are similar to Frondizi's in demanding high quality, low price, and highly specialized produce varieties. Growing some of these crops requires exotic fertilizers like Chilean Nitrate and a high energy blend based on fish emulsions to maintain adequate productivity given the farm's climate and soils. The *inspirational* values of many of the upscale Kansas City restaurants thereby carry over into *inspirational* values at Organic Way Farm that compete with purely *ecological* values regarding ideal crop types and rotations. This treadmill of marketing in which Organic Way is to some extent trapped is a good example of the "agrarian paradox" presented by Julie Guthman (2004), whereby the promise of organic agriculture is to save farm ecologies and agrarian lifestyles simultaneously, but the reality is that classic factors of production like rent, capitalization, and labor disrupt the promise by forcing treadmills of production and marketing. Organic Way Farm has become the preeminent organic produce supplier for Kansas City upscale restaurants, but at what cost?

Other restaurant local food suppliers have struck a slightly different balance. Campo Lindo⁷ is the preeminent supplier of chicken and eggs to Kansas City restaurants.

⁷ Campo Lindo was visited and the owner, Jay Maddock, interviewed on 24 May 2005. The discussion and quotes are based on this conversation and visit.

It is a family farm, primarily a poultry producer, and processes and packages the roughly 20,000 broiler hens it produces per year in its own on-farm federally inspected processing facility. The hens are “free range” in that they are raised in a large chicken house without cages, and the chickens are free to roam about the house and in and out of a few open doors. They are grain-fed, as opposed to pasture-raised, and the feed is not organic nor is it locally sourced. Raising and slaughtering the poultry humanely is a high priority for the owners, but forcing the poultry into lifestyles according to their ecological roles is not as much of a priority.

Supporting a family and the costs of the farm on specialized poultry production requires two things: high volume of production and sales, and price premiums compared with the low prices of industrial large-scale poultry farms. Humanely raised poultry and eggs is consistent with some *ecological* valuations, but it also results in better taste and texture in meat and eggs, for which many are willing to pay a price premium. Serving *ecological* values thereby serves one of the key *market* values for the farm. Pasture-raised poultry and eggs would likely be of even higher nutritional quality and taste by extending many of the same ecological factors that contribute to improvements by raising cage-free poultry. However, raising 20,000 chickens per year, plus the thousands of laying hens, on pastures is not practical for the size and labor capacity of Campo Lindo. In addition, it would require raising heritage breeds of chicken rather than the standard industry Cornish-cross, bred for large breasts and efficient conversion of grain to meat. As Campo Lindo’s proprietor puts it, “you can’t sell enough of them to make a living” because production costs are much higher and the additional price premium cannot compensate for these costs in moving from free-range production to pasture-raised poultry. Compromising *ecological* value for *market* value is a critical feature of Campo Lindo’s success, despite the fact that it features relatively humane production methods.

On the sales and marketing side, supplying nearly as many restaurants as Organic Way is not sufficient to support Campo Lindo’s level of production. Even though the farm has successfully engaged *opinion-based* values to become a household name for upscale restaurants, this notoriety derives from offering a quality product, reliably delivered, packaged appropriately, and with a reasonable price. In order to round out its

sales, Campo Lindo has diversified its marketing to include supermarkets for higher volumes of sales, the opposite of Organic Way's strategy of CSA and farmers market direct consumer marketing.

Both Organic Way and Campo Lindo have therefore significantly used alternative conventions of production driven by engaging alternative production values. Their marketing conventions are also rather personalized. Yet, neither of them have escaped the influence of *market* values, exemplified by balancing *ecological* and *domestic* values with *inspirational*, *industrial*, and *opinion-based* values through conventions like branding products and the farms themselves, year-round and standardized production, and exotic crop production. These conventions enable both farms to serve a high share of the Kansas City upscale restaurant market, expand into other local food pathways, and garner fiscally necessary price premiums. Making a living by marketing to restaurants would seem to require compromises which the local food movement needs to explicitly acknowledge.

4) Summary: Restaurant-Farm Relations and their Implications

There are several lessons from this section's discussion of the restaurant-farm local food pathway. First, restaurant-farm relationships are grounded in a number of independently justifiable moral valuations. However, in keeping with other research on local food direct marketing (Hinrichs 2000), the compromises among these different valuations must serve the market needs of the restaurants and farms in question. Second, there are two clear strategies of compromise among the restaurants sampled in this study. One considers the ecological and civic values embedded in the concept of local food as primary and organizes its other restaurant activities around these core values, while the other uses ecological and civic values to serve other values like restaurant or chef reputation and restaurant style. Both strategies are successful in locating the restaurant in a market niche by appealing to specific consumer interests and values. Yet, the two strategies have different implications for consumer consciousness and producer opportunities.

Restaurants are in a powerful position to affect consumer culture. The growth of the local food movement is in large part due to the advocacy of reputable chefs. It is also at upscale restaurants that foods are presented at their best in terms of aesthetic and taste. The type of information used to frame local foods in restaurants becomes associated with the quality of food and the restaurant's image in the mind of consumers. Only a few upscale restaurants in my study explicitly associated local foods with the ecological and civic relationships through which the local foods are procured, while most used local food to supplement their independently established restaurant image. The predominant consumer force of local food in upscale restaurants tends toward a relatively uncritical fetishization of local as opposed to a reflexive consumerism based on many of the primary values of local food advocates.

These uses of local food do contribute to greater demand for local foods and more opportunities for producers to organize and meet this demand. However, the more successful farms at marketing to restaurants tend to compromise ecological values on the farm in order to serve higher levels of productivity and standardization. These farms seem to successfully balance market values with more ecologically and civically grounded values, but one wonders how long this balance can be maintained as the popularity of local foods grows and competition increases. The unique characteristics of farms are also less important for those restaurants that merely accommodate and fetishize local foods, making it easier for more productive farms to consolidate their market share and leaving new producers with higher barriers to entry in marketing to restaurants. The fetishization of local also limits demand for local foods through restaurants by making it acceptable for restaurants to satisfy their marketing needs with small percentages of their food sourced locally. Local food accommodation in restaurants appears destined to remain a marginal procurement emphasis as long as it remains primarily a marketing tweak, and this has long-term implications for the growth of restaurant demand for local foods.

As it stands, even the successful restaurant marketers must still diversify their local marketing beyond merely restaurants. Produce growers like Organic Way Farm are attracted to the high revenues of direct marketing through farmers markets and CSA

programs. Meat and dairy producers, on the other hand, require larger scales of production to compensate for their investments in on-farm processing or off-farm processing fees. Supermarkets and other forms of retail stores are prime growth markets for these value-added products. Independent upscale restaurants occupy an interesting middle-ground, where barriers to entry are ostensibly as minimal as dropping off product at the back door, and where sales can dwarf those from farmers markets while paling in comparison to supermarket demand. Despite the cultural impact of local food in upscale restaurants, growth in restaurant local food demand is limited by the stresses of individualized restaurant-farm coordination and the compromises necessary for adapting local food to already an well-established business model and market.

This raises a provocative issue regarding the role of local food in restaurant innovation. The upscale restaurant format itself imposes certain limits on the application of alternative values in coordinating food production and consumption. Are there other types of restaurant that could extricate local food from the marketing bottlenecks in which it is placed in the upscale restaurant context? Chapter Seven will consider the case of Local Burger in Lawrence, KS as one innovative example of re-ordering the concept of the restaurant with local food in mind. It seems unlikely that independent restaurants will play a prominent role in revolutionizing the political economy of food relations without innovative reassessments of what it means to be a restaurant. Yet, the lack of involvement of local producers in civically aligned marketing begs the question of whether the institution of farming is sustainable in its present form. For now, let us turn to another major local food pathway in the growing relationships and food flows between retail stores and farms.

C) Retail-farm Pathways

The last few decades have seen continual consolidation of the North American food retail sector, with the latest wave stimulated by the entrance of Wal-Mart into the sector as a mass-merchant of low cost foods. This consolidation has occurred alongside a decrease in consumer spending on retail foods as compared with foodservice sales. Both of these shifts have contributed to very low margins and increased competition for food retailers. Two of the strategies by retailers to fend off these competitive pressures have

been to search for high value products and to develop innovative retail store formats to incorporate these added value products. Local foods represent one increasingly active avenue of pursuing these strategies among retailers in Eastern Kansas.

Based on the identification of key participants in the structures of retail-oriented sub-communities in the last chapter, this section will consider how the values and strategies of these key participants affect the outcomes and opportunities of local food. In the smaller cities of Lawrence, Topeka, and Manhattan, single cooperative grocers are the primary retail force in local food systems. In Kansas City it was found that supermarket chains dominate to the exclusion of cooperative grocers and the marginalization of specialty food retail stores. The following two subsections will treat the supermarket sector in Kansas City and the cooperative grocers sector in Lawrence and Manhattan separately while studying these different organizational tendencies. The first subsection will study the values and production strategies of the major supermarket chains sourcing local food in Kansas City, specifically comparing the HyVee and Hen House incorporations of local food, so as to understand how these programs shape the kinds of local foods and retail-restaurant relations of local food networks. The second subsection will do the same for the cooperative grocers, especially the Community Mercantile in Lawrence and People's Grocery in Manhattan.

1) Supermarkets & Specialty Retail Stores

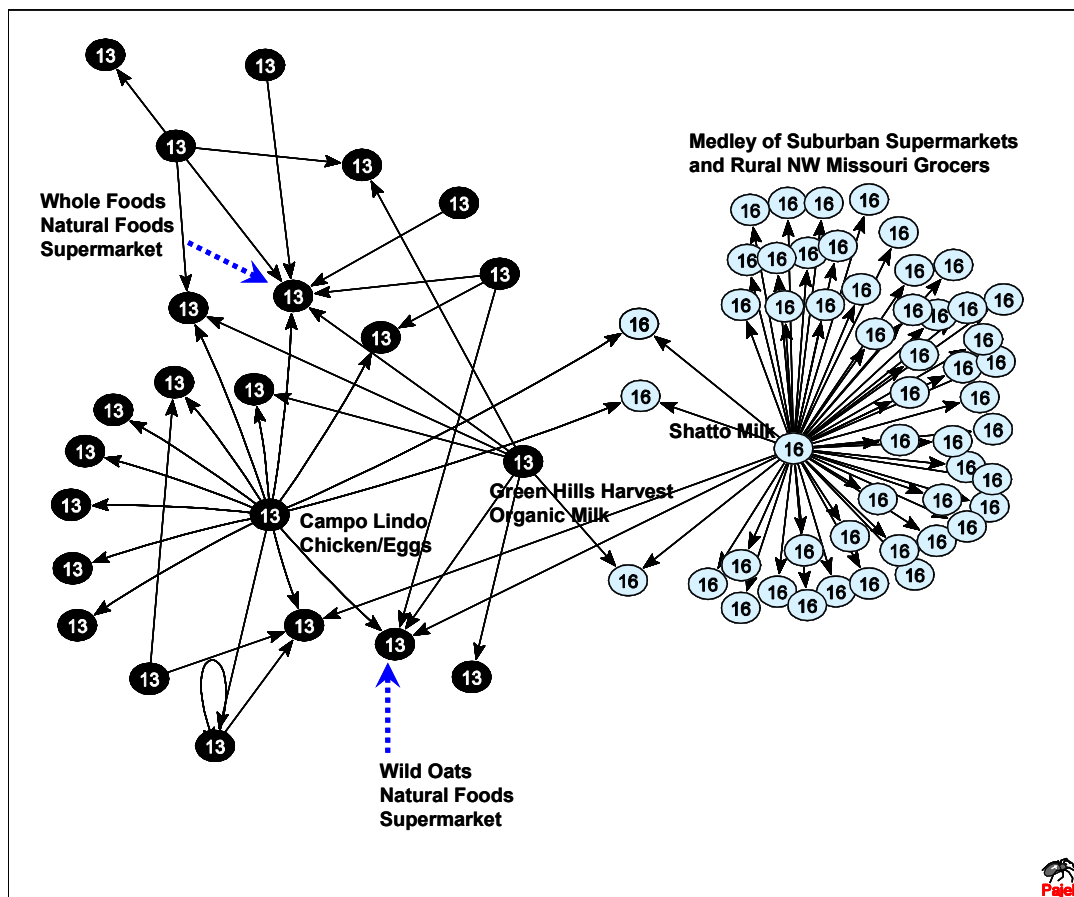
HyVee⁸ is an employee-owned supermarket chain based in Des Moines, Iowa with supermarkets throughout Iowa, Eastern Nebraska, Eastern Kansas, and Missouri. Coordination of supply and distribution of food products to all of its supermarkets are directed through the corporate headquarters and warehouse in Des Moines, meaning that entering the HyVee supply chain requires shipment to their Des Moines warehouse and incorporation into their corporate information systems. The chain has no centrally coordinated program for procuring or marketing local foods, but it does allow individual stores to buy from individual vendors, including local farmers. These relationships are

⁸ HyVee data based on a phone conversation with Nancy Pagel, the Kansas City marketing coordinator for HyVee, on 19 August and an interview with a store manager and store visit on 18 January 2006.

managed on a store-by-store basis by store managers. It is these one-off relationships between individual stores and producers that constitute HyVee's local food linkages.

There are 25 individual HyVee supermarkets in this study's local food network. Nearly all of these are within the Kansas City retail-oriented network sub-community discussed in the previous chapter. Of the local foods procured by these supermarkets, all but 28 of 33 links in the network are either free-range chicken from Campo Lindo farm or bottled milk from Shatto Dairy. Fresh produce, all-natural pork, and wheatgrass products comprise the remaining few links. This highly limited local product diversity

Figure 41: Kansas City Retail Network Diagram



Caption: Retail-oriented subset of Kansas City network, excluding the Hen House program subset, shown below in another figure. Shatto Dairy is the central participant in partition 16 to the right, selling predominantly to HyVee supermarkets and also some rural town retailers. Campo Lindo, the free-range chicken and egg producer, is the central participant in the upper-left partition 13. Campo Lindo sells to select HyVee supermarkets in affluent neighborhoods, Wild Oats and Whole Foods natural foods supermarkets, and to a few specialty retailers.

has its foundation in HyVee's internal priorities.

The "orders of worth" that characterize HyVee's internal organizational structure and its outward image to the public shape the possible niches for incorporating local food into this system. As a major regional supermarket chain with centrally managed distribution, *industrial* values are at the core of HyVee's systems of procurement. In-store promotions are coordinated by central managers using complex data management software to model consumer responses to uniform incentives for uniform products in different locales. These decisions are also tied to wholesale distribution channels which are also centralized, and they leave little room on store shelves for unpredictable supplies of local foods that vary from store to store. Furthermore, HyVee stores have distinguished themselves in the retail food sector with a focus on in-store service provision in the form of banking, prepared hot meals, a dining area, and more, as opposed to innovative regional product offerings. This particular expression of *market* values also excludes ready access for most local foods. Finally, HyVee is very brand-oriented, focused on marketing premium brands of the final foods industry while also branding its stores with a particular style. This expression of *opinion-based* values of reputation appeals to the trust of consumers through polished tile floors, white décor, cleanliness, and orderliness. Most local foods, especially fresh produce, vary in their appearance more than most conventionally produced and procured foods, making them ill-fitted to the cultivated style and image of purity and orderliness in HyVee stores. There are very few local food producers who can navigate the tensions among these values in marketing through HyVee.

The two dominant farms marketing to HyVee stores are both relatively large-scale producers compared to other farms in the study, and they offer standardized specialty products with a brand. This approach corresponds with the "market world" in the "worlds of production" framework. Some sell only to a few HyVee stores catering to wealthy consumers, and others cast a wider net selling at as many of the chain's stores as possible. Campo Lindo, the chicken producer discussed above in section B.3., only sells to a few upscale locations that support a high level of sales at a premium price. On the other hand, Shatto Dairy, an 80 cow dairy farm with micro-creamery and bottling facility,

sells to almost all the HyVee stores in the Kansas City area due to high volume of production and having no fall-back in the form of restaurant sales for its old-fashioned glass-bottled milk. In each case, selling to the store directly saves these producers from selling to wholesale commodity markets where they could not possibly compete on price and which would quickly bankrupt them. Also in each case, the products are traditional in terms of packaging and appearance, and they both have strongly branded images on product packaging to create a distinctive and marketable image. Local food availability in HyVee stores is limited by relying on only the most organized and well-capitalized producers such as Campo Lindo and Shatto Dairy.

Figure 42: Supermarket Product Placement – Shatto Milk in HyVee Supermarkets

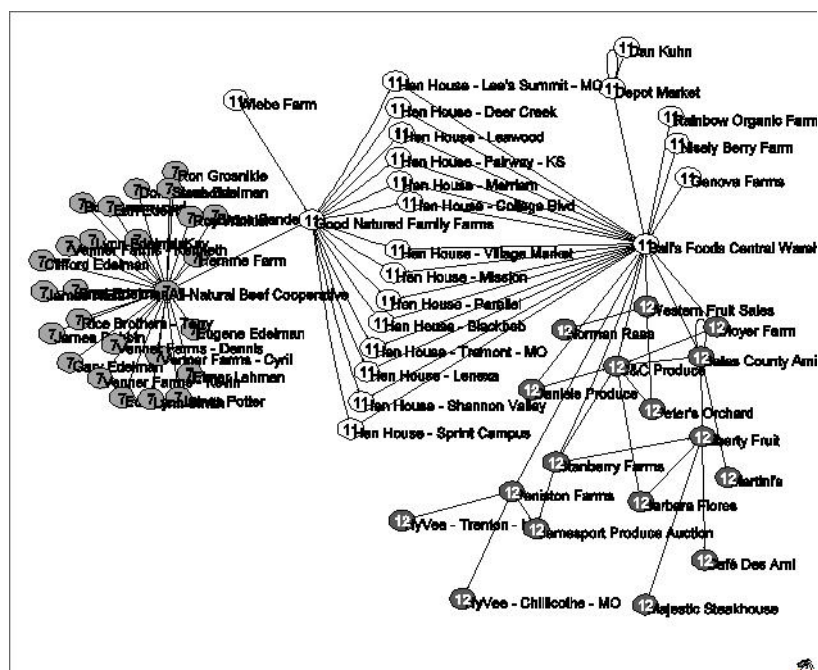


Caption: Images of Shatto Milk (bottled milk at left) in HyVee stores – sales success depends on attractive marketing through branding in the midst of competitive shelf spaces.

The situation could not be more different at Kansas City Hen House supermarkets⁹, Kansas City's main competitor to HyVee. Hen House has begun an extensive and innovative program called Buy Fresh, Buy Local (BFBL) to use the marketing power of localism to boost its regional competitiveness. This is a centrally organized procurement

⁹ Data on Hen House and Buy Fresh, Buy Local was obtained through several interviews and store visits: A Buy Fresh, Buy Local coordination meeting on 29 June, Delbert Housworth on 1 August, Diana Endicott on 2 August, Otavio Silva of Bridging the Gap on 16 July, Matt Jonas (Hen House VP of Operations) on 23 August, and a number of interviews with producer-suppliers to the program and visits to Hen House supermarkets throughout the summer of 2005.

Figure 43: Kansas City Hen House “Buy Fresh, Buy Local” Network Diagram



Caption: *Hen House supermarkets are the central array, partition 11 in the diagram. The all-natural beef producer cooperative and the farmhouse cheese producer are shown at left, while vegetable and fruit growers are pictured at bottom-right in partition 12. Good Natured Family Farms and the Ball's Foods Central Warehouse are the two coordinating bodies with the burden of mediating between numerous producers and supermarkets, and the multiple interests of each.*

and marketing program that leverages the chain's distribution assets as well as its 14 supermarkets. The parent company, Ball's Foods, uses its Kansas City-based warehouse and distribution system to integrate local foods produced within 200 miles of Kansas City into its conventional procurement channels, effectively lowering the barrier to entry to supermarket sales for producers. The foods are provided by a large and growing array of family-owned and operated producers, with fresh produce coordinated by the Hen House central warehouse and processed and value-added products, like meats, milk, jams, cheese or nuts, are coordinated through an umbrella producer alliance called Good Natured Family Farms. Good Natured Family Farms products are all-natural, meaning no hormone or antibiotic use in animals and limited preservatives in processed products. There are no pesticide or fertilizer restrictions on fresh produce, though. The primary produce growers in the program are all several times larger than the largest restaurant produce supplier and tend to use chemicals and inputs for high productivity.

The Hen House program compromises *industrial* and *market* values that dominate conventional supermarket organization with alternative values, and different points in the Hen House organization manage different compromises of these values. The corporate executive decision-making is based on *civic* affirmations of the value of local farmers and special regional products as necessitated by *market* conventions of marketplace competitiveness in terms of market share compared with other area retailers. As the Vice President of Operations for Hen House stated, “Buy Fresh, Buy Local is a marketing campaign like any other; it’s just one of many messages we send to consumers in the stores.” The coordination of local food distribution combines *domestic* relations with farmers and *industrial* conventions of modern supermarket distribution with *ecological* conventions to handle the idiosyncrasies less standardized and durable food products. The store managers compromise *market* conventions in store product placement and in product pricing for the local foods, knowing that these losses will be made up with greater sales of high margin conventional foods, with *domestic* conventions in conveying the particularities of local foods to customers, and *ecological* conventions dealing with fresher and more perishable foods and more continuous display shifting along with seasonal products.

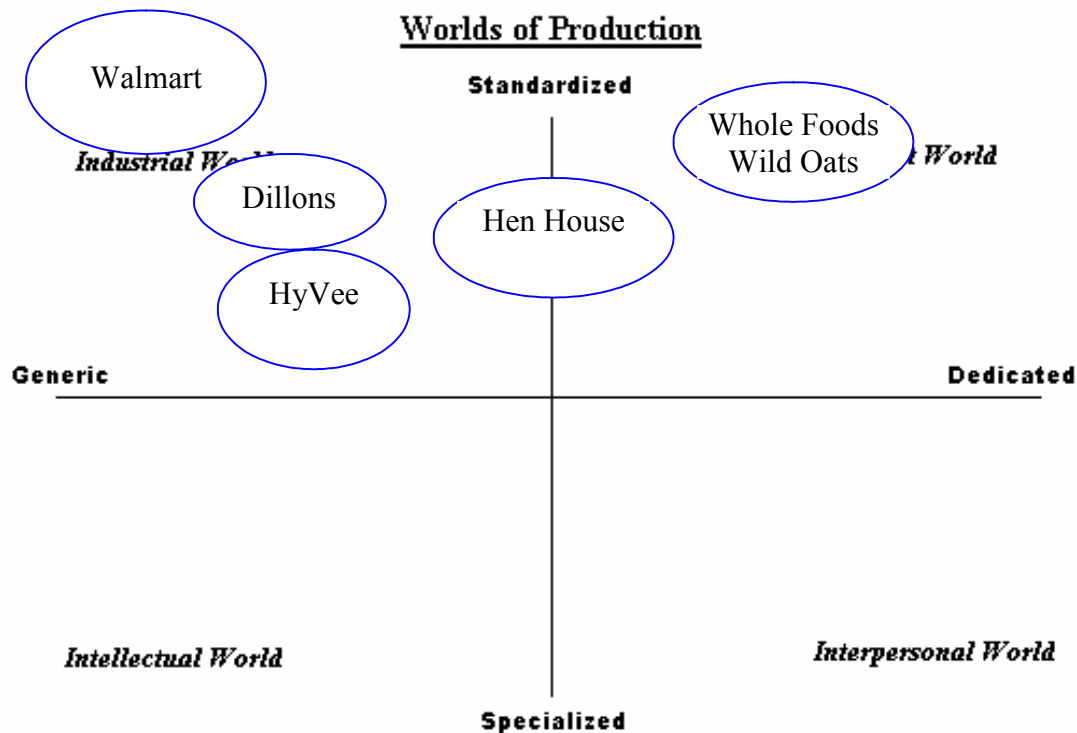
While complementarity among these compromises is the key to successful program implementation, the burdens of compromise are not evenly distributed throughout the program. Thevenot (2001) argues that the function of organizations is to distribute uncertainty across many parties so as to mitigate its problems, and the BFBL system would certainly support this claim. Authority for the program is granted by upper-management in a typical expression of corporate hierarchical decision-making, and while *civic* values are compromised with *market* values by these executives, much of the complex compromise between values is performed by the coordinators of the program who are delegated the management responsibilities for the program. The two program coordinators (GNFF and Ball’s Foods Central Warehouse) have the complex task of reconciling *domestic*, *ecological*, and *civic* values with *industrial* and *market* values in the day-to-day relations of the BFBL program. On top of these complexities of compromise, the two primary coordinators are charged with negotiating among these

values for both many producer-suppliers and many store managers. These one-to-many relationships compound the frustrations of mediating through compromise. The necessities of personalized communication and planning, honoring commitments, and accommodating ecological variables limit the diversity and number of participants that can be coordinated by this arrangement.

To simplify the prospects for coordination, and to meet the high product demand of over a dozen suburban supermarkets, certain producer characteristics are sought and encouraged by the BFBL program. The central warehouse has encouraged many vegetable producers to triple or quadruple their production of certain crops to meet demand. Good Natured Family Farms encourages the formation of producer cooperatives for securing ample supply of meats, dairy, and some durable food products. With prices being paid by Hen House well above wholesale distributor prices, the BFBL program encourages production specialization and intensification among middle-sized farms with adequate capacity to meet demand for the program. This takes different forms for different producers; for some it involves investing in more productive machinery or more intensive crop technology and chemical inputs, while for others like the Amish and Mennonites it involves banding together as communities to leverage cheap labor and plentiful land. Without clear environmental performance and farm diversity guidelines, the BFBL program has the capacity to indirectly promote production methods just as environmentally and socially regressive as those of global food systems.

Despite the complications of compromise, the program has been a success in its intended role of securing Hen House market share. While most supermarkets in Kansas City are losing ground in the market to Wal-Mart and SuperTarget stores, Hen House stores have been holding their ground in the area market in recent years since the installment of the BFBL program. Many of its competitors are envious of the BFBL program and are developing versions of their own, but they will have to contend with the fact that the success of Hen House is a result of leveraging unique assets as much as it is in empowering managers. The most important of these assets for Hen House is its distribution facility located near downtown Kansas City. None of its competitors has a similar facility, severely limiting their abilities to effectively coordinate a diverse local

Figure 44: Kansas City Supermarkets in the Worlds of Production Framework



Caption: *Kansas City supermarkets use various strategies to differentiate themselves in the market. Competition is great among supermarket retailers, especially with the recent entrance of Wal-Mart in the retail food sector. Wal-Mart uses highly standardized supply chains and offers products with mass-appeal, whereas Whole Foods and Wild Oats utilize similar state-of-the-art supply chain management and global product sourcing, but they offer natural foods products dedicated to specialized consumer interests. Dillons, HyVee, and Hen House are all regional supermarkets caught in between these poles. Hen House’s “Buy Fresh, Buy Local” program has helped to distinguish itself from this competition by combining strengths in mass-appeal with a strong niche local food program for specialized consumer interests.*

foods program. In addition to sourcing from regional distribution centers in Denver, CO, the natural foods supermarkets Whole Foods and Wild Oats have only one and three stores, respectively, in Kansas City. This severely limits the demand they can offer to a farmer, and their emphasis on organic foods limits the number of potential farm-suppliers due to competition with direct marketing avenues and restaurant sales for these types of farms. These built-in rigidities of competitors compared with Hen House also impact the ability of these stores to adapt to shifting competition in the marketplace, something that can be represented with the “worlds of production” framework as seen below.

The adjustments and compromises necessary for each of these supermarkets to distinguish themselves in the ultra-competitive marketplace of modern supermarkets in the Midwest entail innovative marketing. Using local food as part of innovative marketing and store management requires supermarkets to flex their distribution and product management systems to accommodate foods with characteristics for which they were not designed. There are also market incentives for instrumental use of local food, often contributing to the fetishization of local without explicitly communicating the intent and effects of this marketing fetish to consumers or participants in the local supply chain. In the context of supermarkets, compromises of values underpin both the organization of local supply chains and also the ways in which marketing engages the consumer. These compromises simultaneously give new kinds of relations access to powerful retail spaces, but they also prevent transparent representation of motives and impacts of these relations.

2) Cooperatives, Large and Small

Retail food cooperatives are based on the concept of cooperative ownership of enterprise. This ownership is usually organized through membership shares bought by the consumers that shop at the cooperatives, and the members then have a degree of democratic say into the management of the cooperative through voting and the approval of the guiding boards of directors. The larger of these cooperatives can be full-functioning grocery stores that act like hyper-specialized supermarkets, while others might be little more than a small shop acting as venue for a CSA, buying group, farmers market, or some combination of these. Those in Eastern Kansas have organized from grassroots beginnings and universally feature a strong affinity for health foods, sustainable agriculture, and some degree of local food provisioning.

Membership in these cooperatives is composed of consumers disenfranchised by conventional retail stores, and the mission of the cooperatives is to serve the marginalized interests of their members. In doing so, they engage different core values than conventional retailers. In particular, *ecological* values are common and expressed through conventions like primarily stocking health foods. The form and availability of health foods in the market has largely been shaped by the political economy of organic

foods, and cooperative grocers tend to use national and regional organic and natural foods distributors to source health foods in the durable manufactured forms that mimic products from the conventional final foods industry. In this way, cooperatives also engage *market* values by purchasing in bulk from distributors to obtain price reductions favorable to their members. Yet, local foods have a natural resonance with cooperative grocers through the *civic* values that are the heart of cooperative forms of organization. When members pool their resources to establish a retail store for their common good, it is an expression of collective civic activism. It takes very little cajoling to extend this sphere of civic concern among members toward the producers who would provision the store. Avenues of opportunity for local food development through cooperative grocers therefore rest on appeals toward combined *civic* and *ecological* values with a diminished prioritization of *market* values in recognition of the often higher prices for local foods.

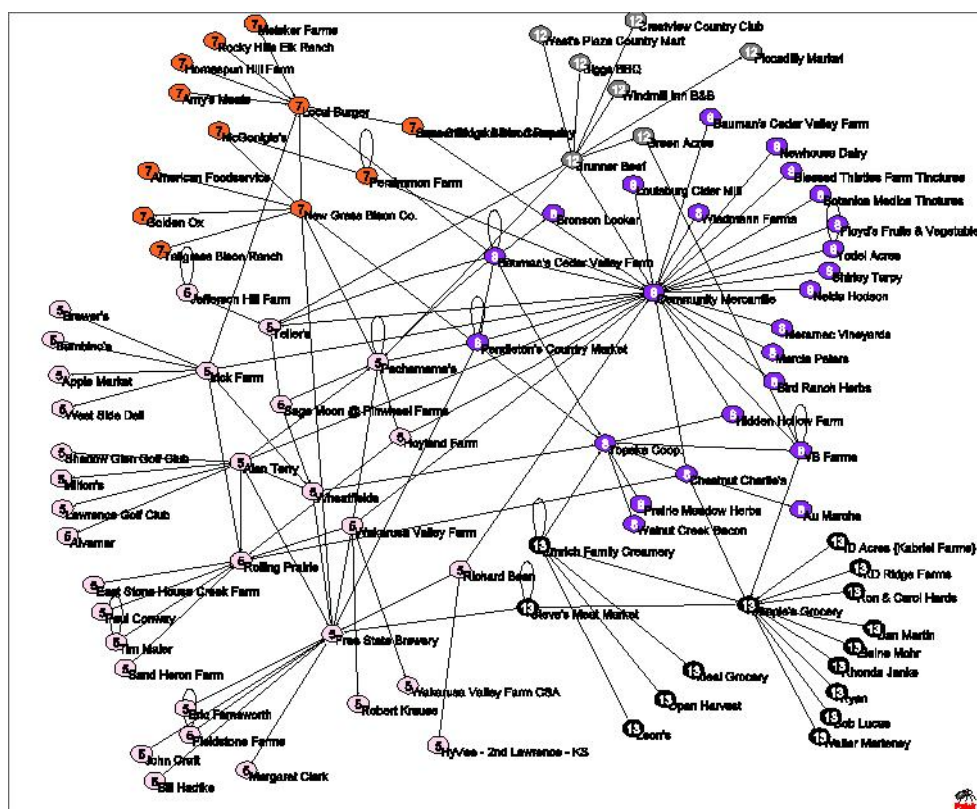
Different cooperative grocers make these compromises of values to different degrees and in different ways. While the cooperative model in some ways guarantees that these compromises will be democratically determined, the extent to which decisions incorporate the perspectives of those outside the spheres of membership is in many ways up to the will of the members. Governance of these cooperatives can have a big impact on their role in fostering local foods in their respective locales and in shaping the networks that emerge as a result.

The Community Mercantile¹⁰ in Lawrence, KS has long been supported by a strong community of members. It survived three years of losses in the mid-1990's due to competition from a Wild Oats store in a town where natural foods demand could not support both, and survival depended largely on conscious avoidance of Wild Oats by its membership as well as member loans to absorb annual losses. This example of strong community spirit has also been readily adapted to supporting local foods through the store. For the last few years, the Community Mercantile's board of directors has continually increased its demands for management to stock more local foods, empowering managers to sacrifice some ordering and store presentation ideals toward

¹⁰ Community Mercantile data was gathered through interviews with the Director of Education and the Retail Manager at the store on 2 May and 3 May of 2005, respectively, as well as numerous store visits and conversations with individual department managers and local food suppliers.

providing accessible and identifiable spaces for local foods in the store. *Civic* values are certainly a driver of its strong efforts to incorporate local foods into the store. As the Community Mercantile’s retail manager explained, the organization’s mission is to “provide community ownership of a grocery store that encourages personal, community, and environmental health, so we want the product to fit into our mission statement and we consider a local product to be supporting community health”. This membership-mandated extension of a food retail environment into various other forms of community support has meant a great deal to local food development in Lawrence, helping to increase demand for local foods beyond the farmers market, but also encouraging collaborative cross-linking with diverse producers and restaurants in the community.

Figure 45: Lawrence-Area Community Network Diagram



Caption: *The Community Mercantile is the central participant in partition 8 at upper-right. It purchases “local foods” from numerous producers who also sell to restaurants and through the farmers market. In so doing, it anchors a differentiated, but highly interconnected local food network in Lawrence, helping to establish a true community in the local food movement there.*

The types of foods that benefit from the Community Mercantile’s compromises toward localism tend to be boutique goods from producers with small-to-moderate scales

of production. Smaller scale of production fits well with the smaller consumer demand from a single cooperative grocery store as opposed to a chain. The local producers and Community Mercantile compensate for the limitations of single store sales by adding value through carefully linking local food to local producers with in-store signage and knowledgeable staff. This strategy is reinforced by the strong farmers market in Lawrence, where consumers can meet face-to-face with producers in order to associate face with name in the Community Mercantile. Some producers are also those who sell to restaurants, further enhancing name recognition. While there is no mandate to do so, organic foods are the norm due to the strong incentives for ecologically conscientious production methods in the ecological priorities of Community Mercantile customers. The moderate size and ecological sensitivity of the Community Mercantile thus provides an attractive demand for high quality, organic produce, meats, and other value-added products. However, the demand is not adequate to completely support producers on its own, encouraging them to carry *ecological* and *domestic* production and associational values with them in other marketing pursuits such as through restaurants or the farmers market.

People's Grocery¹¹ in Manhattan does not perform quite so integral a role in promoting local foods and uniting efforts into a local food movement. Its board of directors has charged store management with the primary responsibility for sales growth and reasonable prices on organic and other health foods. This mission has lend itself to serving those with special dietary needs and food allergies as well as those highly concerned about food additives, preservatives, and pesticide residues. Although the management recognized the importance of supporting local producers, the provenance of foods has not been as important as avoiding "unnatural" chemicals in the food. In practice, there are relatively few local products in People's Grocery compared with the Community Mercantile due to the fact that few local producers go to the trouble of organic certification. As the general manager explained, "People are generally concerned about the health of themselves and their families, and we try to give them the best prices

¹¹ Data on values and priorities of People's Grocery obtained from an interview with the General Manager of the store on 4 May 2005 as well as numerous store visits and conversations with individual local food suppliers.

more importantly are more variable. People's Grocery is small compared to the Community Mercantile, and minimally staffed. Store space and management time are premium resources, and without a mandate from membership, the management is ill-suited to coordinating variable supplies and changing store displays for local foods. The local foods that are successful are those which are either shelf-stable – like cheeses and frozen meats – or they can be depended on for continuous supply – like bottled milk from a micro-creamery and eggs. Produce from local farms is a rarity due to the complexities of managing supply, and store management sees this as a minor problem given other opportunities in town for fresh, local produce in the farmers market and Eastside/Westside Markets. The result on the Manhattan-area network is that People's Grocery does not serve as a reliable and committed demand for local foods upon which local producers can base much confidence in organizing their business plans. The dominance of *market* concerns on the prioritization of food procurement diminishes People's Grocery's role as a local food leader despite its potentially strong role in this regard, contrary to the example of the Community Mercantile.

What are we to make of these variations in leadership among cooperative grocers? Smaller cities have less competitiveness among their supermarket retailers, competitiveness that would translate into retail opportunities for local foods. Instead, cooperative grocers appear to represent alternative values in food procurement in these urban contexts. If local food is to take off in the smaller cities of Eastern Kansas, cooperative grocers have a role to play in determining the extent and the type of growth. The Lawrence and Manhattan cooperative-farm relationships and networks illustrate both the potential for leadership and the complications of compromising values required to perform the leadership role. The cooperative organizational model needs only minimal extension to welcome local foods on *civic* grounds, and the marginalized *ecological* and *domestic* values of cooperative customers are also easily aligned with organic and boutique products from small producers to which they can relate. Yet, there are practical difficulties for managers to significantly expand local food access, and there are minimal incentives to overcome these difficulties of compromising conventions without strong leadership from members, boards of directors, and concerned consumers.

3) Summary

While independent upscale restaurants have been at the forefront of a cultural renaissance celebrating localness of food, they have not been alone in capitalizing on this cultural shift. Supermarkets in major metropolitan areas, and grocery cooperatives in smaller cities, have both been drivers of local food growth in an effort to attract concerned consumers in their respective urban contexts. Supermarkets and grocery cooperatives each have common traits among their respective store formats that create common rationales and difficulties in embracing local foods. At the same time, each supermarket chain and grocery cooperative responds to these rationales and challenges in unique ways, producing difference in the construction of local food networks.

Supermarket chains produce difference with variations in decision-making at the various points of their corporate hierarchies. Despite their desire to appeal to shifting consumer sensibilities, most supermarket chains are ill-suited to comprehensive local food marketing strategies. Supply chain management is usually centralized in such chains, but this centralization rarely overlaps with the geography of stores closely enough to effectively coordinate local sourcing as well as conventional regional and national distribution systems. In the absence of such overlap, local food is either ignored entirely or responsibility is devolved to individual store managers to seek local food sources that do not overly challenge the conventional management of the store. Where central management and distribution infrastructure do substantially overlap with a local foodshed, as in the Hen House “Buy Fresh, Buy Local” program, substantial capacity for local food provisioning exists. However, this requires novel compromises between conventional and local organizational values – ecological, domestic, and civic – at each level of the supermarket hierarchy – central office, distribution facilities, and individual stores. It also places much of the burden of compromise on coordinators between the supermarket distribution system and local producers. In the less coordinated version of these retail-farm pathways, local producers all have incentives to concentrate on high production of high-value crops while competing with each other for access to individual stores. In the Hen House version, farms are encouraged by coordinators to specialize in high productivity of individual crops to fulfill the high collective demand of all stores;

this is to the detriment of on-farm product diversity, but to the benefit of enrolling a larger number of producers and offering a wider variety of products in stores. A greater number of farms are sustained by the coordinated Hen House version than the uncoordinated version typical of supermarkets right now, but each is notable for the disconnect between ecological, domestic, and civic ideals and their practical implementation through improved farm ecologies, personal relations, and cooperative management of the market for the benefit of all.

Grocery cooperatives do not have such extended hierarchies, but individual conditions also strongly influence their degree and style of local food participation. Cooperative organizational structures have an inherent resonance with the *civic* ideals of local food engagement, and scale of demand is appropriate for the levels of production of the small farms who are the primary suppliers of local foods. The Community Mercantile is an example of a cooperative that has exerted the primacy of these *civic* ideals through its membership and board of directors in concert with its well-established *ecological* ideals for organic and all-natural foods. It has comprehensively sought to incorporate local foods through local provisioning of store product, but also through educational advocacy, networking with other town organizations, and through playing host to community food organizations and events (e.g. Rolling Prairie cooperative CSA). In contrast, People's Grocery's board of directors and management have exerted the primacy of *market* values rather than *civic* ones, limiting the types of local foods that are suitable for in-store placement and the efficacy of the cooperative grocery in incubating the growth of local food relations throughout the community. Cooperative grocers have significant capacity to promote local foods, but their governance structures and decision-making is critical in directing management toward making the compromises necessary to this end.

Combined, supermarkets and cooperative grocers represent a substantial demand for local foods beyond restaurant sales and farmers markets. In smaller urban areas, cooperative grocers and other specialty retailers have the potential to challenge conventional agri-food systems of provision through engaging alternative values common in local food pathways. In major metropolitan areas, supermarket chains are a

major retail force, and incorporating local foods is a way of challenging conventional relations from within. The successes of local food development in retail contexts are not universal nor are they pure, as is evidenced by the compromises between conventional *industrial* and *market* values and the more diverse values shaping local foods. Rather, retail sales represent expanded options for marketing local foods, options that vary in their complementarity with other local food pathways depending on whether the respective pathway participants value the same things and relate in the same ways.

D) Conclusions – Value in Local Foods

The development of local food systems is driven by value – value produced by farmers and intermediaries and recognized and compensated by consumers. However, the production and consumption of this value is an uncertain and contested process, with many different methods and modalities. This chapter has shown through conventions theory frameworks how the processes of constructing and consuming value can be viewed as experiments and negotiations in the organizing of agri-food relations according to common sets of values. These experiments and negotiations are uneven throughout the study region, as are the combinations and compromises of values at the heart of new agri-food relations. This unevenness results in a diversity of practices dedicated to local food in Eastern Kansas, but it also creates a geographically differentiated and contested meaning of local food.

While the following chapter will focus more on the geographical aspects of this differentiation, this chapter has been dedicated to unearthing the often unspoken moral valuations underpinning local food networks. The local food networks presented in Chapter Five provided a structural basis in addition to intuitions developed during fieldwork for choosing key cases for the study of these values. The concept of food pathway was used to separate analyses of restaurant-oriented and retail-oriented supply chains, while conventions frameworks were used to understand the framing of local food value in terms of moral “orders of worth”. The chapter particularly focused on restaurants and retailers more than producers as sites for the negotiation and compromise in constructing and representing local food supply chains according to these moral values. Producers and consumers are active participants in the processes of compromise

that create the local food pathways, but restaurants and retailers appear to serve as key intermediaries in these pathways where the interests and values of producers, consumers, and the intermediaries can all be expressed.

Restaurant-farm and retail-farm local food pathways both exhibited distinctive patterns of value. In each case, cohesive framings of value related to the cohesion local food network communities, expressed as archetypes for the ordering of local food relations. Case studies articulated two archetypes in the Kansas City restaurant community; one where intensive ecological, domestic, and civic values are the core ordering principles in the supply chain, and another where these values are engaged but subordinated to opinion-based and inspirational values contributing to restaurant atmosphere. In retail-farm pathways, there was an important distinction between conventional retailers, typically in the form of supermarkets, and the cooperative groceries which are the predominant local food retailers in smaller cities. There is an archetypal split among Kansas City supermarkets; most supermarket chains leave coordinating with local producers to individual store managers, but one supermarket chain coordinates local foods among individual stores and numerous producers through a coordinated program. In the former case local foods are at the whim of *industrial* and *market* values, while in the latter case local foods and alternative values have a form of dedicated legitimacy relative to these conventional values. However, the power of local foods in each case is marginal compared to dominant supermarket organizing values. Cooperative grocers also revealed two archetypes; where one example is intent on community growth and development of local food networks, another is more internally focused on store growth through conventional market values and conventions of specialization. These divisions have some commonalities in their construction of the value and meaning of local food, despite their unique organizational and geographical contexts.

Compromise is an essential feature of mediating between producer and consumer interests in constructing value. The trouble with compromise is that it often entails the prioritization of equally justifiable values in the service of particular agendas. In this case, ecological, civic, and other expanded forms of worth are generally only valued if

they can be leveraged to justify the price premiums that support the more intensive relationships required to engage in these values. Moral value is thereby reduced to market effectiveness in the ordering of local agri-food relations, despite earnest efforts by many to prioritize these values over purified values of the market. Even organizations like Bluebird Bistro and the Community Mercantile, which place non-market values at the core of their dedicated incorporations of local foods, still must place the values of local food in line with efforts to remain competitive in the face of others who see plenty of money to be made in the instrumentalization of local. While consumers may be offered increasing diversity and quality of products and personalized relationships through this local food movement, such development comes at the cost of high prices, a reinforced division between producer and consumer roles in market relations, and the emergence of somewhat uncompetitive markets.

Local food pathways may have mixed success in challenging root industrial and market agri-food values, but they do very little to challenge geographies of consumption or the fetishizations of localism. This chapter shows that processes of compromise in local food pathways certainly do impact the distribution of value, exerting preferences for urban consumption of quality foods from producer groups close enough and well-organized enough to take marketing in their own hands. As long as these preferences remain unacknowledged by local food advocates, there is little possibility of reducing social and geographical inequities of access to local food networks by producers and consumers, alike. The contemporary focus on unreflexive localism obscures the complexity and problems of constructing local food values and networks, limits our capacity to build food system values based on justice and inclusion. As the owner of Free State Brewery in Lawrence stated with regard to his support of a small grain mill in Western Kansas, “Is it not sanctified simply because it’s too far from Lawrence? Thinking this way is a diminishment of our common humanity. How can we build something inclusive and enhancing with this kind of mentality?” Indeed, localism is often used for the sake of finding a market niche for specialty activities without regard to building a genuinely expanded ethics of concern and health through local food networks. Despite circumspection about the focus on localism among some local food participants,

the worlds of production framework remains a powerful model showing the inability for participants to escape the market landscape with regard to their local food activities. Protectionist and exclusionary discourse pays, and progressive desires for equitable distributions of value can easily revert to more regressive forms of “defensive localism” that privilege local elites and stifle innovation (Winter 2003). If they base their activism solely on their internal community concerns, or “militant particularisms” as David Harvey (Harvey 1996; Harvey 2000) has articulated them, local food activists can miss opportunities for solving food system problems through reflexive politics and trans-local collaborations.

The evolving landscape of local food is thus a mixture of challenges to conventional food supply chains, in terms of geographic proximity and the exclusion of processor/manufacturer/distributor conglomerates, but also in terms of values and discourses. Local food networks foster alternative logics and values for ordering agri-food economics, but constructing new agri-food relations presents profound uncertainties in negotiating the priorities and values of these relationships among participants. In the process, ecological, civic, domestic, and inspirational values often find themselves serving powerful market values rather than being valued as alternative paradigms in their own right. This leads to questions about the nature of the relationship between alternative and conventional food systems. (Allen, FitzSimmons et al. 2003; Whatmore, Stassart et al. 2003; Watts, Ilbery et al. 2005; Holloway, Kneafsey et al. 2007) Is local food reducible to a marketing niche, or is there something truly challenging to market values in the local food movement? The conventions frameworks used in this chapter suggest that the disruption of industrial and market logics is partial, incomplete, and continually in the process of negotiation. There are ample signs that there is nothing inherently alternative about local food networks in terms of their values, and extractive and exploitative logics appear to have the capacity to distort and appropriate other values in food localism. It will be a challenge for advocates to resist reducing their struggle to a boosterism of localism in favor of nuanced, particular, and geographically contingent struggles over inclusive and mutually enhancing values and valorizations.

The “orders of worth” and “worlds of production” frameworks have been very helpful foundations for studying the uncertainties about what local food means and how this contributes to the construction of local food networks, but they also have shown some important limitations. They were helpful for classifying common moral groundings for economic relations, and in doing so they were a basis of comparison between many different types of organization and geographical settings. They were also helpful for framing the construction of local food pathways in terms of compromises between participants with both sympathetic and conflicting sets of values. However, the frameworks were not so helpful in representing the processes and politics of negotiation and/or coercion at the heart of compromise. They were also limited in their capacity to represent the orderings of resources, processes, and space in service of the compromises reached. While the conventions frameworks were useful in considering relatively stable and/or formal relationships, they also have their limitations in conceptualizing how variations in decision-making, informal partnerships, and ephemeral settings play into the evolution and growth local food value, meaning, and networks. To compensate for some of these limitations, the next chapter will employ an alternative and complementary framework based on examining the places and spaces that host the processes and relationships of local food networks.

