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Alternative Food Systems: Expectations and Reality

abstract | *Short food supply chains (SFSCs) are a type of alternative food system (AFS) whose alterity is defined by socially proximal economic exchanges that are embedded in and regulated by social relationships. Recent scholarship has questioned assumptions of a causal relationship between participation in AFS structures and producer adherence to AFS value systems and broader food systems outcomes. One area where these assumptions have cast a shadow is on the motivations that farmers have for participating in SFSC market venues. To shed light on these motivations, nineteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with Vermont vegetable and diversified vegetable farmers. Within individuals and between interviews, some farmers seemed to hold contradictory goals. A qualitative coding framework based on the theoretical arc of Granovetter, Block, and Hinrichs was developed to parse out and organize these internal contradictions. The results demonstrate how formal and substantive rationality can both play a role in motivations to participate or not participate in certain SFSC markets. These findings challenge common assumptions about AFS alterity.*

keywords | *Alternative Food Systems, Short Food Supply Chains, Embeddedness, Karl Polanyi*

The debate regarding the legitimacy of the theoretical underpinnings of alternative food systems (AFSs) and whether or not they live up to expectations continues to evolve.¹ There is at present a lack of in-depth qualitative studies that examine the values, motivations, and practices of farmers participating in AFSs.² In part, this research gap is a consequence of assumptions that AFSs are fundamentally different and opposed to the dominant paradigm of food production and distribution—here referred to as the conventional food system (CFS).³ This notion of fundamental difference stems from a perceived dominant role of formal and substantive rationality in the CFS and the AFS respectively.

This oppositional framing finds its roots in the theory of economic anthropologist Karl Polanyi, which has been subsequently critiqued and modified by Marc Granovetter, Fred Block, and Clare Hinrichs.⁴ These scholars posit a concomitant influence of formal and substantive rationality in economic decision making. In this study, this model is used to interpret the motivations that a sample of Vermont vegetable and diversified vegetable farmers have for participating in a type of AFS known as a short food supply chain (SFSC). In doing so, this paper contributes to both the theoretical and practical literature on AFSs by confirming recent challenges to AFS alterity as well as providing practical insight into farmer motivations. First, the paper briefly reviews the evolution of AFS theory. Second, the paper explains how the analytical framework for this study was developed from recent AFS literature. Third, the analytical framework is applied to three case studies.

Finally, the paper concludes that formal and substantive rationality can both be playing a role in motivations to participate or not participate in certain SFSC markets. These motivations can be aligned in pursuit of a common goal or can at times come into conflict. Implications of this conclusion are discussed, and areas in need of further research are identified.

BACKGROUND

The Conventional Food System

There are numerous problems associated with agriculture and the food system today. Some of these impacts are tangible, including environmental damage, vanishing farmer livelihoods and rural communities, human health impacts, and social justice issues.⁵ Other impacts are more existential, including a sense of alienation from production, a lack of transparency and trust, and a yearning for more authentic foodways.⁶ For a certain subset of concerned producers and consumers, these impacts arise from a set of values, practices, and characteristics that typify the dominant paradigm of agricultural production and exchange—here referred to as the conventional food system (CFS).⁷

These concerned individuals perceive the CFS to embody such processes and values as centralization, consumer dependence, competition, domination of nature, specialization, and exploitation.⁸ These values have in turn shaped the structural characteristics of the CFS, which include increasingly fewer and larger farms; vertical and

horizontal integration of input manufacturers, producers, processors, distributors, and retailers in the food supply chain; increasingly globalized supply chains; and increased physical and social distance between producers and consumers.⁹ A growing social movement rejects CFS values, practices, and characteristics across the board, in order to resolve negative impacts that are perceived to be a consequence of these variables.¹⁰ The values and structures that are emerging from this movement have been loosely labeled alternative food networks—here referred to as alternative food systems (AFSs).¹¹

Origins of the Conventional and Alternative Food

Systems Sociologist Elizabeth Barham argues that all AFS movements can be viewed as a kind of anti-systemic protest against the disembedding of economic activity.¹² The idea of a disembedded economy was developed by economic anthropologist Karl Polanyi in his 1944 book *The Great Transformation*.¹³ Polanyi believed that in pre-industrial societies, economic decisions were evaluated primarily through substantive rationality; that is, economic activity was viewed primarily as a means for achieving noneconomic socially defined objectives, such as social, religious, or political considerations, as well as to meet individual needs. In this way, economic activity was embedded within society.¹⁴

Polanyi argued that Western societies made an abrupt transformation following the industrial revolution, beginning to perceive economic transactions as being informed and motivated by formal rationality. According to the theory of formal rationality, economic decision making is ideally guided by an internal logic of maximizing individual gain or utility. This formal rationality is posited as a universal human trait, not as a product of a unique sociocultural structures and interactions. Polanyi argued that by adopting this interpretation of the economy, Western culture created an idea of economics with a logic outside of social control; or in his words, the economy became disembedded from society.¹⁵ Polanyi predicted that this unrestrained economy would have severe negative impacts and that people would take action to protect themselves from the disembedded economy. AFSs can be understood as a countermovement against the formalization and disembedding of agricultural production and exchange that typify the CFS.¹⁶

Theoretical Foundations of SFSCs FSs have become incredibly diverse in terms of which values and impacts of the CFS they focus on as a point of differentiation. The Fair Trade and organic movements, community supported agriculture (CSA), farmers markets, localism, and more can

all ultimately be characterized as rejections of a value or impacts of the CFS.¹⁷ One type of AFS is called a short food supply chain (SFSC). SFSCs attempt to challenge the CFS specifically by socially re-embedding agricultural economic exchanges through structurally differentiated markets that foster more direct interactions between producers and consumers and deliver socially contextualizing information along with agricultural products.

There are three kinds of short food supply chain transactions.¹⁸ First, there are face-to-face transactions. These are the most embedded and likely the most local. Examples of face-to-face transactions include farmers markets, pick-your-own operations, community supported agriculture (CSA), and on-farm retail. Second, there are spatially proximal transactions, which are conducted by local middlemen while still delivering products that remain encoded with information about the context of production. These could include cooperatives, specialty stores, grocery stores, restaurants, and even institutions and schools. Finally, there are spatially extended transactions, which occur through non-local middlemen and non-local consumers but still deliver products with socially contextualizing information. One example of spatially extended transactions would be a regional distributor who sells products locally as well as up and down the East Coast.

The first two kinds of transactions create the most opportunity for economic exchanges to be experienced as situated in a social relationship and are understood to have the shortest relational distance.¹⁹ Thus, the SFSC structurally differentiates itself from the CFS through the elimination, reduction, or social contextualization of middlemen in the food supply chain, provisioning food products that also deliver social relationships and trust. The relational closeness that defines SFSCs confers upon consumers a direct role in what producers provision and how—a power that is confirmed by SFSC producers.²⁰ Relational closeness allows consumers to directly communicate the values they want embodied in their foods and also confirm through questioning and observation that these values are present. This degree of perceived control and transparency is impossible in the CFS due to the lack of contextual information delivered with a commodity product and the relational distance between producers and consumers.

Provisioning contextual information to consumers who are willing to pay for it gives farmers a way to profit from values that are not rewarded in commodity markets. Such opportunities are attractive to farmers who do not wish to or can no longer successfully participate in the increasingly

competitive CFS. Another potential benefit of SFSCs includes community economic development, achieved by keeping economic exchanges local, cutting profit-taking middlemen out of the supply chain, and even generating additional economic activity—an effect called an economic multiplier.²¹ Perhaps more controversially, it has been argued that communities with more spatially and socially proximal businesses score higher on quality of life indicators and experience higher rates of civic engagement.²²

The Debate Over AFSs The structure of AFS exchange seems to allow for greater transparency, consumer and producer agency, consumer-producer relationships, market valuation of public goods, local economic activity, and more. However, as short food supply chains have become more widespread, there is increasing concern that consumers and policy makers alike may be making a number of unfounded assumptions about short food supply chains.

There is increasing evidence that individuals seem to assume that certain values, practices, or impacts are a necessary outcome of the use and proliferation of AFS structures like SFSCs. Academic and political entities have overemphasized structural approaches to respatialize and resocialize food production in efforts to achieve desirable food systems improvements.²³ It has been demonstrated that consumers make many assumptions about a product's context of production and producer adherence to the consumer's value system simply as a result of the product being spatially proximal. Consumers have been shown to believe that local food is fresher, of higher quality, more natural, and less environmentally harmful than food purchased through spatially extended conventional supply chains. Nevertheless, these assumptions have been shown not necessarily to be true.²⁴ These studies begin to suggest that consumers conflate the structure of an exchange with adherence to certain values or with certain outcomes or impacts, even though they do not take the initiative to test these assumptions or do not have a way to test them.

Similarly, consumers may be susceptible to making assumptions with respect to social proximity. Short food supply chains are supposed to enable consumers to interrogate producers about the methods used in the production of and values embodied in their food purchases. However, some research suggests that consumers in SFSCs are liable to be predisposed to trust producers in direct exchanges, rather than generate trust through relationship building.²⁵ Thus, it seems that even trust, which is supposed to be an outcome of a process, is perceived to be an inherent quality of the type of exchange. In addition, despite placing an emphasis on social proximity, SFSCs have at times

been shown to be neglectful of the broader social good, perpetuating white privilege, unequitable distribution, and other harmful social dynamics.²⁶

Some argue that assumptions that certain values and outcomes are an inherent quality of AFSs arise from their inappropriate framing as being opposed to, superior to, and fundamentally different from the CFS.²⁷ This dichotomous oppositional framing appears to be at the core of AFS authenticity as discussed through the work of Polanyi and Barham above. Fundamentally, the assumption of opposing values, practices, and structures rests upon Karl Polanyi's opposing forms of formal and substantive rationality. Since AFSs are framed as being opposed to the formally motivated CFS, there seem to be assumptions that producers who participate in AFS market structures privilege substantive rationality. An authentic AFS producer is expected to value independence, community, harmony with nature, diversity, and restraint—substantively motivated goals—rather than the formally motivated, gain-maximizing behaviors such as centralization, consumer dependence, competition, domination of nature, specialization, and exploitation associated with the CFS.²⁸ However, it is not an inherent quality of AFS structures such as SFSCs that this dichotomy should be enacted.²⁹

Granovetter called into question the dichotomous framing of disembedded and embedded economies posited by Polanyi.³⁰ Granovetter argued that modern economic activity is never wholly disembedded and that preindustrial economies were never wholly embedded either. He supported his argument by examining ways in which social relationships inform and constrain the supposedly independent logic of the free market in modern societies.

Fred Block further refines the argument of the always embedded economy by positing that the consideration of embeddedness is in tension with considerations of marketness and instrumentalism in every economic transaction. Embeddedness, marketness, and instrumentalism refer to the importance of social relations and expectations, the importance of price, and the importance of individual goals, respectively.³¹ Depending on the unique characteristics of the actors and the context of the transaction, embeddedness, marketness, and instrumentalism play varying roles in a transaction. While embeddedness is opposed to marketness and instrumentalism, it does not preclude them, and all could play a role in any given economic transaction.³² Thus, Granovetter and Block completely do away with the notion of a society shaped and constrained by an independent market logic or completely constrained by the expectations

of society. Instead, economic decisions are always embedded in society, and individuals are independently acting upon prioritization of marketness, instrumentalism, and embeddedness in every economic exchange. Marketness and instrumentalism, both involving the pursuit of individual gain, are informed by formal rationality, while embeddedness prioritizing social and moral obligations is informed by substantive rationality.

Hinrichs brings Block's interpretation of economic exchange to bear on AFSs, using it to dismantle their posited alterity based on embeddedness.³³ If embeddedness can be found to influence the workings of the supposedly formally rational CFS, Hinrichs asks, could marketness and instrumentalism be found in the supposedly hyper-embedded exchanges of the AFS? By observing economic exchanges at farmers markets and CSAs, two of the most relationally proximal types of AFS exchanges, Hinrichs determines that instrumentalism and marketness are present. Thus, "embeddedness should not be seen as the friendly antithesis of the market."³⁴ This evolving dialogue provides evidence and a framework for explaining how formal rationality and substantive rationality can simultaneously motivate decision making on the SFSC farm level. It is from this theoretical context that the analytical framework for parsing out farmer motivations for participating in SFSC markets is derived.

METHODS Nineteen interviews were conducted by the author with vegetable and diversified vegetable farmers who operated near Burlington or Montpelier, Vermont, and participated in SFSCs. Initially, farmers who had previously participated in University of Vermont studies were interviewed, but subsequently snowball sampling methods were used to identify potential interviewees.³⁵ This method was particularly useful for identifying farmers who had not yet built a significant reputation or market presence. The interviews ranged in length from as short as half an hour to as long as two hours, though most were about an hour long. Most of the interviews occurred at the farms during the winter and early spring months of 2014. Two of the interviews were done over the phone, and three other interviews were done in person but away from the farm. Interviews were transcribed with HyperTranscribe, and these transcripts were coded with HyperResearch.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, participant observation was conducted on three farms. Two days were spent working alongside the selected farmers and their employees. There were many opportunities to ask

questions and take copious notes. Insights gained from the participant observation helped to support and inform the analysis, and these three farms are showcased in greater depth below.

ANALYSIS Qualitative data coding was conducted in two stages using methods outlined in *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*.³⁶ First-cycle coding methods, which were used to gain familiarity with the data and identify potential themes, began while farmer interviews and participant observation were still being conducted. Two first-cycle coding strategies were used. First, attribute coding was done to pull out farm and farmer characteristics such as farm type, size, farmer experience, age, market participation, and additional demographic features. Second, a form of exploratory coding known as holistic coding was undertaken to gain familiarity with the data. These holistic codes identified general farmer goals, challenges, and motivations. After all the data were collected and had been attribute and holistically coded, a second-cycle coding scheme, which classified and organized first-cycle codes, was developed. This second-cycle coding technique, known as structural coding, organized the holistic codes into an analytical framework discussed below.³⁷

The holistic codes and the participant observation revealed incongruities in some farmers' motivations for participating in SFSC markets. Within individuals and between interviews, some farmers seemed to hold contradictory goals. A structural coding framework based on the theoretical arc of Granovetter, Block, and Hinrichs was developed to parse out and organize these internal contradictions.

The first order of codes indicated what kind of SFSC market venue was being discussed: a face-to-face market, a spatially proximal market, or a spatially extended market. The second order of codes indicated whether the motivation was a positive motivation to participate or a negative motivation to reduce or avoid participation in a market. Next, the type of rationality informing the motivation was coded as being marketness, instrumentalism, or embeddedness. Later, this order of codes was recoded back into broader categories of formal and substantive rationality to simplify the analysis. Marketness and instrumentalism, both informed by formal rationality, are often equally weighted.³⁸ Finally, the actual motivations, identified through the holistic first-cycle coding process, were lumped together using a second-cycle coding technique called pattern coding to identify relevant themes. These pattern codes were embedded in the

structural coding framework so that their relationships to each other were made apparent. Figure 1 shows the overall organization of the final coding scheme.

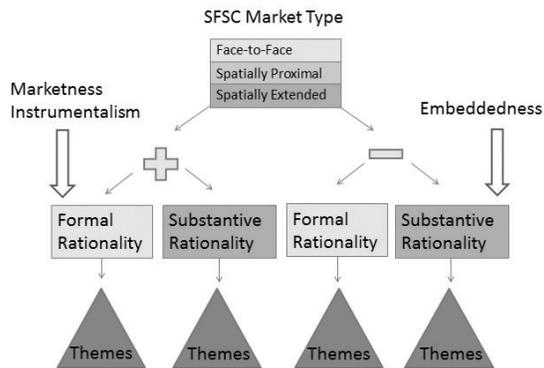


FIGURE 1. Shows the operational diagram used to code farmer motivations for participating in SFSC markets. The structure will frame the results below.

DISCUSSION The analysis described above was conducted for all farms participating in the study.³⁹ In this paper, the experiences of a select number of farmers will be highlighted in order to demonstrate how formal and substantive rationality can both play a role in motivations to participate or not participate in certain SFSC markets. Some farmers seem to privilege formal rationality, while others operate farms that achieve both formal and substantive goals, though at times these goals can be in tension.

Formal Rationality Participant observation was conducted on Frank’s farm during the height of the potato and winter squash harvests.⁴⁰ The following description of Frank’s farm operation is derived from both the coding of the interview and observations gathered while working on the farm. Frank’s farm, average in size for this study at around twelve acres, was located about a half an hour from Burlington, Vermont, where most of his products are sold through a number of nearby cooperatives and specialty stores, as well as at a face-to-face winter farmers market. Frank is in his thirties, is married, and has a young child. The farm is unmarked to passersby, with no visible signage from the road that abuts the farm property. The farm is relatively mechanized with several tractors, implements, specialized vegetable washing equipment, and a new climate-controlled vegetable storage and processing area. Frank manages his farm operations and market venues strictly in accordance with how well they contribute to the farm’s economic success.

This penchant for formal rationality was demonstrated at the very beginning of the interview when Frank was asked about his goals for the farm: “Well, it’s mainly about hitting a revenue figure. In this industry, most people are not

netting more than 25 percent of their farm’s gross, so how much money do you want to earn?” It was clear that Frank wanted to earn more than “most people” in this notoriously difficult business.

On the farm, Frank pursued this goal in several ways. The first was through extensive record keeping regarding labor costs, input costs, and sales figures. Unlike many farmers who were interviewed, Frank inputs and examines these data on a regular basis and claims to enjoy doing so.

I probably spend ... between one to two hours of actual computer work a day, just for the farm. Some people might say it is overkill how much time I spend doing statistical comparisons on stuff. But that is how my brain likes to look at stuff.

This data informed management decisions on the farm.

I have in my computer every single sale I have made, what crops were in that sale, how much of each, and at what price. That all tallies up at the bottom of the page. I know exactly how many pounds of everything I have sold, what I sold it for, how many acres I planted. So, I know what my yields and dollars are per acre. All the stuff that helps you make management decisions.

Unlike many farmers participating in SFSC markets in the area who grow upwards of forty different commercial crops in a growing season, Frank only grew about six commercial crops. His reasoning, as demonstrated in the following quotation, is to maximize the efficient use of his land and labor in pursuit of an economic return.

At this point we have about six main crops, and they all complement each other in terms of the time of year they require the most work, so the idea is that nothing is in competition [for labor]. So in May, we put the onions in the first week, potatoes in the second, winter squash the third, sweet potatoes the fourth, and into June, and they harvest in that sequence too ... I try to be pretty systematic, I hope I am not guessing at much most of the time, we are crossing our fingers a lot of the time, but I like to think we are not guessing, because this business is not that forgiving.

This prioritization of formal rationality for managing on-farm decision making is reflected in Frank’s motivations for participating in certain SFSC markets.

Face to Face Markets With respect to face-to-face market venues, Frank only participates in a winter farmers market. Frank only discusses formally motivated reasons for participating in this market, and some of his comments suggest a negative perception of these market venues. The main reason Frank participates in face-to-face markets is a desire to capture the price premium that he can capture there, which he does not get through his spatially proximal wholesale outlets. However, this positive motivation to enter these markets on a wider scale was tempered by what Frank perceived to be their inherent economic inefficiency.

When I started [farming] I couldn't go to farmers markets, I had a full time job. And you know farmers markets you are taking an entire day away just to stand and sell stuff. For some people, they are really good at it, they get a lot of energy from it, and that is a great situation. I am kind of neutral on farmers markets.

This quote succinctly demonstrates Frank's own conception and self-positioning on the formal-substantive spectrum. Frank seems to be saying that some farmers participate in face-to-face transactions in order to fulfil goals that are motivated by something other than formal economic calculations (they get "energy" from participating), but by Frank's calculations it is clear that in most situations farmers markets are a waste of economically valuable time. This sentiment is repeated later in the interview when Frank implies that one of the main nonpecuniary rewards of farmer's market participation is social interaction, something he doesn't need much of to be satisfied.

I like talking to people, and I get that when I go deliver to the stores. I don't think I need to go talk to hundred people at a market to get my fill of social gratification. I get that even now, I bump into someone and they'll say 'Oh I bought some of your sweet potatoes at [a local coop], and they were really delicious.' And I say 'Thank you!' and that is really great to hear. Getting that once a week or something is plenty.

The other reasons that Frank participates in the winter farmers market and his negative motivations for not expanding these market opportunities also seem to be informed by formal rationality. First, in the winter farmers market, it is acceptable to bring a low diversity of

products, which aligns with his on-farm production plan that prioritizes efficient production of a low diversity of crops. However, in the spring and summer this diversity of crops is no longer acceptable to farmers market and CSA customers. Rather than meet this demand, Frank elects to utilize spatially proximal wholesale markets. Second, during the winter there are fewer alternative economically productive activities competing for his time.

Spatially Proximal Wholesale Markets Frank wants to spend the least amount of time finding buyers, delivering, and selling his products and wants to achieve the highest possible financial returns. Where Frank finds these goals met is in spatially proximal wholesale markets, including local cooperative grocery stores and specialty stores. Several of these stores plan their purchases during the winter, eliminating the need for Frank to find buyers during the season, and they buy high volumes of product and pay higher prices than spatially distant markets. Frank avoids spatially proximal sales that take too much time to negotiate or to deliver to in proportion to the volume of sales.

I sell almost all of my stuff to six customers, and the idea of making calls to restaurants to make forty dollars in sales is just not where I want to be in the summer, so I stick to the plan to a degree, especially with perishable stuff. But some people love driving around, and chatting with chefs, and they spend like 6 hours on a Tuesday driving. That would work for a farm at the Intervale, but I can't be away from the farm for that long. When I do deliveries it takes me three hours for five stops.

Spatially Extended Markets Though Frank views spatially extended markets as extremely efficient, he cannot participate in them because the low prices would hurt the viability of his business model. Other farmers, however, are more motivated by substantive rationality. They may choose to participate in the same markets as a more formally motivated farmer but to different degree, in a different way, or for different reasons.

Formal and Substantive Rationality Helen and her husband operate a relatively large farm, with over 40 acres in vegetable production and many more acres involved in livestock production. They have been in operation for over ten years, and they are middle-aged and have young children. Participant observation was conducted on this farm while numerous crops were being weeded and harvested and while sheep were being dewormed and

moved from one pasture to another. The farm was well kept and picturesque. A large farm-themed mural painted on the farm's packing shed was visible from the road, and signage invited drivers to pull into the farm's parking lot to purchase advertised foods from the farm store. A large new cooler was being built to accommodate the farm's focus on storing root crops for winter markets. Helen expressed both formal and substantive motivations for participating and not participating in certain SFSC markets.

Face-to-Face Markets When asked about her farming philosophy, Helen describes her relationship to farming as a way to make a living but also as a form of community service. This suggests a stronger role of substantive rationality in her motivations for participating in certain markets.

You know this is something people need. They need food, they need high quality food, and they need a connection to land too ... Like with the CSA, we have always wanted to have an on-farm pick up component. We do deliver shares now, and I have kind of resisted it, and I really don't like it, but it is sort of a part of the market. But I always, always want this on farm pick-up component, and I always feel like the people who come to the farm and pick up their shares just get so much more out of the program. They have the opportunity to come pick in the gardens, or even just talk to us and see a field. They don't even have to go out there if they don't want to. But I think it is important and I want to offer that. I want people to say, I know where this food comes from, I know how it grows, I can see it as well as eat it and experience it.

The quote reveals a tension between the formally motivated pursuit of lucrative market opportunities in the form of a delivery CSA and Helen's substantively motivated desire to provide a community service. Helen notes elsewhere in the interview that summer CSAs that have customers pick up shares on the farm have become increasingly competitive and take a significant amount of time and effort to organize and maintain. Nonetheless, Helen mentions several formally motivated reasons to participate in them. Helen's CSA is profitable and provides cash flow at the beginning of the season; in addition, pre-season subscriptions make for easier crop and livestock planning.

A similar tension is revealed in Helen's discussions

regarding farmers markets. Helen is attracted to farmers markets for both formal and substantive reasons. With respect to substantive rationality, she enjoys cultivating social connections, and they fit into her philosophy of serving her neighbors. When she started farming commercially she only operated a CSA and at a farmers market. The quote below explains her motivations for doing so.

I wanted to sell directly to the consumer. I wanted to give people the opportunity, like I said to know a farm and know how their food was grown and be a part of that. And you know growing up here, more so then than now, everybody had gardens and everything, and now it is much less so, and you know there was this sense in the community that there were people who appreciated big gardens, and fresh food, but just couldn't fit it into their lives. So I was like, 'Ok, I am going to fill that role for them.' So I used to babysit their kids, and now I grow their vegetables.

Helen's farm continues to attend a farmers market, but the role of farmers markets on this farm has diminished as the farm has evolved. Helen envisions herself eventually eliminating this final farmers market from the business model and transitioning to spatially proximal wholesale accounts. Formal rationality has much to do with this transition.

According to Helen, the most significant formal motivation for participating in farmers markets, besides generating income, is initial public exposure and the development of a reputation as an authentic AFS producer that participates in alternative market structures. However, now that her reputation is established, Helen feels that that formal motivation for participating in these markets is diminished, and she is confident that the income for participating in these markets can be made up through spatially proximal wholesale venues. A negative formal motivation for not participating in farmers markets is the significant amount of time, energy, and labor costs she feels is required to participate in them, which she no longer feels is a necessary sacrifice for the economic sustainability of her business. Helen described her evolving opinion about farmers markets in this way:

Weaning from the farmers market is more of a life choice, you know, it is a lot of work, and it is weekends, and to really be effective at the farmers markets we feel that one of us, the business owners, needs to be there, we can't

just always have our staff do it ... we think it is important for one of us [the farm owners] to be there, and that is a huge commitment every Saturday to be at the farmers market.

This transition away from farmers markets to wholesale markets could threaten her substantive goals of community service; however, she explicitly manages these spatially proximal markets in such a way and keeps part of her business rooted in face-to-face markets so that this does not occur.

Spatially Proximal Markets With respect to formal rationality-informed motivations for increasing sales to spatially proximal local coops, specialty stores, and restaurants, Helen gives many reasons. These market venues are more efficient with respect to the labor time needed to sell a unit of product; certain buyers reliably buy large volumes of goods; and they are flexible if for some reason anticipated production does not meet their demand. The majority of Helen's revenue now comes from these market venues; however, her commitment to her local community and her substantive goals continue to play a strong role. As the quotation below demonstrates, not only does Helen frame participation in these markets as a way to meet these substantive goals, these goals directly guide and even constrain her participation in spatially proximal markets, potentially curbing economic rewards.

So, on the wholesale end, what I found as we expanded, we started talking to buyers for eggs we got to know them personally, and even though we didn't know all of their customers per se, we got to understand each restaurant or store as who they were as an entity and what they were trying to do, so then we were like 'Ok, now we are supporting them in reaching these customers directly to get their food local.' You know, we realize that not everybody is going to come to the farm stand three days a week to buy their groceries, so as our volume and production capacity increased it made sense to reach out to wholesale ... We only work with buyers who we know are committed to the local movement, or who have a customer base who are interested in it. It is all within 25 miles of the farm and we don't use any distributors.

Helen perceives there to be additional market opportunities both in spatially proximal and spatially extended markets which she could successfully exploit, but she chooses not to in order to meet her substantive

goals of serving her local community. Helen has found a way to successfully balance her formally and substantively motivated goals by keeping her farm involved in relatively less efficient and lucrative face-to-face markets and engaging only with spatially proximal wholesalers who share her substantive values while rejecting participation in spatially extended markets. While there is a negotiation between formal and substantive goals, on Helen's farm the relationship seems to be harmonious. This harmony seems dependent on the ability to take on certain economic costs in the pursuit of substantive goals. Conflict between substantive and formal rationality seems to arise when economic goals are proving hard to meet.

Conflict between Formal and Substantive Rationality There were numerous instances where farmers noted a conflict between the way that they would ideally like to market their products and the way that they currently did. Conflicts between formal and substantive rationality were often most visible in these instances. Eddy's farm was located on a dead-end gravel dirt road. Participant observation was conducted while lettuce harvesting, squash fertilizing, and field weeding were the main tasks at hand. There was one small greenhouse, a high tunnel, and sturdy handmade outdoor wash and pack area and cooler on the property. Little of the farm operation was visible from the road, and there was no signage indicating the presence of the operation.

Eddy's goals are to make a decent living, care for the soil, and participate cooperatively with other small farmers to supply a local food system. Eddy started his farm two seasons ago, intending to establish his operation through intensive hand-powered cultivation of a small number of crops sold to local wholesalers and through a CSA. However, his goals have been interrupted. Poor weather conditions and inexperience with the soils on his new property led to a number of crop failures. It became difficult to meet the expectations that his customers had for a wide variety of fresh produce, and Eddy felt that he was working too much and not making enough money.

Formal rationality informed Eddy's motivations to transition to regional wholesale markets.

The advantage [of wholesale] is that you know what you are going to be getting into, in terms of income. It allows you to be more efficient. You know, I only do a little over 3/4 of an acre. You know with the parsley I can get a high return on a small amount of space ... There is a trucking charge and there is a commission, so your margins are lower, but you

have more volume of sale, and you don't have to spend a lot of time working again, so as long as you know how to grow it properly. You know I didn't think it was going to be as much of a focus as it was, but I just make so much more money doing that than some of the other things that are a little more marginal, like salad mix. You know, it all depends on where you are. If I was in Burlington, and I could get ten dollars a pound for my salad mix, then that would be much different than getting five dollars a pound.

Though the motivation to more efficiently pull in more income has caused Eddy to transition to regional wholesale markets, he expressed substantively informed long-term goals to return to selling to local markets several times throughout the interview.

I think long term I'd rather have sales based more in the local area. You know I sell to the [regional grocery stores and distributors] for monetary reasons, but I would like to be more part of the local food system ... Yea, it's partly ethical, and it's more just about what I, yea, it's my vision of what I want to do. You know, if I really wanted to make a huge business out of it then I would be at a different scale, you know, growing a lot of stuff for wholesale.

There is a tension between an expressed substantive motivation to participate in market venues that serve the local food system and the present need to generate income in an efficient way. For Eddy, face-to-face markets and spatially proximal wholesale markets are viewed as viable ways to achieve both formal and substantive goals in the long run.

CONCLUSION It is clear that both formal and substantive rationality play a role in the motivations that farmers have for participating in SFSC markets, validating the theoretical framework of Granovetter, Block, and Hinrichs. The dichotomous opposition between substantive rationality and formal rationality that is reflected in the oppositional framing of the AFS and the CFS is not strictly enacted by AFS participants. In fact, there seems to be a spectrum regarding the role of substantive rationality for participating in SFSC markets. Some farmers, such as Frank, seem to privilege formal rationality while successfully operating within the AFS. Others, such as Helen and Eddy, actively recognize that substantive goals play a role in

guiding the management of their farm operations and reasons for participation in the AFS. Nonetheless, these farm businesses must make a profit, and in the face of monetary or labor resource constraints, these substantive goals seem vulnerable to compromise. This raises a question of how well substantive goals can persist as AFSs become more popular and the markets more competitive.

Several experienced farmers interviewed in this study identified increasing competitive pressure as reasons for stopping or reducing participation in face-to-face markets, turning to spatially proximal and spatially extended markets to meet financial goals. To serve these markets, the structure of their farm business evolves as does their relationship to the community. Research needs to be done to identify measurable impacts that such transitions—and AFS participants in general—have on environmental, social, and economic sustainability. One potential metric for measurement might be the Community Capitals framework.⁴¹ If increasing competition and the scaling up of AFSs do indeed threaten substantive goals and community capital it may be necessary to intervene in that process.

There are many models upon which to base such interventions. Within the current paradigm of agricultural production for the purposes of exchange food systems, education could be intensified in order to change consumer values and grow the body of consumers who can effectively engage in these markets. Alternatively, subsidies could be used to support certain farm management strategies that are found to be beneficial or to minimize the financial stress on family farms by reducing costs such as healthcare, childcare, and infrastructure investments. Of course, there are some, such as proponents of the food sovereignty movement, who advocate for more radical changes that remove agricultural production from the realm of capitalist exchange. In doing so, the impacts of agricultural production and distribution would be determined by democratic engagement rather than through the price mechanisms of the free or regulated market. It remains to be seen how the impacts and the character of AFS will change as they respond to increased competition and popularity. However, even now AFS are not the panacea that many assume them to be. Could AFS in fact be a smokescreen, distracting from the pursuit of more fundamental and lasting change?

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ENDNOTES

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 26. Turner and Hope, “Staging the Local,” 152-54.
 27. McClintock, “Radical, Reformist, and Garden-Variety Neoliberal,” 10-13.
 28. Bues and Dunlap, “Conventional versus Alternative Agriculture,” 590-616.
 29. Hinrichs, “Embeddedness and Local Food Systems,” 295-303.
 30. Granovetter, “Economic Action and Social Structure,” 481-510.
 31. Block, *Postindustrial Possibilities*, 46-73.
 32. Ibid, 46-73.
 33. Hinrichs, “Embeddedness and Local Food Systems,” 295-303.
 34. Ibid, 296.
 35. Snowball sampling is a non-random method for identifying potential research participants where current research subjects recommend whom the researcher should contact. I would end the interview with this question: “Are there any other farmers you think I should talk to?”
 36. Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2013).
 37. An example of this process is as follows. After I conducted an interview with a farmer, the farm would be assigned a unique ID number. Then categorical data about the farmer’s experience and age and the farm’s size and type would be identified. These attributes were used to put the farms into categories. For example, a farmer younger than forty, farming on less than five acres, and having one year of experience would be placed in three categories: Young, Small, and Experienced. Then their goals, challenges, and motivation would be coded; for example, “Make Money,” “Be a Steward,” and “Educate the Public” might have been identified as reasons why a farmer farms. Finally, the phrases that these codes referred to were interpreted through the structural coding scheme described in the figure. Was the motivation positive or negative, formal or substantive?
 38. Block, *Postindustrial Possibilities*, 46-73.
 39. For an in-depth enumeration and analysis of the pattern codes, please see Richard Richards, “Differing Motivations for Producer Participation in Short Food Supply Chains” (Master’s thesis, University of Vermont, 2015), 51-103.
 40. Pseudonyms are used for all the farmers discussed in this study in order to protect their privacy.
 41. Cornelia Butler Flora and Jan L. Flora, *Rural Communities: Legacy + Change*, 4th ed. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2013).