University of Alberta

Growing Against the Grain
One Local Food Producer's Story

by

Brent A. Hammer

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Examining Committee

Helen Vallianatos, Anthropology

Christopher Fletcher, Anthropology

Candace Nykiforuk, Center for Health Promotion Studies

Abstract

The author employs a life story interview approach to examine how one farmer, participating in a local food system, constructs an identity as a food producer that reflects their practices, beliefs, and values. Farmers' markets have grown significantly in the past twenty years. Interest in these local food systems has shifted from the original counter-culture, back to the earth movement of the 1960's-80's to focus on issues of safe, healthy, and tasty food produced using natural methods that emphasize economic and environmental sustainability. Embedded in these issues are the social relationships that shape peoples identities. One person's particular story contributes to the understanding of the motivations and meanings involved in the various roles of individuals participating in farmers' markets. Findings from this study support the argument that people, including the food producer, and the production process are vital components that create a taste experience within a local food system.

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Chapter 1

Germination of an Idea

Brent: When you were making this transition, how was the community reacting to your changes? Were they aware of it?

Rusty: No because we hid it.

Brent: You hid the fact that you bought all these chickens?

Rusty: Yes, as you are aware we have the chickens right off the highway now and you can see it all. Before we had the chickens nestled in around behind the trees and nobody could see anything; nobody saw these pens moving across the pasture unless they came to visit or see what was going on and then it was " Oh are you crazy or what". But they have come to expect craziness from this part of the farm.

Introduction

Foodways, the production, distribution, and consumption of food (Anderson 2005:2) have increasingly become part of global, corporate agribusiness which has created a disconnect between people, food, and place (Feagan 2007, Pollan 2006, Feenstra 2002). Warren Belasco, the respected American historian has written extensively on food and culture and stated that the food industry "is more consolidated, chemicalized, and globalized now than it was in the 60's" (1999:284). This globalizing process resulted in the development of the Industrial Food System (IFS), a system that now produces the bulk of the world's food in a highly efficient manner. This system is energy and capital intensive, globally integrated, and economically consolidated. It is a system of production that often emphasizes convenience and choice over transparency and safety.

It is also a system, Feenstra suggests, that has resulted in environmental degradation and economic disaster for family farmers and small businesses related to local food production, distribution and consumption. "And, it has led to the disintegration of the social and spiritual fabric – critical connections – that are part of a community's food system" (2002:100). We have become disconnected from the people who grow and harvest food, and from the land that produces that food in both physical distance and social space. The IFS is a system where the public, especially local communities, have little participation in the decision making process (Anderson and Cook 1999:145).

Local food systems (LFS) have emerged as an alternative to the homogenous IFS. One of the goals of farmers and consumers in LFS is to reconnect people to their food and place, and to symbolize self reliance (Hinrichs 2003:41). Feagan and associates describe LFS as rooted in particular places, aimed at economic viability for farmers and consumers, employing ecologically sound production and distribution practices, and enhancing social equity and democracy for all members of the community (2004:238). The centerpiece of LFS is the direct marketing of food from producer to consumer (Hinrichs 2000:297). The most common forms of this direct marketing include farmers' markets, roadside farm stands, U-pick operations, and community supported agriculture.[1] These LFS are often viewed as attempts to connect or reconnect people with their food and the land, and may be motivated and shaped by what

[1] There are other forms of non-commercial LFS, such as food banks, school lunch programs and nutritional information, gleaning projects, and food waste management (Dahlberg 1993, Tansey and Worsley 1995). This thesis focuses on aspects of LFS that entail market relationships in the delivery of food from producer to consumer.

Trubek characterizes as a foodview. A foodview uses food and foodways to frame ideas and beliefs that individuals, groups, or societies use to make sense of their world (Trubek 2005:260-262). LFS are seen as a way to recapture or create a sense of place that promotes powerful sociological and geographical symbolic determinants of people's identity (Trubek 2008, Feagan 2007).

There has been a tremendous increase in public awareness of local food system movements in the last few years with the success of books like *The 100 Mile Diet: A Year of Local Eating* (Smith & MacKinnon 2007), *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto* (Pollan 2008), and documentary films such as *Food, INC*. (Kenner 2009). These evocative works attempt to increase our awareness, enlighten us to the possibilities, or scare us into action by creating positive paranoia. The action suggested is predominantly local action.

These works may also immobilize us into a state of inaction, fueled by a sense of hopelessness that the sheer scale of the IFS is too overwhelming to the individual. Pollan addresses this issue in his New York Times Magazine article *Why Bother?* (2008). He suggests one of the most powerful things an individual can do is to eat food produced locally. In fact, most national, regional, and local newspapers regularly feature articles and stories on local food and LFS (Durham et al. 2009:56).[2] These successful and influential mediums often strike a popular nerve in our consumer driven North American society by appealing to the apparent novelty of farmers and consumers interacting at a personal level (Hinrichs 2000:295).

[2] "Good Food promotes local healthy eating" Edmonton Journal, May 22, 2009. "Let them eat dirt... as long as it's organic. Leah McLaren, The Globe and Mail, August 22, 2009, "Where Does Your Food Come From?" albertaviews, July/August 2008

The dramatic rise in direct agricultural marketing, predominately through the growth of farmers' markets, has also provoked academic examination into LFS. The significance and impact of this is reflected in Gottlieb and associates study where they reported that farmers' market sales in the United States now exceed $1 billion annually, and that markets are located in all 50 states (2008:300). Feagan and associates, in their study of Ontario farmers' markets, reported that in Canada, the number of farmers' markets doubled from the 1980's to a total of 425 in 2003 (2004:235). In 1973, the Alberta Department of Agriculture established a program to aid in the development of farmers' markets. Alberta had not traditionally been a place where consumers could buy directly from farmers or at farmers' markets but the government had noticed the popularity of them in other provinces. There were 16 farmers' markets the first year of the program. Lencucha and associates reported that by 1998 there was an average of 115 registered farmers' markets in the province of Alberta, an increase of over 700% (1998:1).

However, the majority of the academic literature and media attention has tended to focus on the consumer's motivations and benefits to their participation in a LFS (Feagan et al. 2004, Feenstra 2002, DeLind 2002). When the literature focused on the producer it was framed around economics and refered to the producer as a collective group (Gottlieb et al. 2008, Starr et al. 2003). What are the issues, obstacles, and struggles food producers face as they attempt to serve local markets? What are the benefits and challenges to the individual, the family, and the community in producing food for the local food system, and in addressing the motivations and benefits expected and experienced by the consumer? The overarching goal of this thesis is to build upon past work on LFS through examination of one individual local food producer farming in Alberta.

Local food systems do not occur in a vacuum. They are dynamic, constantly changing, and part of the larger food system embedded within a particular cultural milieu. Feagan suggests “food and its powerful sociological and geographical associations are arguably more critical symbolic determinants of identity than many other elements of cultural consumption” (2007:33). One of the pursuits of anthropology is to explore how cultural values, practices, or traditions may reflect shared cultural meanings (Atkinson 1998:5,15). My thesis project involves the study of one individual’s involvement as a food producer in a local food system in Alberta. The research questions driving this project are:

- What are some of the challenges facing this food producer in participating in a local food system in this particular place?

- How are this person’s beliefs, experiences, and cultural values reflected in and shaped by involvement in this local food system?

- How does this person’s story inform us about the different roles of participants within a local food system and the cultural milieu in which it occurs?

The life story interview is one of the most effective ways to research individual and localized subjective experiences and to interpret how they may interact with other ethnographic experiences. Life stories are often presented as moral tales, of overcoming adversity or achieving success (Coffee and Atkinson 1996). Marjorie Shostak, in her book *Nisa: the life and words of a !Kung woman* (1981), reveals a vivid story of a woman from a hunter gatherer tribe in the Kalahari desert of southern Africa. It is a classic anthropological work detailing the minutiae and breadth of an individual's life story from a distant and exotic culture. Julie Cruikshank, in her book *Life Lived Like a Story* (1990), collaborated with three elderly Athapaskan and Tlingit women from the Yukon to document their ancestral cultural experiences around alternative ways of living a life in Canada. Their life stories provide insight into northern women's and Native American studies through a historical, anthropological lens. My objective is to use the life story interview as an anthropological method to explore the life of a contemporary individual, living in the present-day world of Alberta, engaged in present day social and economic practices.

The life story interview is also an effective method to create a voice, authority, and an aura of authenticity for the storyteller (Stoller and Olkes 1989[2007]:412). In this project, I seek an understanding of the challenges faced by a local food producer in a local food system and to examine the relationships between individual beliefs, experiences, and cultural values with participation in that local food system. The intent of this project is to address the void in academic literature concerning the varied and complex roles of individuals participating in a local food system. I will begin by outlining my theoretical framework, centered on the anthropological approaches to food and identity.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Food and Identity

Brillat-Savarin, in his 1925 publication of *The Physiology of Taste*, produced the frequently quoted line "tell me what you eat and I'll tell you who you are" (Heath and Menely 2007:599). Anthropological studies have shown that food and foodways may have deeper meanings for people than just providing nutrients to the body. The roots of anthropological research on cultural food meanings is represented in the research of Douglas (1966), Douglas and Isherwood (1980), and Lévi-Strauss (1969, 1962). In various ways, these scholars illustrated the connection between food, cultural meanings, cultural differences, and identity.

Lévi-Strauss theorized that the cooking process transformed nature into culture, and that the function of cooking was to allow people to think about their identity and their place within the cultural realm. Cooking, for Lévi-Strauss, was not only a way to change the flavor or digestibility of food, and reduce or neutralize potential toxins; it was a way for people to understand their world. Stoller and Olkes suggest that Lévi-Strauss believed cooking food represented a logical operation that he presumed was universal (1990[2005]:133). He saw the conventions of particular societies that determine relationships around food and foodways as sharing universal patterns and structures. Lévi-Strauss saw food as an especially appropriate mediator of these relationships because when we engage with food we establish a direct identity between ourselves, as culture, and our food, as nature (Leach 1970:34). The tendency to over focus on static binary assumptions however, remains a challenge for contemporary academics. This is particularly important when discussing terms such as conventional-alternative and global-local within the context of foodways. By presuming the universal the anthropologist risks missing the subtle nuances and meaningful insights of the subjective experience (Stoller and Olkes 1990[2005], Ornter 2005, Jackson 1998).

Douglas, like Lévi-Strauss, was interested in discovering universals in symbolism. She suggested that the most potent symbols are found in mundane things or ordinary activities (McGee and Warms 2008:484). Food, because all humans require it to survive and because everyone eats it, may be considered one of those mundane everyday things, and cooking food may be considered an ordinary activity in the pursuit of consuming it. Douglas saw the act of performing food preparation as a material and social transformation involving the knowledge and skills of the people (1966). Douglas examined how people gave meanings to reality and how this reality was expressed by their cultural symbols. An example of this is her analysis of the English formal dinner where she found the order of the meal: an appetizer, soup, salad, entrée, dessert, was symbolic of a structure that people used to make meaning in their lives. Douglas extrapolated this idea to suggest that an individual's whole food system may be structured like a story (Anderson 2005:109-110).

Douglas and Isherwood reiterated the importance of this connection by suggesting that the essential function of food consumption is its 'capacity to make sense' (1980). Douglas supported Lévi-Strauss' argument that taboo foods are selected not because they are good to eat but because they are good to think about. People will eat a food not because of the taste but because of what the food represents, or how it enables them to make sense of their world. Douglas' classic example of this is from her purity and pollution work concerning India and the Hindu caste system where food and food practices were symbolic models of larger social relationships. People in the higher or purer castes, the leaders, priests and the elite could not eat food prepared or associated with the lower or polluted castes because these castes were responsible for the tasks dealing with the disposal of human waste and refuse. Douglas emphasized that these relationships were attached to or part of a worldview or cosmology (1966). These relationships occur within a culture that orders the world in a way that is specific to itself (Fischer 1988:280). This 'making sense', Winter suggests, takes place in the sociocultural relationships people construct to mark their identities (2003:24).

Lévi-Strauss and Douglas are important to my thesis because they are considered the founders of food anthropology (Anderson 2005:109). Their work, despite being overly focused on the formal structural elements, illustrates the powerful relationship between food and identity. They both demonstrate that it is not only the food itself, but the cooking or food preparation that people use to understand the world and make meaning in their lives. I intend to build on this notion that food and foodways are an integral part of making sense of the world and that the cosmology they are part of, may be interpreted as a foodview. Lévi-Strauss and Douglas both also highlight the importance of the relationship between language and the way people give meaning to their world. They were both accused later, by post-structural anthropologists, of oversimplifying their universal perspectives by relying on culturally specific metaphors (Anderson 2005:110). Lévi-Strauss has been accused of practicing a "verbal sleight of hand" (Leach 1970:34) in his writings, yet his culinary triangle and binary oppositions remain relevant and topical in food anthropology studies.

Anderson argues that food and foodways, while following some of the rules and structure of language, are more like music and visual art. Cultural foodways communicative value lies in its predictable, comprehensible, and creative abilities to inform us about the world and provide physiological pleasure (2005:111). It is my intention in this thesis, to illustrate that the use of metaphor, when presenting an individual's life story interview concerning food and foodways, is not only essential, it is unavoidable.

Bourdieu's sociological work, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984) remains influential in contemporary anthropological thought today. Bourdieu suggested that aesthetic taste, as in the appreciation for consuming certain foods, is a means to mark and maintain social boundaries between and within different class structures. Bourdieu's theories reflect the idea that power and control of decision making is a vital component of marking and maintaining one's identity. He focused on class structure, especially in French society, to suggest that taste could be used to mark your position within that society and therefore become a way to identify yourself. His classic example is his analysis of the eating practices and food choices of the working class and the bourgeoisie. Bourdieu used the phrase 'taste of luxury', which included purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables, and a preference for tasty, health giving foods, to represent the aesthetics of pleasure associated with the freedom of choice that went along with being a member of the elite. Conversely, the working class was concerned with basic survival and focused on foods that were cheap and nutritional, what Bourdieu coined the 'taste of necessity' (1984). One of the weaknesses of Bourdieu's theory of taste as an expression of cultural capital is that individual's, societies', and whole cultures' food taste preferences and food practices can change over time (Wright et al. 2001, Warde 1997). While Bourdieu's theories have been criticized for being 'frenchcentric' and ignoring gender differences, they do contribute to the French ideology that serves as Trubek's foundation for the concept of foodview that I present in my thesis.

Bourdieu, unlike Douglas and Lévi-Strauss, chose not to focus on searching for universal symbols, but rather emphasized a subjective perspective on the structure of symbols. He suggested that people have agency, albeit within their sociocultural framework that would include their worldview or cosmology, which enables them to make choices that will influence their behavior. Bourdieu's work on taste and food is useful to my thesis for illustrating the importance of shifting the focus away from the structural elements of LFS and farmers' markets to emphasize the significance of the processes and people involved. It also demonstrates the link between language and the use of metaphors to create a shared meaning for people. Bourdieu acknowledged that when examining peoples' eating practices and food choices it is important to consider all other elements of their lifestyle (1984). This holistic approach reinforces the relevance for anthropologist, that when telling the human story, it is important to look at the way people actually live their lives.

Fischler, in his paper *Food, self and identity*, suggests that food is central to individual identity formation. He builds on the work of Lévi-Strauss and Douglas to describe this complex relationship between food and identity as having two dimensions (1988:278). The first dimension is the biological approach, where food and eating performs a nutritional function, linked to the cultural perspective where food or food practices perform a symbolic function. The second dimension links the individual to the collective or the psychological to the social. Fischler acknowledges that this notion of identity formation is problematic due to the 'omnivore's paradox' which he describes as humans fear of the unknown with their need for variety and novelty in their food choices. This is one of the themes that Pollan also uses to construct his argument in *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006).

Fischler believes that the modern eater has become a "mere consumer" and that an increasing proportion of the population consumes food whose production, history, and origins they know nothing about. More importantly for the purposes of my thesis, he suggests that the work of producing and preparing food "is performed increasingly before it arrives in the household and the kitchen, particularly in factories, i.e. remote from the eyes and knowledge of the eater" (1988:288). This creates a social distance, combined with the physical distance, from the production of food which results in a food without identity.

This research and theoretical literature suggests that how people interact with food, how it is produced, prepared, displayed, or consumed, is a powerful way to construct meaning and identity. I believe this has direct relevance to my examination of one individual and their role in participating in a local food system. This individual attempts to provide the knowledge and connection to customers that creates an identity for the food products. They will know who produced the food and how the food is produced. This process or relationship may then serve as a way for the food producer to make meaning in their life, and use this meaning to mark their identity to the outside world. To paraphrase Brillat-Savarin, tell me what you produce, how you produce it, how you distribute it, and why you do this, and you will have told me who you are.

Place

The significance of place to the creation of identity, whether it be individual, group, societal, or cultural, has long been recognized as a way to make and mark meaning in the world (Trubek 2008, 2005, Korsmeyer 2005, Nabhan 2004, Warde 1997). The rise of the post- industrial modern era saw the rise of the nation-state as the primary aspect of identity unifying individuals with regional, ethnic and cultural differences (Feagan 2007). A sense of place, like the concept of traditional, was believed to represent something nostalgic, old fashioned, irrelevant, static and frozen in time. The process of globalization was seen as creating a world of increasing placelessness where the significance of individual peoples' lives within a specific place was reduced or considered to be of negligible relevance to the new global order.

The new global village was touted as a place where we could all live as one. Even if we did not physically move to occupy the same geographic location, technology enabled us to communicate instantly and know what, when, who, and where something was happening around the world. This 'shrinking of distances', continually facilitated by technological advances, promoted the interests of capitalism where people (as customers around the world) and places (as markets for production and distribution) were viewed as commodities in global economic exchange. Countries and regions often trade their distinctiveness and sovereign qualities for perceived economic gain (Feagan 2007:31). Prescribed borders and boundaries became blurred as the people of those regions lost an important marker of their identity as they were encouraged to become global citizens. Globalization was seen as disempowering and homogenizing as common ties to place and physical engagement with that place became subsumed by market-based models of economic behavior (Allen 2003:169, DeLind 2002:217). Feagan and associates reported that this behavior over the past fifty years has resulted in a "range of environmentally degrading impacts and the general destabilization of rural and regional economies and their associated sociocultural spheres" (2004:237).

This is no more evident than in the food industry. I do not intend to dispute the fact that food is a commodity. However, as Feagan suggests, the IFS has distorted relationships by increasing physical, social, and metaphorical distances between people and the places where their food is grown or produced (2007:25). The standard joke among local food activists, although not very funny, is that if you were to ask a young child where their food came from they would most likely say the grocery store. While technically correct, the answer is socially and spiritually unsatisfying, especially to an anthropologist. The IFS represents places where the local people have little participation in the decision making process (Anderson and Cook (1999:145).

The work of Agnew and Duncan (1989) revitalized the importance of place as a concept in the social sciences. They redefined place as the structuring or mediating context for social relations, and suggested that place, as a spatial concept, could not exist without people having a strong identity connection to a geographic location. Geographers and other social scientists had begun to notice that people were not letting go of their community or regional place and the identities that they associated with that place (Feagan 2007, Inda and Rosaldo 2002, Appadurai 1996, Friedman 1994). Despite, or perhaps in spite of globalizing processes, the academic pursuit of utilitarian and rational universal explanations was being confounded by irrational and powerful regional differences encountered in the field. Feegan saw this re-emergence of place, as an expression of identity, as representing a growing awareness and resistance to the deterritorialization brought on by global change. Place and the relationship it has to food is an important component in the examination of local food systems.

Local Food Systems

Local food systems (LFS) and local food movements are often presented, in academic literature, as counterpoints to the “global food systems” dominating our current foodways (Feegan 2007, Feenstra 2002, DeLind 2002, Hinrichs 2000). In an applied or real world sense LFS are seen as an alternative to the IFS, where local participation and choice is paramount. LFS tend to be place based and draw on the attributes of a particular region and its people. Feenstra suggests that LFS are "rooted in particular places, aim to be economically viable for farmers and consumers, use ecologically sound production and distribution practices and enhance social equity and democracy for all members of the community” (1997:28). This is the operational definition of LFS that I will employ as a framework in my thesis.

Relationships in the IFS are perceived to be distant and anonymous. In contrast, LFS promote foodways (production, distribution, and consumption of food) based on direct agricultural markets such as farmers' markets, community supported agriculture, vegetable box schemes, cooperative distribution and delivery programs. These markets all emphasize human connection through face to face interaction between food producers and consumers. This connection occurs at the place where the components of foodways converge and promises an experience considered unavailable to those who participate in conventional food exchange such as in supermarkets (Hinrichs 2000:295).

These direct agricultural markets, as Hinrichs (2000) points out, are not a new phenomenon. Farmers' markets were a regular venue for farmers to market their products to consumers prior to the post World War II rise of the modern grocery store. Studies on the reasons for the proliferation of LFS over the past 20 years, and the motivations for consumers to participate in them, are well documented: food security issues (Anderson and Cook 1999); quality of food issues (Goodman 2003); food democracy issues (Hassanein 2003); food politics issues (Hinrichs 2003); sustainability issues (Feagan et al. 2004); freshness, organic and health issues (Hinrichs 2000). The common anthropological thread that resonated strongly with me in all of this literature is the connection to people. The relationships between people in a local food system, how they perceive their roles, and how they give meaning to what they do, is a driving focus of my research.

Taste of Place and Foodview

The notion of taste experience is a key component in my examination of a local food producer as it relates to the concept of experiential knowledge that Trubek discusses in *The Taste of Place: A Cultural Journey Into Terrior* (2008). She emphasizes the importance of experiential knowledge in the concept of *goût de terroir* or "taste of place". Trubek, a cultural anthropologist, professionally trained chef, and local food activist, became fascinated by what peoples' discussions about taste and terroir revealed about what mattered in their community and how they informed their everyday choices (2008:3). Trubek builds on the French understanding of terrior, which is derived from the Latin root meaning earth. She proposes that the word has many meanings, even for the French, and is often associated with a person's history with a particular place or described as their roots (2005:261).

Trubek critiques Bourdieu's perspective of taste, within the social context of identity formation of having "good taste", by flipping the words and the metaphorical meaning to represent "tastes good" (2008:8). "Taste" for Trubek, includes more than the physiological or sensory sensation of eating; it encompasses all the human senses as well as the full cognitive and cultural realm elicited by the product to the extent one is capable of experiencing it. "Place" indicates all the physical characteristics of geography and the scientific elements of geology, climate, and weather. More importantly, "place" includes the people, their customs and traditions, and their ancestral heritage within a physical and spiritual space. Trubek's research, into different food products from different regions around the United States, illustrates that a centuries old tradition of terroir is not required for people to construct meaning about their relationships with food that shapes their collective or individual identity.

Trubek continues to expand on this idea by suggesting that "taste of place" becomes a concept to frame and explain relationships people have to taste, the land, their roots, and the place they have created. She then asks whether this concept may serve as "categories that frame perceptions and practices – a worldview, or … a foodview?" (2005:261). A worldview refers to a constellation of beliefs, practices, and paradigms through which an individual interprets the world and interacts with it. A worldview, as Davis suggests, "is but an expression of our cultural values" (2009:193). A foodview, in broad terms, may be defined as how we think about food, our eating patterns, choices and habits. More specifically, a foodview may be considered as a discourse that combines food and taste with physiological and ecological factors (Trubek 2008:42).

A foodview encourages the asking of many questions that integrate macro-level processes with individual food practices: where and how was the food grown, produced, or created, the methods and technologies used, the role and experiences of farmers or workers, access and distribution issues, and even how food is cooked, prepared, presented, and consumed, and the accompanying experiences of taste. As a discourse, foodview is neither right nor wrong, good nor bad. It is a way to construct our local environment and identity based on how we perceive and understand our relationship to food and foodways. Foodview, similar to the concept of worldview, then becomes a way to examine through food the physical, sensorial, and spiritual world, and our place in that world. Such a view may provide alternative perspectives and influence the beliefs and behaviors that we practice and use to shape our values regarding kinship, politics, economics, religion, environment, and so on.

Structure of Thesis

In order to make connections to a deeper or larger universal story it is often beneficial to first explore a particular story (Jackson 1998:4). Therefore, the purpose of my thesis is to employ this foodview discourse as a way to explore one individual local food producer's role in participating in a LFS by asking how he defines his role and what it mean to him. The goal of this thesis is to contribute to a growing body of academic literature in understanding the processes and various roles involved in LFS by focusing on one individual. As Geertz suggests "cultural anthropology is mostly engaged in trying to determine what this people or that takes to be the point of what they are doing" (1983:4). I believe the best way to do this for my thesis is through a life story interview project.

Chapter 2 describes the methodology used for this project, including participant recruitment, my reflexivity, and limitations of the life story approach. The chapter also includes a description of the methods and interview rationale I employed. Chapter 3 presents some of the common terms and labels associated with LFS, and the different understanding and meanings people apply to those terms and labels. This highlights the first challenges facing the participant of how they define themselves and their role within a local food system and their community. Chapter 4 focuses on the issue of taste, and examines some of the reasons and motivations behind the participant's decisions and practices. Chapter 5 explores the notion of freshness associated with foods purchased through LFS. I continue to examine issues facing the participant and how the relationship to these issues may reflect and shape their identity as a local food producer. Chapter 6 summarizes the themes of sustainability, LFS and place, food and identity, and the meanings they have for this one local food producer participating in a local food system.

The life story interview permits an intimate exploration of a particular individual which enables us to learn not only something about this particular local food producer but also about the varied and complex roles and relationships of people participating in that local food system. The popularity and growth of direct marketing strategies, such as farmers' markets, suggests that an increasing number of people, producers and consumers, are involved in this activity and it is important to understand the reasons why and what the implications may be for the individuals, the local communities, and the larger society.

Chapter 2

Conventional or Alternative: Methods or Madness

Brent: There must have been issues when you were making the transition. How did you overcome them in the sense that these are obstacles, "We are no longer going to be conventional farmers, we are going to practice alternative methods." Were you aware of those obstacles?

Rusty: Until you start the alternatives, you don't know that there are obstacles [laughter].

Methodology

Documenting stories has been used as a conventional fieldwork method in anthropology since the discipline began (Cruikshank 1990). Typically however, the investigator controlled the research with little collaboration from the subject, and the accounts were often used as supplementary material towards a larger interest. The emergence of life story interviews reflect an interest in symbolism and text where the focus is placed on the words and meanings individuals use to make sense of their lives. The life story interview approach seemed best suited to my research interests and theoretical framework discussed in the first chapter. Storytelling, as Cruickshank suggests, is an excellent medium for expressing values, beliefs, and philosophies of an individual.

"Tell me your life story". If only such a simple statement of request was all that would be required to elicit the information that you seek. A life story can be told in many styles and shapes to represent the words of the person telling the story. What is important is that the life story format fit with both the participant's and researcher's narrative style (Atkinson 1998:8). The life story interview, as a method of conducting fieldwork, focuses on how the participant sees himselfmethod of conducting fieldwork, focuses on how the participant sees himselfmethod of conducting fieldwork, focuses on how the participant sees himself

3 The participant in this research project is a male, and is here on in identified by the use of a male pronoun, or by his nickname Rusty.

However, the life story interview must also serve research objectives. So a typical response to the "Tell me your life story" statement may be the question "Well, what do you want to know?" This reflects the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the researcher and the participant, and makes clear, despite the truthfulness and honesty implied by a first person narrative, that the interview is indeed part of a research process. This is a research process where, as Hammersly and Atkinson point out, there is no such thing as pure data, free from the potential bias of the interviewer or researcher (2007:102). Nor is the research process about the pursuit of truth. Factuality, as Linde argues, is not the concern of the life story interview (1993:16).

The intention of this research project was to design and execute fieldwork using the life story interview. I wanted to explore whether one farmer's attempt to create and promote a sense or taste of place is reflected in his farming and business practices, beliefs, and values, as suggested by Trubek's concept of foodview (2008, 2005). I was interested in investigating the challenges and issues experienced with the change from conventional

farming practices to alternative methods and exploring how this shift in farming practices reflected and shaped Rusty's beliefs, customs, practices and the his self-identity as a local food producer.

Participant observation is another hallmark of social science fieldwork pioneered by anthropologists (Robben and Sluka 2007:2). Hammersley and Atkinson suggest that there are distinct advantages in combining participant observation with interviews; "the data from each can be used to illuminate the other" (2007:102). In my project, participant observation supplements the life story interview methodology by observing the participant's farming and business practices both on the farm and at a farmers' market. Observing the face to face connections Rusty has with customers may illuminate the beliefs, customs, and practices in his stories.

Photographs of the farm landscape, buildings, equipment, livestock, food products, and marketing venues provide supplemental documentation of current farming and business practices that illuminate Rusty's stories. Photographs were used to support the participant's text and represent thematic interpretations discussed in this thesis.

Limitations

An important aspect of determining a methodological course of action for any research project involves addressing weaknesses and foreshadowing potential problems (Hammersly and Atkinson 2007:21). The greatest weakness of a life story interview project may be participant recruitment. What if the interview participant you choose (or in some cases is chosen for you) turns out to not have a very interesting life story to tell? It is often difficult to ascertain the significance of a person's life story before you begin to explore it through the interview process. What if the participant agreed to be interviewed but refused to give consent to allow any of the material to be used in any presentations or publications? What if the participant's life story was interesting and of some significance but did not mesh well with your initial research objectives? Do you stop the project or readjust your research goals and perspectives? What these questions suggest is that there is a lot of significance placed on the importance of participant recruitment when focusing on the life story of one individual. Fortunately, none of these issues arose in my project as Rusty was a very engaging and colorful individual who wanted to tell his story. The information he provided and the process of him sharing this information were relevant to the question of how he defines his role as a food producer within a local food system.

A potential danger of participant observation is that the participant may simply "perform" for the researcher (Hammersly and Atkinson 2007:177). The participant knows he or she is being observed and alters their behavior to accommodate the researcher as another audience member. Their behavior may be different from their daily practices. One method of minimizing this "performance" effect is usually through long term and repeated observations. Regardless, the researcher must be continually aware that his or her presence may shape the observation or data.

Another potential weakness of the life story interview method is the danger of privileging the researcher's subjectivity in a way that can prevent him or her from hearing the participant's story (Finlay 2006:28). It is at this stage that I fully acknowledge the concept of reflexivity, that as the interviewer, I exert agency in the research process, both unknowingly and knowingly, that contributes to the subjective experience of the participant (Ortner 2005:34).

Reflexivity

It is imperative the researcher address their own potential biases towards the project and to reconsider these throughout the life story interview process. Rather than viewing reflexivity and agency as potential problems, I prefer to see them as an integral and beneficial part of the research process for this life story interview project. Reflexivity, as defined by Robben, is "the conscious self-examination of the ethnographer's interpretive presuppositions" (2007:443). Being reflexive is to understand that the researcher is part of the realm to which he or she is investigating; the researcher is part of the process. Despite the common assumption that a life story interview somehow represents an honest and truthful narrative of pure data, the interviewer becomes part of the participant's subjective experience of telling his story. The interviews thus include my subjective experiences as well.

Ortner, a contemporary anthropological theorist, argues for the restoration of subjectivity into social theory in order to create a "robust anthropology" (2005:46). She suggests that post-structuralism has tended to focus on "dissolving man" with the result of producing ethnography that is "anti-human" (2005:32). I agree with the notion that subjectivity is a major part of human existence and that by studying the particular, as in a life story interview, we are not only able to learn something about the individual and ourselves but also about the larger world. This is what I attempted to do with this life story interview project.

Photographs are generally considered an objective form of conveying information, an image as a physical record of something. However, as Grady suggests, the image may represent a complex subjective process that requires careful interpretation (2004:18). Photographs have the ability to engage us and demand that we give them meaning. An example of the different subjective experiences coming together is demonstrated by a photograph that I took of Rusty's farm (Figure 1). I held the camera, pointed it in a certain direction, selected the shot, and pressed the button to capture and freeze that moment in time. It was, I thought, a general landscape picture of Rusty's field covered in, what I thought was, a thick blanket of winter snow that represented, to me, a long, cold, and miserable winter season with spring a long ways away.

When I made comments that reflected my personal sentiments of what I saw in the photograph I was quickly and emotionally refuted by a different perspective: "That's our future!" Rusty elaborated that the snow coverage represented valuable moisture that would nurture the soil and provide a healthy spring growth of grass. This is very important for someone who refers to himself as a grass farmer and whose philosophy is all about balancing nature with production.

Figure 1. Rusty's place, Big Coulee Farms, Athabasca County. March 11, 2009.

Without good grass, Rusty could not feed the livestock and good moisture was needed to grow good grass. One simple photograph - two different perspectives with subjective meanings. Clearly, the participant's meaning is much more relevant than my meaning in conveying his life story, but such moments provide an opportunity to clarify ideologies and practices.

In discussing reflexivity, it is important to address the audience: whom are you writing this thesis for; who are you conducting this research for; and who is funding this research. My immediate audience is my program supervisor and committee members as this thesis is part of a program supervised by the Department of Anthropology. This program operates under the policies and regulations of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research and within the framework and governance of the University of Alberta. This governance is largely dictated by the social contract (largely unwritten) that exists between the University, a sanctioning democracy and the citizens of the democracy (Fallis 2007:7-8). An audience of one theoretically becomes an audience of 34 millionUniversity, a sanctioning democracy and the citizens of the democracy (Fallis 2007:7-8). An audience of one theoretically becomes an audience of 34 millionUniversity, a sanctioning democracy and the citizens of the democracy (Fallis 2007:7-8). An audience of one theoretically becomes an audience of 34 million

[4] Figure from Canada's population clock, http://www.statcan.gc.ca/edu/clock, Consulted 11:24, April 24, 2009.

Despite McCall's insightful articulation, I feel it is important to single out two specific audience members: the participant and the researcher. The participant is not required to grade me on this thesis. Yet it is important to acknowledge that this thesis is a way for him to tell and have his life story heard. It gives the participant a voice, a sense of authority, and an aura of authenticity to his narrative (Stoller and Olkes (1989[2007]:412) as interpreted by me, the researcher.

I pursued the potential participant and asked if he wanted to be interviewed and not the other way around. Rusty did not ask me for my life story, yet in a small way my experiences became part of the research process. Ortner refered to this as a "matrix of subjectivity" (2005:34), the coming together of subjective experiences that acknowledges the agency of all participants which creates a new subjective experience. The essence of subjectivity is realized in the fact that if another researcher was to conduct an interview with the very same participant they would most likely come up with a very different life story (Atkinson 1998:20-21). From the moment I "discovered" my potential participant, my subjective experiences became part of the research process and the resulting story.

Analysis

The interviews, transcripts, fieldnotes, and participant observation notes were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis to identify common codes and themes (Rubin and Rubin 1995:226-238). Ruben and Ruben describe coding as the process of grouping the interviewee's responses into categories that represent similar ideas, concepts, and themes. Once the main themes were identified the overall descriptions of the data were synthesized with current literature to look for support or contradictions in concepts and interpretations.

However, as Ager suggests, analysis of life story history material may be problematic (1980:224,229). He drew attention to the "ethnographer's dilemma" which purports that as a study progresses the participant becomes less informative because they assume the researcher knows what they know, and the researcher becomes less analytic as they unconsciously make the same background assumptions of the participant. One of the ways to address this "dilemma" is to incorporate reflexivity into the research project as previously mentioned. Another effective way is to shift the emphasis away from the structure and explanation of the life story method by making inferences about the meaning the narrator gives his story (Ager 1980:231).

It is important, as Rubin and Rubin suggest, to let the voice of the interviewee come through as clearly as possible, to let him tell his story (1995:257). Towards this goal I have included many and sometimes lengthy excerpts from the transcripts to infer shared meanings that reflect the role of a food producer participating in a local food system.

Methods

Participant Recruitment

The first step in planning a life story interview project is to find someone to interview. I was not looking for anyone in general when by happenstance I came across my prospective participant. I was gathering background information for another research project (on family foodways) that I was working on by attending the St. Albert Farmers' Market on September 19, 2008. For this project, Dr. Helen Vallianatosa suggested I keep an eye out for a farmer or farming operation that was promoting direct sales of their food products, preferably of the organic or grass-fed variety.

As I strolled down one of the many busy aisles I came across a rather nondescript booth with a burly looking man wearing a bright yellow hat who was showing a group of interested people a photo album of his products. I stopped a short distance away to read some of the signage that was posted. I noticed that he was from Athabasca County, the area we were conducting research for the family foodways project. He was promoting pasture raised and grass-fed chickens, turkeys, and beef. I immediately had one of those "aha" moments and proceeded to move closer to the booth. The booth had attracted a sizable crowd of interested people and the man was quite engaged in his oration (sales pitch?). I managed to get close enough to grab one of his brochures. The brochure was the same bright yellow as that of his hat and was made from an eight by eleven-inch piece of paper, folded twice. It was full of information, containing the name of his farm, a short history of the farm and family, a brief description of some of his practices and products, along with an order form and details of terms to purchase (Appendix A). (Information not consented to publication by the participant has been blocked out to protect confidentiality).

I shared my good fortune with Dr. Vallianatos at our next meeting. We both agreed that this information might be worth exploring further as it had relevance to our current research questions. Dr. Vallianatos suggested that I call the telephone number on the brochure to see if I could set up an opportunity to visit the farm the next time I was in the region conducting research. I made it clear, when I spoke to Rusty, that I was from the University of Alberta and was conducting research in the area on family food practices. When I asked if I might come out to visit and discuss the current research project, he was more than willing to have me come to his farm so that he could show me the operation and discuss his business. This welcoming and open approach is part of the message displayed on Rusty's brochure "We would welcome you to visit us at Big Coulee Farms and would be proud to show you our farm" (Appendix A).

I visited Rusty and his farm on October 24, 2008. He gave me a tour of the operation although it was fall and his production season was winding down. There were no chickens or turkeys left to pasture. As I was preparing to leave after our conversation I asked Rusty if he would be willing to meet with me again to be interviewed and voice recorded. He immediately agreed and as we shook hands, I said that I would contact him in the future to discuss arrangements. At this point, I did not have anything specific in mind but I felt that Rusty represented something of relevance to our current research questions concerning family food practices and local food environments. I sensed, after this one meeting, that Rusty had an interesting story to tell.

The idea was put on hold for a brief period while I tended to other projects. When it came time to register classes for the 2008 winter term I proposed the idea to Dr. Vallianatos that I conduct an independent research project using this farmer and his business operation as my study subject. Dr. Vallianatos, being familiar with the subject, suggested I approach the project from a life story interview perspective. After the formalities of filling out, signing, and submitting the appropriate course registration forms, I had the makings of a research project and a willing participant.

Rusty operates a farm and business operation in Athabasca County located in north central Alberta. His family has operated the farm since 1975, originally producing grain and cattle using conventional methods. In 2001, dissatisfied with current farming practices, Rusty made the decision to abandon conventional grain farming in favor of raising pasture fed livestock and selling the product direct to consumers. He lives on the farm with his wife, his mother, his sister, and her two children. Rusty is in his late fifties. He is an American, born in Washington D.C. and raised in Virginia, who has not applied for Canadian citizenship after living in Canada for over 30 years. His early years were influenced by the hippie, organic, and back to earth lifestyles associated with counterculture movements of the 1960s and early 70s. Rusty is from the generation of young people who protested the Vietnam War and occasionally fled their country in protest.

My experience in recruiting this participant reflects opportunistic research (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:28) where serendipitous events provide the chance for new research to evolve. I was interested in this particular individual because of what I thought he represented (alternative food production and local foodways) which was relevant to the family foodways research project I was working on. I felt Rusty's story would be of anthropological interest in the understanding of how and why people construct meaning and identity in their environment through their food practices.

The Pre-Interview Stage

The next step, after recruiting a potential participant, was to draft and submit an ethics application to the Ethics Review Board to obtain clearance from the University to proceed. The ethics application consisted of a project summary outlining the main research questions, a brief description of the potential study participant, a sample list of semi-structured interview questions, a copy of the study participant consent form to be used, and a detailed section on methodology. The Ethics Application addressed the following guiding ethical principals: respect for human dignity; respect for free and informed consent; respect for vulnerable persons; respect for privacy and confidentiality; respect for justice and inclusiveness; balancing harms and benefits; minimizing harms; maximizing benefits; and the statement of the researcher.

The application was submitted to the appropriate authorities. Two weeks later I received written confirmation that my ethics application had been approved and I was ready to proceed with my project. Copies of the Ethics Application and confirmation letter were submitted to my program supervisor, Dr. Vallianatos. I telephoned Rusty and explained that my project had received approval from the University to proceed and confirmed that he was still interested in participating. Upon receiving his verbal acknowledgement, we arranged a time and location to meet. Included in the Ethics Application was the statement that data and information collected may be used in the future as part of my Master's research thesis. This represented the conscious foreshadowing of the serendipitous nature of social science research.

The next step in the pre-interview planning was to focus in on the methodology I detailed in my ethics application. I constructed an outline guide to serve as my primary research tool for the interviews (Appendix B). The outline guide is an essential tool in conducting semi-structured interviews to pursue reliable, comparable qualitative data (Bernard 1994:210). The guide consists of a preamble with basic introduction and procedural information for the potential participant and me. It also contains a section highlighting the rationale for each of the interviews. Because the primary method of investigation was a life story interview, I wanted to make sure that the different stages of the participant's life and his farming career were addressed. The term guide is important to emphasize as it reflects the role I wanted to assume with this project. The interviewer acts as a collaborator, helping the participant compose his story (Atkinson 1998:9).

The Interview Stage

The first meeting began with a thorough review and discussion of the project, procedures, ethics, and consent form. The participant raised the issue of removing the confidentiality and anonymity sections of the consent to allow for the use of his farm and business name, location, and possibly his personal name. This speaks to the motivation the participant had in agreeing to participate in the research project, seeing the exposure as a way of promoting his business. He decided that he would like to think about that for a while and decide later. The consent form was signed as presented and we proceeded to the actual interview.

The primary method of investigation for this project was a semi-structured life story interview centered on the participant's farming experiences and business practices. The use of a semi-structured interview technique allows the interviewer to maintain organization by articulating key questions in the interview guide while providing opportunity for both interviewer and interviewee to explore new leads or let the conversation go in any direction (Bernard 1994:210). I attempted to employ many open ended questions, with additional probes, to facilitate the story telling process. This was a life story interview and I wanted Rusty to tell whatever stories he felt were relevant. This is reflected in my conversational style, sharing in the emotions and experiences of the interview process. I found this a productive way to make Rusty feel at ease, enabling him to relax and open up more.

All interviews were conducted in person, face to face, and voice recorded. The initial project was designed to include three interviews with each interview focusing on the rationale outlined in my interview guide. The first interview focused on Rusty's early years. This was designed to establish rapport, trust, and to allow the participant to become comfortable with the procedure, including the use of the digital voice recorder. It was also designed to get Rusty to reflect back to his youth and upbringing for possible insight into connections to agriculture, food habits, and beliefs and values that may shape his current situation. Linde suggests that "a distinct sense of social identity begins in early adolescence" (1993:25). The rationale of the first interview also was to build a foundation for subsequent interviews, highlighting possible areas to explore. This illustrates that a research project is fluid and that agency from all parties' shapes its direction. Handwritten notes were kept to a minimum to allow me to focus on the conversation.

The first interview concluded with arrangements for the second interview being discussed and an invitation to join Rusty and his mother for lunch (we met in his mother's home on the farm and sat in her kitchen). This was an excellent opportunity for participant observation, more so from the point of view of building rapport and establishing an open and deeper relationship with the participant than collecting new data (Rubin and Rubin 1995:110). After lunch, the participant presented me with a book that he gives to all his customers, *Holy Cows & Hog Heaven* (2004), written by Joel Salatin. This book serves as an important resource for Rusty on how and why he implements and practices some of his current farming methods. He also uses the book as a tool for educating his customers. Salatin is a Virginia farmer who practices alternative farming methods and promotes foodways by enhancing nature's ecology. Salatin gained national and international recognition for his ideas on healthy, sustainable and tasty food production through Michael Pollan's best-selling book, *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006) and the documentary film *Food, INC.* (Kenner 2009).

The second interview took place 17 days later, March 7, in the cab of Rusty's pickup truck. He was parked at St. Albert Mall, one of his regular drop-off points, where his customers come to meet him and pick up their preordered food products. This illustrates the sometimes unusual and uncomfortable places that a researcher must be prepared to use to conduct an interview with the participant (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). However, it did present the opportunity to engage Rusty in a different environment. I was able to observe his interaction with a customer who arrived to pick up their order of eggs while we were in the middle of conducting our interview. I stopped the digital voice recorder, as conversations with individuals other than the study participant were not permitted in my ethics approval. Nevertheless, it did provide a real life example of part of what Rusty does that reflects his ideology and actual practices (i.e. selling his "eggceptional eggs grown nature's way" [see the front page of participant's brochure Appendix A] direct to the consumer). The rationale for the second interview was to discuss the participant's current location and some of the early experiences of establishing the farm and the farming operations.

The third interview took place three days later, March 10, back at Rusty's farm. We met in his mother's house around the kitchen table. The rationale for the third interview was to explore the transition, after approximately 25 years, from conventional farming methods to alternative ideologies and practices in the production, distribution, and consumption of pasture fed livestock food products. Rusty and his mother again invited me to stay for lunch but I had to decline as I had an appointment to conduct another interview for the family foodways research project I was working on. Rusty and I went outside and walked around the farm so I could take photographs using a digital camera. These photographs comprised of landscape, building, and livestock shots to provide some context and information to the research project (Figure 2). I thanked Rusty for his participation and informed him that I would stay in contact with him regarding the project.

The quick timeline for the three interviews (under three weeks) was conducive to keeping the flow and continuity of the project moving. It was also appropriate for the assigned timeline to complete the initial project, as it was originally designed as an Independent Research course

Figure 2. Rusty's cows, Big Coulee Farms. March 11, 2009.

towards my program course requirements. However, a more in-depth and longer period was desirable to continue to explore the research questions and issues that arose through the initial interview process. I again discussed the possibility of continuing the research with Rusty, reminding him that my Ethics Approval was good for one year. He acknowledged his continued interested and stated (I have the statement on the digital voice files) that he would like to wave anonymity and confidentiality to allow his common nickname, farm-business identity, and location, to be used in any public format: papers, articles, presentations, publications, websites, and so on. I thanked Rusty for his decision and reiterated that I thought it was an important part of this research process. After all, what good is a life story if you do not know whose life it is? Walford suggests that promise of anonymity is designed to give the research generalizability (2002:100) whereas in my case the life story interview is about understanding the participant's uniqueness first (Josselson 1996:xiii). I informed Rusty that I would have to pursue this with Dr. Vallianatos and the chair of the Ethics Review Board (ERB) before anything could change.

I amended the consent form, with the support and advice from Dr. Vallianatos and the chair of the ERB, and submitted the amendment on May 5. I contacted Rusty with the good news upon receiving approval and scheduled another interview session. In the meanwhile, I had decided to continue developing this project as my Master's Thesis, which I had made provisions for in my original ethics application and participant consent form. I wanted to meet again with Rusty quickly as I was preparing to present the findings on my initial project with him at the Canadian Anthropological Society Conference in Vancouver on May 16, 2009.

The fourth interview was scheduled for May 7, 2009 and I prepared a new outline guide with interview rationale and questions (Appendix C). We met at Rusty's farm, in his mother's house at the kitchen table. The first order of business was to review the amended consent form that allowed for the use of the participant's common nickname (Rusty), farm and business operating name (Big Coulee Farms), and their location (Athabasca County) in publications, presentations, public discussions, and so on. Rusty consented to this amendment.

The main significant difference in the interview environment this time was the presence of Rusty's wife in the kitchen preparing a stew for supper. He had informed me over the telephone, when setting up this meeting, that his wife had been laid off from her job of 19 years on May 1. It was obvious to me that Rusty was not in a good mood as he was not his usual jovial self upon our initial greetings. There was a noticeable tension in the kitchen as we began the interview. What transpired illustrates the dynamic process of research and how the interviewer needs to be prepared to let the interview go where the participant wants to take it (Bernard 1994:210). It also highlights Rubin and Rubin's theory that most individuals, particularly in a life story interview project, have a strong desire to share what is on their mind (1995:103). I barely had to say anything over the course of the first 60 minutes of the interview. The interview rationale and questions I had prepared were not important. My job at this point was to sit and listen, silently acknowledging, and thereby authenticating Rusty's story (Stoller and Olkes, 1989[2007]:412).

Participant Observation-Farmers' Market

I met Rusty at the St. Albert Farmers' Market on Saturday, June 20, 2009. Rusty participates in this weekly market from the time it opens on the second Saturday in June until it closes at Christmas. The market operates outdoors until the Thanksgiving weekend when it moves inside the City's administration building which is located beside the summer street location. The St. Albert Farmers' Market is promoted as the largest outdoor farmers' market in Western Canada[5]. This market is Rusty's primary venue for selling his product direct to the consumer. It is also the place where he promotes his products and actively seeks pre-orders for the next season's offerings. This reflects the seasonality of some of the products that Rusty produces and represents one of his major challenges (Starr et al. 2003:317). He does not always have actual product, other than eggs, to offer at the beginning of the Farmers' Market season. The chicken, beef, turkey, and pork are processed in the fall after spending the summer eating grass on the pasture. The St. Albert Farmers' Market is also the place where Rusty has the opportunity to promote his image, his business identity, and his identity as a local food producer participating in this local food system, the farmers' market.

[5] The Farmers' Weekly, June 20, 2009. This newsletter is published by the St. Albert Chamber of Commerce and distributed by the Market Manager to all vendors and available to all customers at the information booth.

I arrived at Rusty's booth just after the market had officially opened at 10:00. The market lasts until 3:00. I stayed for two hours, briefly and informally chatting with Rusty when the opportunity presented itself. My main purpose was

not to interview him nor have an in-depth conversation but rather to observe some of the face to face interactions between him, as a local food producer, and his existing or potentially new customers. I wanted to observe and experience the personal connections that might reflect the beliefs and values between what Rusty says in his interviews and how that relates to the practices in the local food market environment.
I took photographs of Rusty's booth, the merchandising information, and some of his product to provide context to what this venue and local food environment looks like. I was careful not to include any people, including Rusty, as this is outside the bounds of my ethics approval (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Rusty's booth at the St. Alberta Farmers' Market. There is a small sign reflecting the seasonality of some of his products. Chickens are sold out and not available to September, June 20, 2009.

Participant Observation-Field Day

I attended a "field day" hosted by Rusty at his farm, Big Coulee Farms, on July 7, 2009. It was organized in conjunction with a grazing organization made up of like-minded farmers who share common goals on the sustainability of the independent farm and local food producer. There were 25 people, males and females from senior citizens to teenagers, on the busload that arrived from a small central Alberta community. Then there was myself and one other person that Rusty had specifically invited. This person was a longtime customer of Rusty's who had severe weight and health problems before changing his dietary habits. Unexpectedly, Rusty asked both of us to speak for a few minutes about why we were there and what our involvement with him and Big Coulee Farms was about. This day, which I originally thought would be straightforward participant observation, illustrates the fluidity of research and that the research is part of the process. It illustrates how the role of the researcher may be used by the research participant to validate what he says or does (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:64). Rusty, by introducing me and asking me to discuss why I was at the field day, was placing me in the role of an expert or authority and himself in the position of "privileged informant" (Clifford 1988[2007]:483). My role was not one of an expert in grazing or alternative farming practices but one that presented me as an academic researcher from a University, with the suggestion to Rusty's audience that if what he is talking about and promoting is worth researching it must be important.

Once everyone had arrived, Rusty proceeded to feed us a lunch focused on his own products. He barbecued some of his chicken and hamburgers, made from his ground beef. He served some cold turkey and ham that was also from his livestock. After lunch Rusty introduced himself to the group, talked about his farm and practices, and answered questions. He then led the group on a tour of the farm and the different livestock, which lasted approximately three hours. Throughout the tour Rusty described his practices, the reasons behind them, and addressed questions from the group. Despite the "performance" aspect of this field day (Rusty as the host and perceived grazing expert) it was an excellent opportunity for participant observation where my subject was engaged in face to face contact with people, expressing his identity as a local food producer.

A fifth interview was conducted with Rusty on November 26, 2009. I met him in a shopping mall parking lot in Edmonton where he comes to meet his customers and deliver their orders every two week. The interview was conducted in the cab of his truck with frequent breaks as Rusty served his customers over the hour and a half time period that I was there. I got out of the truck each time a customer arrived to casually listen in on the conversation and to observe the transaction from a closer distance. I did not attempt to actively participate in the transaction unless prompted by Rusty. My intent was to allow the exchange to occur as regularly as possible. This is also why I did not remain inside the truck when customers arrived. I did not want the customers to feel like some outsider was observing them.

The rationale for this interview was to round out the seasons. I had interviewed or met with Rusty in the winter (March), spring (May), summer (July), and now fall. It was now post-Thanksgiving when a large portion of Rusty's livestock had been processed and delivered into the hands of his regular customers who had preordered their supply of meat products. It was also an opportunity to address issues that required clarification to write my thesis. But more importantly, after meeting and talking to Rusty for over a year, I wanted to give him the final word by asking him what the past year had meant to him. I wanted to get a sense of how he felt about what he does and what he accomplished this past year, and to get his feedback on his participation in this project.

The Post-Interview Stage

Now that the fun part is over, the 'roll up your sleeves work' begins. As Atkinson points out, one of the purposes of a life story is to generate data (1998:21,54). The next question is what do you do with that data. All voice-recorded interviews were immediately uploaded and stored on a password-protected computer as a voice file. In preparation for future interpretation and analysis the voice files were transcribed, by me, into written text in a word document on the computer and stored in a secure location. The audio files and transcriptions were backed up at a secondary secure computer source.

Fieldnotes for each interview and participant observation were voice recorded immediately after I left the participant. Fieldnotes are a traditional method for documenting observations and information that the voice recorder is

unable to record (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:141-147). This was done to ensure that reflections and thoughts from the preceding interview, and ideas for future interviews remained fresh and relevant. The fieldnotes were then uploaded to a digital voice file on the computer for future use. The fieldnotes were transcribed, by me, into written text and stored on the computer and backed up on a secondary source.

The photographs were uploaded directly from a digital camera to a file on the computer to be stored for future use. All data, digital, visual, and written, are stored in a safe location on the University of Alberta campus and are not accessible to anyone but the researcher. A total of ten hours of interviews with the participant were recorded for this thesis project. The voice-recorded files were transcribed into 135 pages of double spaced text. Twenty-eight additional pages of fieldnotes and participant observation notes were generated from the voice files. Twenty photographs were taken.

A written paper based on the initial research project, including the Ethics Application, outline guide, all transcripts, fieldnotes and appendices completed at the time, was submitted to Dr. Vallianatos on April 24, 2009, as an Independent Research Project as part of my Master's Program course requirements. Oral and visual presentations, in the form of Power Point slides, on the initial research project were given at the Canadian Anthropological Society's annual conference in Vancouver, British Columbia on May 16, 2009, and at the Frucht Student Conference in Edmonton, Alberta on March 5, 2010. A poster summarizing the overall thesis project was also presented at this conference.

Quoted passages from the transcripts were not edited other than for punctuation, which was arbitrarily and subjectively interpreted by me to represent breaks or pauses in the conversation, and for ease of readability. The passages quoted do not follow the chronological order of Rusty's life story interviews but reflect the thematic discussion I created for my thesis. This reflects Linde's position that "A life story is also a discontinuous unit, told in separate pieces over a long period of time" (1993:4). Upon completion, one copy of my thesis will be made available to Rusty as per his request from the original consent form.

Chapter 3

You Say Tōmātō and I Say Tomato…

Brent: If people ask you what business you are in or what type of farmer you are, how do you sum it up for them?

Rusty: I always start it off like this: "I own 360 acres of solar panel", 'cause that tweaks everybody's interest into "What is this guy talking about?" I'm a grass farmer. I don't say I'm a farmer because I'm not a conventional farmer, so I have to define myself someway.

Terms and Labels

How one occupationally defines oneself or gives meaning to what they do is an important means of delineating their identity for themselves and thereby marking their place in the social worlds in which they live. An important feature of Rusty's story is his efforts to construct an identity as a food producer that is understandable to consumers in the local food system (LFS). The use of various terms and their definitions is a constant language problem for those participating in a local food system, whether they are producers, consumers, or researchers studying this growing phenomenon (Feenstra 2002:99). Participants within a local food system may use the same term but have a different understanding of what the label means to them. Labels, as Fromartz (2006:ix) suggests, are often at the heart of consumer trust within LFS.

In this chapter, I will discuss some of the terms Rusty uses in demarcating his place as a food producer, identified through thematic analysis of the interviews. The truthfulness or accuracy of his interpretations of these terms is not measured against any accepted empirical norm. What is important to my thesis are the interpretations Rusty uses to give meaning to what he does and how he uses this meaning to construct an identity that reflects who he is as local food producer and as an individual. Inferences to shared meanings between Rusty and his consumers helps him to validate his understanding of these terms (Cruikshank 1990:4).

The first terms or labels identified as a prominent theme in Rusty's life story are conventional and alternative. In the context of modern farming and direct agricultural marketing, such as farmers' markets, the terms conventional and alternative are frequently employed to identify a method of practice and ideology perceived as polarized opposites. Conventional farming has come to represent chemically intensive large-scale production with the focus on feeding the planet through participation in the capitalist fueled industrial food system (IFS) (Fromartz 2006:12). Belasco describes the modern farmer's tools as "pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, subsidized irrigation projects, and heavy machinery that destroyed soil while bankrupting over mortgaged farmers" (1999:282).

Conventional farming became more prominent after Word War II and began to displace what Hinrichs called the traditional family farm in North America (2000:298). Post-war prosperity and technological advances helped usher in long distance food distribution to fuel the rise of the modern grocery store and large supermarket. A growing and increasingly urban population meant that local regions around these populations could no longer supply enough food to feed them. Central warehousing was required to stock the expansion of grocery stores. Improved refrigeration facilities, including those on long haul trucks, made the transportation and storage of food products easier and safer. Fresh produce and meat could be transported over greater distances without spoilage (Horowitz 2005). The post-war expansion and improvement of road and rail networks connected the continent in all directions. This meant food could be shipped quicker, more safely, and more directly to the large urban centers.

This process helped make possible the growing expansion of the corporate controlled retail food system, which fostered the development of the industrial food chain. Control through ownership or contractual relationships with the different levels in the food production and distribution system was seen as a way for businesses to improve profitability. Food became a national, then global commodity increasingly valued, not for its ability to feed people, but in its ability to make money for those who controlled it. Economic relationships, or links, were forged between the consumer, the retailer, the wholesaler, right down to the producer or the farmer, whose identities were unknown to consumers. Rather, the face of food producers was erased and production became represented by faceless corporate entities. These relationships produced foods Belasco describes as "biochemically adequate but spiritually vacuous" (1999:278). The consumer had become physically, socially, and spiritually disconnected from the food they ate.

The farmer, like the consumer, became increasingly removed from the decision making process and control over what they produced and how they produced it. Conventional agriculture's primary goal shifted to high yield and high output to satisfy the growing demand of a mass market. Monocropping, specializing in growing one dominant crop, was promoted as the way for the farmer to be successful in this model (Fromartz 2006:41,82).

Alternative, as the polarized opposite of conventional, is commonly used in LFS to distinguish itself from the IFS by implying that the participants within the system have a choice. The consumer and the producer have an alternative to purchasing or selling their food at the grocery store or supermarket. The motivations behind that choice may be deeper than mere anti-industrialism or anti-capitalist protests. They may include a back to the land sentiment based on perceived simplicity of agrarian ideals, environmental concerns, nutritional and health concerns, or the love of fresh, whole, natural foods (Fromartz 2006:xiii). Feenstra suggests alternative systems are "characterized as more environmentally sound, more economically viable for a larger percentage of community members, and more socially, culturally, and spiritually healthful" (2002:100). Therefore, in the context of LFS, conventional implies disconnected and alternative implies connected. The consumer participating in a LFS is physically, socially, and spiritually closer to the production, distribution, and consumption of their food.

What does Rusty mean when he says he is not a conventional farmer in the opening passage of this chapter? I was discussing the family's arrival from Virginia to Athabasca County in 1974. Neither Rusty nor his father was a farmer, although farming was part of their ancestral heritage. They had been exposed to the back to earth, organic, and hippie movements that were popular on the East Coast at this period.

Brent: Did your father have a vision of the kind of farming he wanted to do when he first moved here?

Rusty: Well, when he moved here it was strictly conventional farming, there were no thoughts of organic. Yes, he wasn't trying to be a rebel, he didn't do any of that organic stuff. He was just being a conventional farmer, so there wasn't any drawbacks at all. He was just like everybody else.

In this passage Rusty implies that organic methods are not part of his understanding of conventional farming practices. I continued to probe this notion of practicing conventional farming methods by addressing the seasonal and climatic differences between Athabasca County and Virginia.

Brent: How about from a farming perspective? Because the different seasons imply a different farming strategy than they would have in Virginia?

Rusty: Yes, they do here. You see you have a rest here. There, there is no rest. You could drive a fence post anytime that you want to. You can drive a fence post in November – December. You can put up a fence anytime that you want. The right kind of fescue grass, you could have grass all year round. Here you have to be prepared. You have to have everything stockpiled and ready to go for winter, that's all.

Brent: Was that a difficult adjustment at first?

Rusty: No, because I am having to learn that now with this grazing thing that we're trying to get off the ground. But when you are conventional farming, there is no adjusting, you know. You just feed hay and conventional farming in Virginia and conventional farming in Alberta are exactly the same. It just takes a little more money here because you have to heat water so it doesn't freeze, and heating things with electricity is expensive. You have to use your tractor more than you want to here, but those are the only two things that are different. We started out with conventional mixed farming and it is pretty much the same in both countries.

In these two passages Rusty emphasizes the sameness or standardization implied by conventional farming but also makes note of the change to what he refers to as alternative methods: “I am having to learn that now with this grazing thing” and “We started out with conventional mixed farming”. Rusty suggests that grazing is an alternative practice and that he no longer practices conventional methods. Rusty continues to explain the transition away from conventional farming methods during the economic challenges of the 80’s and after the death of his father.

Rusty: We kept the livestock but we didn’t do any grain farming or anything after Dad died.

Brent: How did that affect the farming operation?

Rusty: Well, he was the mechanic. He loved mechanics and that kind of thing and I hate it with a passion. I just really hate it so, and he had cancer and before he got really, really bad he had set up an auction to get ride of all the grain equipment and all that kind of stuff and actually he passed away before the auction came to be. But we went ahead with the auction and moved all the grain equipment out and took that money and got some more cows. I am a livestock guy and I can maybe keep a tractor going. But combines and grain trucks and all that stuff that is in grain farming is too mechanical and I get along better with animals than I do with combines and grain trucks, so that is kind of what we did. We moved it into livestock farming.

Brent: So you got right out of grain farming at that point?

Rusty: Yep.

Brent: How was grain farming up until then? Was your father planning to get out of grain farming?

Rusty: He wasn’t going to continue organic farming. He was going to continue to grain farm and keep organic practices, but he was not going to stay certified organic and that kind of thing. And then he ended up with cancer and that was kind of the start to the finish.

Brent: You mentioned that he was concerned about the chemicals, so when did he start this shift towards more organic farming?

Rusty: It would have been in the early to mid 80's that he decided that there had to be a better way to do things [pause] so we started researching and looking into doing it and figured out that it would be better.

Brent: Did the government offer some incentives and aide for people trying to go organic and get certification at that time?

Rusty: They probably did but we come from a country where you don't get involved with the government unless you absolutely have to and have kept that practice up to today and I hope to keep it going. So we don't get into government programs because it usually ends up being so much red tape and paper work that by the time you get it all done, you have pulled half your hair out [laughs]. You are better off to do it yourself.

This passage highlights two important features that reflect meaning that shape Rusty's identity as a local food producer and an individual. The first is Rusty's acknowledgement of his dislike of government and bureaucracy. This was a recurring theme in Rusty's interviews where government and politics, particularity concerning agriculture, were viewed as the enemy and an obstacle to what he was trying to do. The second feature is Rusty's statement "we come from a country" that represents his cultural identity, as an American with particular values of independence and self sufficiency, which is also reflected in his personal identity. When I asked Rusty why he had not taken permanent residence like the rest of his family, he relied while laughing, "I have nothing against Canada ... the only thing I can't do is vote and work for the post office ... other than [that] there is no difference."

The following passage is from the fourth interview when Rusty had recently been to a meeting of local cattle producers. Although a lenghty passage, I am including it in its entirety to capture Rusty's depth of feelings and emotions on being a small-scale food producer participating in a local market. It reflects his frustration with politics and highlights some of the challenges that he faces as a local food producer:

> **Rusty:** Well, the things that the Alberta Government is doing in our – the Minister of Agriculture for Alberta – he's single handedly really messed things up big time. And it is so interesting to me because I don't travel in – we direct market everything – I don't travel in the regular farm travellings. But last Tuesday the 5th, or was it Monday, I can't remember which evening it was but I went to an Alberta Beef Producers meeting at the Ag Building, right on this side of the river outside of town. There were probably 35 guys there, some of the bigger meat producers in the area, guys that are running 1500 head cow-calf operations. Of course they market their calves at the auction mart. The Minister has this new scheme up that you may have heard some things on the radio; hopefully you have. If you haven't you will, about the Alberta Beef Producers and the check off money they get when a calf comes off the trailer into the feedlot. It's called a check off - the check comes to the – then that money is divided up into – it goes to different parts of the Alberta Beef Producers. And the Alberta Beef Producers is the only organization in Alberta that has elected members- you have to be elected, you just can't hope the Minister appoints you like he has all his other friends. Anyways, I was in that circle of people that I normally don't travel in because it just takes so much of my time marketing what I do, and I didn't know that they were in this kind of trouble [chuckles]. And they don't know the kind of trouble I'm in as a direct marketer and the hoops we have to jump through – do you know anything about the ALMA, the Alberta Meat legislation that the Minister's got on the go. Well anyways between these two things he should pretty well bring an end to the family farm. And in the Minister's eyes a guy that raises 1500 calves is a small operator [laughs]. (For comparison, Rusty had 37 cow-calves this year).
>
> **Brent:** Okay! [Said surprisingly]

Rusty: I know that doesn't sound small but in the government way of thinking it's tiny; they think that's too small. If you're under 2000 acres and you're not raising 7 or 8000 steers, or you know, having calves like that, you're just a small time operator and they don't have any use for you. So, anyway I went to this meeting and I found out all of these things and how disgruntled and upset these guys are and it – you know you would think you'd be able to get to have meetings with your Minister and sit down and talk with him, especially if it's the board of director's that is elected. They can't seem to get any meeting or get any discussions or any of that. And this Bill has already gone to second reading, so he's going to get to take that check off money from elected people and use it for I don't know what; whatever he wants I guess. I don't understand because the way things work when the border was closed with the BSE, the government can't take the money and fight to get the border open. The Alberta Beef Producers has to do that themselves to keep it free trade legal, okay. A portion of that check off money goes to things like that and a portion of it goes to supporting advertisements on television. You remember those ads, probably two or three years ago, they had those ladies that were ranching in Southern Alberta, that was paid for with check off money 'cause it's promoting Alberta Beef.

Brent: Oh yes I remember those.

Rusty: And so they were very upset that they can't get anything – they can't even get their side of the story heard. And we were at the same meeting where I learned some more things about the CCIA which is the people that make us put those little buttons in the ears so that the calf is traceable right, that's another thing that all of us are kind of upset about because basically that has to be done by the cow-calf producer. Nobody else can do it because you are supposed to tag the calf when it is born and write it up in your calving book. That was one of those things we were trying to get established at this meeting the other night that, you know, we're not getting any extra remuneration for this - these buttons are seven bucks a pop. So you're going to tag- like my friend that has 1500 – 1500 times seven dollars is a lot of money. That is he has to "Now how am I going to recover this money when I put them in the auction mart." You know, and he has no control over what ever he gets, if it happens to be a good day or if it happens to be a bad day. And it appears to me from what I could see at this meeting – the Minister of Agriculture's buddies run the feedlots and they're the ones that basically own the feedlot and they own the processing plant. Okay, so they basically set the price that any of us are going to get. And if the Minister of Agriculture decides he wants hamburger to sell for eighty-nine cents a pound in Safeway, he can do that. Now as soon as he gets this bill through he can say to his guys in the feedlot and the buyers at the auction marts "Calves are way too high, we gotta get this price down so people can eat cheap food", and then I can get re-elected. So basically his friends in the feedlot business have taken their check books and done their voting. So hopefully this won't fall into the wrong hands but I don't care; I'm so upset now.

> So, on my side of the equation I can see how the government is going about also trying – they're promoting small ag business like that – rural development, that's their job is to make my life as easy as possible, har, har, har [laughs facetiously] to be able to promote local food and do all of those things and I just can't understand how the government – one hand doesn't know what the other hand is doing. That's what it looks like to me when you sit back and look at this. "Go do this, go do that, promote this, promote that". "Well it didn't work". "Oh well, let's see if - ". And in the mean time we are all spinning our wheels. These two different camps are spinning their wheels and they don't know the other one is in trouble. So they've got us all split up and divided right. They're keeping the cow-calf, the big cow-calf people that go through the auction mart separate from people like me who market direct and I'm finding a set of things that are costing me money, like labeling this, labeling that. You know, do this, do that, jump through this hoop, jump through this flaming hoop and everything is good. And these guys are jumping through a whole bunch of different hoops. And some of the hoops we have to jump through – like I have to tag my calves, just because they are not going to the auction mart, I still have to tag them or they won't accept them at the abattoir, right. So they have got you coming and going; anyway they have us all separated. Now I can see how they were so happy that the city folks are so separated from their food now, they don't understand what is going on. So they have succeeded in keeping all three of us components of food separate.
> And they're drawing the string around everybody's neck tighter and tighter and pretty soon they are going to bring all these strings together and go thfft [makes a motion with his hands of ropes being pulled tight together, as in a noose tightening around a person's neck] you're out of business because you're just not big enough.

There are many issues raised or alluded to in this passage from Rusty: the plight of the small family farm, the perceived ineptitude of government bureaucracy, the publics' desire for cheap food, the possible misinformation, miscommunication and misunderstanding between and within different levels of organizations. While these are all relevant issues in examining a local food environment, what this passage emphasizes are the challenges that Rusty must deal with and how these challenges shape his beliefs, values, and practices in participating in a local food system. Conversely, how Rusty's beliefs, values, and practices shape his identity as he addresses these challenges creates a relationship between himself and his role in the local food environment. This is characterized by his decision to remain a landed immigrant and not apply for Canadian citizenship despite having lived in Alberta for over 30 years. It suggests that Rusty not only views his methods as alternative or non-conventional but that he regards himself as non-conventional as well. Despite having stated earlier that his father was not trying to be a rebel, it seems that Rusty enjoys portraying himself as one.

The term organic is another label that characterizes how Rusty defines his role as a local food producer. Organic is a term strongly associated with LFS (Winter 2003:25). McMichael reported that organic farming was a $5 billion dollar industry in Canada and the US by 1997 and growing by 20% annually (2000:30). Yet its meaning and the understanding people have of the term as a label is highly varied. Rusty does not attempt to provide a definition of organic but acknowledges that there is a difference between "certified organic" and organic practices. The distinction is relevant if difficult to articulate. It speaks to Rusty's disdain for bureaucracy and the need for government to "certify" what he does. Rusty provides some insight to his meaning or understanding of the term organic as he continues the conversation.

Brent: You did implement some organic practices like eliminating pesticides and fertilizers?

Rusty: We went into crop rotations and that kind of thing but the no-till and all that kind of thing hadn't come along yet. What I have learned since then is that Mother Nature hates bare dirt and to do that kind of farming you have to keep a certain amount of bare dirt to try to keep weed control because you are not using chemicals. It is not a good thing because you are trying to do something against nature and she is always going to win. I learned that a long time ago.

Brent: Is that an important thing to know as a farmer, to understand that relationship with nature?

Rusty: Yes, but unfortunately not everybody gets it yet, but anyway. That is the other reason that we went into more animal production than grain production. Most organic farmers have no animals. They are grain farming so their fertility starts to drop because they have no animals to put into the rotation. A cow is the most inefficient animal on the planet because its eats and almost 90% of what it eats ends up back on the ground. Now that sounds inefficient until you are thinking of the pasture or whatever she is eating and then it starts to make some sense to you. So, if you don't have livestock in your organic grain farming how are you doing anything for the soil? Because it all ends up starting in the soil.

The term organic, for Rusty, is more about the process and its relationship to nature than it is about a government certified label of recognition. Organic is about nurturing the complex biological activity within the soil (Fromartz 2006:7). This passage warrants reference to Lappé's argument that cattle are the most wasteful converters of grain to meat (1991:xvi). Rusty is aware of the ecological inefficiency of feeding precious grain to cattle and emphasizes that cows were meant to eat grass. This speaks directly to Rusty's motivation for changing from conventional mixed farming to certified organic grain farming to pasture-fed livestock producer and reflects his spiritual beliefs as suggested by the following passage.

Rusty: It made a lot of sense when you start researching and you are reading all the different things that we have read. Joel[6] was the one who - I had never thought about it, but the earth has the same bugs in it that we have in our gut. This is kind of an eye opening thought to think about. If the soil and my gut have the same thing in them, we have to take care of both of them. That is the first thing and the second thing is I have a Christian background and I believe in creation; that didn't happen by accident, that was planned. So if that much of it was planned then I better think about how can I make this better and something that is sustainable. When I use the word sustainable, it means a lot. It has to be economically sustainable, and environmentally sustainable. Sustainable, sustainable – something that can carry on and on.

6 Joel Salatin is a farmer and author of Holy Cows & Hog Heaven (2004) as well as many other books on alternatve and sustaniable farming practices. Rusty models a lot of his ideas and practices based on Salatin's writings.

Education

Rusty repeated throughout the research process that 95% of his time and energy is spent educating the consumer. This process of constantly educating the consumer serves to reinforce the meanings Rusty constructs to promote his identity as a local food producer. It is important to note that Rusty does not use the label “organic” in the directing marketing of his products. Rusty expresses his disdain for government involvement and the “certification” of definitions by stating “The organic people have kind of shot themselves in the foot”. This is supported by research that suggests the original concept of organic has been “transformed into a costly private possession” (DeLind 2002:218) usually used to gain market advantage.

Originally, organic food was supposed to be pure, wholesome, natural, and produced on a small scale. It was understood, by those involved, as a true alternative to conventional food produced through chemical intensive farming (Fromartz 2006:12). However, with the growth of organic foods over the past ten to twenty years, there was concern that organic was becoming part of the conventional food system. The original intent of organic practices was being consumed by the rules the U.S. government uses to regulate The Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 (Fromartz 2006:x, McMichael 2000:30). The focus shifted from the counterculture movements' emphasis on local, sustainable small scale farming and concern for workers' rights, to a certification process administered by a government bureaucracy that made it difficult and costly for the small local farmer or producer to participate. Those who had the money and resources to 'capitalize' on the certification process were the corporate enterprises and agribusinesses that already controlled the IFS. These structures of capital, as Hassanein suggested, served the commodification of food and promoted people as passive consumers (2003:80).

The word organic does however promote the discussion of some other terms and labels bantered about the farmers' market with consumers. Rusty elaborates:

Rusty: When organic first started, it was kind of yucky. Now they have gotten better at what they do but they've adopted so many

commercial and confinement things. For example, it used to be chickens, whether they laid eggs or not, were all raised in crates, five chickens to a crate. So they didn't have a lot of room and all they could do was get fat. That wasn't good, and the organic people didn't like that so they've gotten together with the government and they've come up with definitions of things. So now, a free-range organic chicken is a chicken that eats organic grain; it can be in a barn still, confined with hundreds or thousands of other chickens, as long as it's eating organic grain through the grain system and it's loose on the barn floor to roam around [laughs]. It's called an organic free range chicken, and the eggs are the same. Now chickens, when you have them in a barn that packed, they don't roam, they don't go anywhere. So to me those kind of things, you know, it doesn't help anything. They're just adopting the same practices that the conventional confinement people use so that they can supply the demand [for organic products]. And if more people would have the ability to raise chickens outside on grass in a shelter like we do, and they did it in the summer, and yes people would have to eat frozen – you wouldn't get fresh year round, but at least it would be better for the chicken, better for the customer, and it can be done, but its not very lucrative. Like the more widgets you raise the better you get paid. And there is only so many widgets you can raise outside in shelters.

Brent: What is the difference between grass or pasture fed and free range?

Rusty: When we first started, we said ours were free-range chickens. But as soon as this definition came out and as soon as we found out you could have chickens loose on a barn floor and call them free range, we stopped using that label free range and went to pasture fed. Cause as far as I know no one has figured out how to grow grass indoors yet [laughs]. But when you say free range to the public, the first thing that flies into their mind is "Oh this chicken is outside on the grass in the fresh air and the sunshine". And that's just not the case.

Food safety and trust are two other terms closely associated with the concept of organic foods in an alternative food system (Feagan et al. 2004:243). The increasing distance between food, the farmer, and the consumer, as a process of the global food system, is cited as a reason generating food safety and trust

issues (McMichael 2000:30). The shortening of the food system was seen as a way to address these issues. Food safety and trust issues are however, even more challenging for a 'protein' food producer. Rusty expresses the added challenges he believes he faces in both educating his customers and dealing with government bureaucracy and regulations by describing his role as a local 'protein' producer. He begins by explaining how he uses his newsletter to educate and motivate his customers into action.

Rusty: We got our customers to write a few letters. They woke up a bunch of people and they [politicians] realized that there were voters out there that liked real food from a real farm. They shouldn't mess with what is working.

Brent: Just as we were saying that any food scare is good for business, it is probably good for farmers' markets in general, right?

Rusty: Yes.

Brent: People would be more likely to go and say let's look at these alternatives?

Rusty: I hate to say this but farmers' markets – it's getting harder and harder for them to find a small family farm to be able to go to the market and – if you were to go to farmers' markets and if you just decided "Well for the next four months I'm going to travel the province and go to farmers markets" you would find the vegetables and the root crops people that raise lettuce, and tomatoes and cucumbers, peppers, potatoes, carrots, and broccoli and cauliflower, they're still fairly widespread through the market. But if you were to go to that same market and look for protein products, you would find a very small smattering of us through the market. There is almost no one that does pork at a farmers' market. We are the only ones in St. Albert that do pork. And we don't even carry cuts because we've never been able to produce enough pork [laughs]. So, we have at the farmers' market in St. Albert, there is another beef producer there; there is us that does beef and there is two guys that do bison, and there used to be an elk guy, but I don't think he was there last summer at all. And that was it for protein in that huge, huge market. And when we started out there were four chicken producers, now we are the only one.

Brent: Well you wonder if it's just the cycle of a successful farmers' market, you have to be a certain size producer to have product for that size of market and meet the certain standards?

Rusty: I think the farmers' market would be so interested that they would just about take anybody that produced protein.

Brent: Does the farmers' market have obligations for checking vendor's credentials or certification?

Rusty: No. Nope, they would like it to be that way but they don't have time for that either.

Brent: That's another administrative, bureaucratic thing and they don't have time to check whether someone is certified organic; it's up to the customer to decide whether they believe this guys sign and that he is certified organic or whatever?

Rusty: Yeah, right.

Brent: Well is it just the cost then for the small producer to bring protein to the market?

Rusty: It's all the hoops you have to jump through. It's all the obstacles you have to go through to get a product to someone's table, and [sighs exasperatedly] it's all done in the guise of food safety. But it really doesn't have anything to do with food safety. If it were really about food safety, there would be better ways to do it. And Joel [Salatin] says this all the time, if it was really about food safety nobody would be able to have a hunting license and go hunting. I don't know – they say it's food safety but it's really just another way to keep control on people. Not everybody is like me but I truly don't want to make anyone sick. And I truly want to give someone what I say I'm doing, and that's why we have on the brochure that you can come to the farm anytime you want, see it in action and see that we are doing what we say we are doing. If I made someone sick or my product kept making people sick, how long would I be in business? It doesn't make any sense to have to regulate me as strictly as they do. It's just mind boggling. And word of mouth is still the way we probably get most of our customers.

It was evident to me, while observing him at the farmers' market, that Rusty enjoys this educational aspect of direct marketing and engaging with his

consumers. Rusty's manner was congenial and friendly with the customers. He joked around and was willing to engage with people and explain things, as he saw them. He did admit later that you do have to be careful reading the customer, as some are going to want to argue with you about their understanding of what some of the terms and labels mean. One of Rusty's strengths is his conviction to his beliefs in what he is doing. This conviction is an important component in building trust in his farmer-consumer relationship, where Feenstra notes "building trust in a participatory food system is not always easy" (2002:102).

Another observation from the farmers' market was in overhearing a customer mention that she was aware of Joel Salatin from *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (Pollan 2006) and therefore familiar with some of Rusty's methods, like his version of the henmobile (Figure 4), and his beliefs. When I asked Rusty if this was becoming a more common occurrence, he acknowledged that a few more people are becoming knowledgeable about pasture raised product and this did make his job of educating the consumer a little easier.

Figure 4. Rusty's version of the henmobile, Big Coulee Farms, July 7, 2009.

However, Rusty remained adamant that education of the customer is his most pressing and challenging task in the direct marketing of his products. Rusty's position is supported by the research of Starr and associates that found direct marketing required farmers to diversify their skills and use of time (2003:315). Rusty stresses the face to face connection with his customers and the trust that that builds in the following passage.

Brent: So with your customers and the trust issue, is it the safety they feel from that; they think it is a better quality, or they think it is a safer product?

Rusty: Yes, they can talk to me and know what we do. I mean if you went to Safeway and asked the butcher anything about the cow or beef the only thing that he can tell you is that it was inspected. Well that doesn't make it safe just because it was inspected. Yes, they think the quality and safety is better with the local food.

This brings up another term relevant to this discussion and one that is part of Rusty's educational repertoire, the term local and what it means in the context of a discussion on LFS and their participants. Feenstra suggests that local is a characteristic of alternative food systems that draws attention to place by "drawing on the unique attributes of a particular bioregion and its population to define and support themselves" (2002:100). Within this context local is often viewed as the antithesis of global, yet it remains a vague concept. Hinrichs cautions that the term local often serves as a "talisman", a shape shifting magical object that "can hold multifaceted and contradictory messages" (2003:33). Local may refer to a clear delimited unit of governance, such as neighborhood, village, town, city, or county. Local may be used to describe the people of those places or

to the concrete boundaries ascribed by lawmakers. Conversely, local may be a term based more on abstract notions of shared social and cultural values (Anderson and Cook 1999:146).
What does the term local mean to Rusty and how does he employ it in the construction of his identity as a local food producer?

Rusty: To me I would define it as, and I guess we do just fit, a hundred-mile radius from where you are. So we just fit that for St. Albert and Edmonton. When they first surveyed the province, it's exactly from the Legislature in downtown Edmonton here to my front door is exactly one hundred miles, exactly.

Brent: So the physical proximity is important?

Rusty: Yes that is important.

Brent: So when people are buying, like here today you are in Edmonton, would they still consider you and your food local?

Rusty: Yes.

Brent: When you are at the St. Albert Farmers' Market do they believe they are supporting and getting local food?

Rusty: Yes, because everyone may be disconnected from the farm but they do realize that there are no farms in the city [laughs].

Brent: You think they do recognize the difference between the independent family farm and the industrialized food chain, and that is important to them?

Rusty: Yes they want us to stay in business so they don't have to go back to the store. They have the same values as we do and they appreciate that I can tell them how things are raised. They can appreciate that I'm trying to take care of the land so that it's here for more generations, and those kinds of things. Most of our customers, when they are introducing us to a friend they bring to the Farmers' Market or friends they bring out here, they introduce me as their farmer, "This is my farmer. This is where you can get good food".

Rusty began his discussion of what local means to him by clearly emphasizing the physical proximity feature suggested by Anderson and Cook (1999) as one parameter used to construct the 'local' within a LFS. Rusty invokes the use of government to the understanding of his definition by referencing the Legislature and a provincial survey to validate his location. This is interesting given Rusty's dislike for anything to do with governments and bureaucracy as discussed earlier. However, in this instance it serves his purpose to help define what local means to him. Rusty's hundred-mile reference also reflects his familiarity with the book *The Hundred Mile Diet: A Year of Local Eating* (Smith and MacKinnon 2007) and its message of purchasing and eating food grown within 100 miles of where you live.

Rusty has very few customers in Athabasca County where he lives and farms. When I asked Rusty why he thought this was he suggested that because they lived in a rural farming community everybody either had their own garden and fresh farm products or knew someone (family or friends) that did. When I pressed the point that, yes they already lived close to farms and therefore were more connected to their food (at least by proximal distance) was he not offering a different kind of product to the market: pasture raised, grass-fed livestock without the use of fertilizers and steroids? While he agreed that his product was different than what was offered by most farms in the area he reiterated that they were primarily using conventional farming practices and did not subscribe to his alternative methods. Rusty conveyed a story of how he used to go to the local town farmers' market a few years ago and was unable to sell much of his product. He attributed this largely to his outsider status as 'a crazy American' who was trying to do something different rather than follow the conventions of contemporary farming practices in the region: chemically intensive grain growing for export markets and to feed livestock.

The fact that Rusty sells most of his product at the outer limits of the 100 mile proximal distance from where it is produced (or further in the case of Fort McMurray, which is well beyond the 100 mile radius) rather than in his own immediate community of Athabasca County, strongly suggests that his 'local' relationship with his customers is based on what Allen and associates refer to as "the multiple connotations of common interest" (2003:64). As we continued our discussion on what local meant to him, Rusty shifted his emphasis on physical proximity to the people involved in the process of exchanging food. He briefly described the connection he believed existed between himself as the local food producer and his customers and suggested that the relationship is founded on shared personal, social, and cultural values. This speaks to the support for local farmers as one of the prime motivations for people to participate in LFS (Feagan et al 2004, Feenstra 2002, Hinrichs 2000).

The problem of language and understanding definitions is not unique to the realm of LFS; it is a ubiquitous social phenomenon (Geertz 1983). Organic, free range, pasture raised, grass-fed, even conventional and alternative are terms or labels frequently employed by the various participants in a LFS. The meanings of these labels are dynamic, subject to the social worlds they are used in, such as the label organic co-opted by government and industry. The important feature of

Rusty's story is his efforts to construct an identity as a food producer that is understandable to consumers within a LFS. The common interest is the food that he produces and that consumers eat. The appeal for both lies, as Kingsolver suggests, in that food and its consumption hold powerful sociocultural associations that reflect symbolic determinants of how people make meaning in their lives that shapes their identity (2003). Whether you say tōmātō or tomato, or whether you believe it is a fruit or a vegetable, it is a real object with the ability to generate a literal and metaphorical taste experience (Trubek 2008, Korsmeyer 1999). The challenge for Rusty is to create a taste experience based on shared social, cultural, and spiritual values with his customers.

Chapter 4

… but Do They Taste the Same?

> **Rusty:** Yeah, all you have to do is a taste test and then you can tell the difference. If I can get anybody to taste the chicken, take one home, and roast it, then I have a customer.

Taste

This brief passage suggests that Rusty believes his product, chicken in this specific instance, does not taste the same as conventionally produced chicken. The passage also raises the perplexing question of 'What is taste?' and addresses a relatively new dimension to the understanding of alternative foodways and its role in local food systems (LFS). Feenstra suggests, that through globalization and the overwhelming dominance of the industrial food chain, there has not only been a disconnect between people, place, and their food, but also a disconnect from the taste and quality of the food itself (2002:100). An example of this is the tomato used in the fast food industry. In pursuit of a large, sliceable, red tomato, quality and taste became much less important than how it looks, how easy it is to slice and fit on the bun. In a sense, the tomatoes became tasteless (Barndt 2008:31-32).

The neurochemistry of the sense of taste is now understood in greater detail due to recent research in physiology and psychology.[7] Taste cells lay within taste buds which are located in various tongue papillae, the hard and soft palate, and the roof of the tongue. Sensitivity to all tastes is distributed across the whole tongue and other regions of the mouth. Despite this understanding of scientific and perceived objective knowledge, the genetic variation between individuals and their respective taste buds and taste receptors lead researchers to acknowledge that "we do not all live in the same taste world" (Bartoshuk and Duffy 1988[2005]:28). The subjective nature of taste has made it difficult to examine the role it plays as a potential motivating reason for individuals to participate in a local food system.

7 For a general review of current literature on the biological and chemical analysis of the sense of taste see the Oxford Journal's Chemical Senses. www.oxfordjournal.org/chemse/about. Consulted December 14, 2009.

This view has directed attention on taste in the research and literature on LFS to focus on Bourdieu's perspective of an aesthetic taste, as in the appreciation of fine food. He argued that taste is part of wider social structures that help create and maintain power relations as one social group tries to distinguish itself from another. Bourdieu suggested that taste was socially embedded and highly regulated by society to the point that individuals were unaware of it. Taste could subconsciously shape categories learned through a natural socialization process involving income, education, and other social determinants that influence the way we understand and experience the world (Korsmeyer 1999:64). Bourdieu developed the concept of *habitus* to represent a learned set of practices and ideas ingrained in human behavior that shapes their sociocultural judgements. These judgements were expressed as marking either the taste of luxury or the taste of necessity depending on one's *habitus* (Bourdieu 1984:176-199).

Although class based accounts of the concept of taste have been increasingly criticized in the past twenty years (Trubek 2008:8, Korsmeyer 1999:67, Warde 1997:8), the growth and popularity in LFS has seen the 'aesthetic taste' theory reconstituted to explain this phenomena. Feagan and associates (2004) addressed this perspective in their study of local food systems in three Niagara Region farmers' markets. They found that food obtained from farmers' markets may be seen as an "important symbolic purchase in terms of its positionality in a status-seeking class based system" (2004:250). In this view, food purchased at farmers' markets was no longer considered as a populist reaction against mainstream culture, as portrayed by the organic and counter culture movements, it was seen as the purview of the 'food elite' acquiring a high-end commodity. Feagan and associates sardonically referred to food purchased at farmers' markets as "yuppie chow" (2004:250). They caution future researchers to be wary of simply commodifying the farmers' market experience for patrons by suggesting that there is a lot more going on than the exchange of consumer goods. The concept of taste, literal and aesthetic, may also play a role in the experience.

The Taste Experience

Korsmeyer (1999) has argued that the contemporary North American understanding of taste is shaped by the Western philosophical perspective theorized by Plato and Aristotle, and framed by the 18th century period, as science and empiricism were increasingly valued by thinkers of the Enlightenment. This predilection to quantify and explain all phenomena has relegated the sense of taste, notoriously subjective and difficult to systematically measure, to a neglected, misunderstood position at the bottom of the sense hierarchy (1999:11). Taste, because it was associated with the bodily function of eating, was considered very subjective and relative only to the individual experiencing the taste, and therefore unworthy of objective scientific and philosophical discussion.

It is important to note, that since Korsmeyer's book *Making Sense of Taste* (1999) was published, academic interest and research into food and taste has grown tremendously (see for example, Trubek 2008, Counihan and Van Esterik 2008, Anderson 2005, Wright et al. 2001). Korsmeyer, a philosopher, presents this interdisciplinary growth of the topic in *The Taste Culture Reader* (2005). This edited volume, concerning experiencing food and drink, presents a broad range of articles from many different viewpoints, including social and cultural, as well as philosophical. Korsmeyer, in this publication, continues to challenge the belief that taste was thought to be inarticulate, and that food and flavor could not convey meaning (2005:5).

How might these views on taste affect Rusty as a producer of food for farmers' markets? Does a Bourdieuian perspective on taste provide any insight into how he views his role as a participant in a local food system? To address these questions I shall return to Korsmeyer who suggests the need to look "beyond Bourdieu" by challenging his "wholesale flattening of the territories of taste into the sociology of eating" (1999:67). If you focus on social class you may miss out on the other things that are happening around taste. Where Bourdieu emphasized the implicit and reproductive forces of social learning, Korsmeyer argues that there is a role for explicit social and cultural learning about taste. She emphasizes the importance of acknowledging that traditions and cultures are dynamic and fluid concepts with agentive properties.

Korsmeyer makes the distinction between taste in the literal or gustatory sense and its use in a symbolic or metaphoric way to describe an aesthetic sense (1999:38). She argues that this represents a difference between taste sensation and taste experience. Taste sensation refers to the chemical analysis of the accepted four basic tastes of sweet, sour, salt, and bitter as taste categories[8] and not as actual describers of flavors. Taste sensation encompasses the physiological properties of taste buds and taste receptors on the tongue and in the mouth. Taste experience, conversely, encompasses all the senses, sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste, and would include the realm of learned knowledge, symbolic and otherwise (1999:77). Korsmeyer's point is that although taste may be subjective it is still capable of telling us something about the world outside of the individual experiencing the taste.

[8] Umami is often cited as a scientifically accepted addition to the basic taste sense categories. Korsmeyer points out that taste cateogies have changed historically and cross culturally.

What does Rusty's use of the word 'taste' in the opening passage tell us about his world, the world of a local food producer participating in a local food system? The first sentence is a clear literal or gustatory reference. Rusty is suggesting that if you compare the taste of his chicken to that of a conventionally raised chicken from the store, you can tell the difference between them. They do not taste the same; they each provide a different taste sensation. Here, he is not implying a value judgement that his chicken tastes better, just that you can tell the difference between the two chickens.

The second sentence however, encompasses a broader taste experience. It begins with a gustatory act of consumption: "If I can get anyone to taste the chicken". However, the use of the word 'taste' as opposed to the simple verb 'eat' could be interpreted as suggesting that Rusty wants consumers to 'experience' the chicken. The sentence continues to imply that more senses are involved. "Take one home" suggests the use of the senses sight and touch through physical contact and that the chicken will be transported to another place. The phrase "and roast it" refers to food preparation or cooking the chicken, a process that involves sight and touch but is also capable of invoking the senses smell and hearing. You may smell the odors released through the roasting process and you may hear the sounds of the chicken being roasted by the heat. Food preparation and cooking also includes learned cultural knowledge. You need to know how to cook the chicken, at what temperature, for how long, and what spices, if any will be used. You need to understand the process. This illustrates the importance of viewing food preparation as part of a process to create a taste experience.

Lévi-Strauss examined the process of cooking meat in his study of South American myths and devised the ‘culinary triangle’ (1966:937-940). He was interested in how the cooking process served as a symbolic way to transform nature into culture. With fire and heat, the raw meat was changed into a more flavorful and digestible food that now produced a broader taste experience that could then be shared by others. This taste experience was a way to give meaning to one’s life and to mark identity. Although Lévi-Strauss’s idea was critiqued as an abstract and universalistic argument that could not be validated (Douglas 1969), it was significant for articulating a structural nature/culture relationship for understanding food and foodways.

Mäkelä and Arppe (2005) picked up on this binary food paradox by building on the theoretical model of Lévi-Strauus in their examination of the culinary triangle with regard to the contemporary 'living foods diet' developed by Ann Wigmore. The living foods diet revolved around eating uncooked foods from the plant world. Cooked and processed food was considered bad for digestion (2005:3). Mäkelä and Arppe suggest the culinary triangle reflects a moral stance which is still apparent in modern discourses of eating. It does so with the postmodern perspective that both nature and culture are not static or frozen in time; they are fluid and dynamic. The important distinction that Mäkelä and Arppe make against Lévi- Strauss's culinary triangle and the nature/culture binary is that today's foodways do not represent a regression. The desire to produce, distribute or consume raw or uncooked food, foods that are believed to eliminate toxic and harmful substances, does not represent a return to a primitive period. Whereas Lévi-Strauss saw cooking food as a sign of progress, culture usurping nature, a modern discourse on eating's emphasis on taste and pleasure does not represent a return to a simpler or more pure form of nature; they represent the understanding that one's perception of nature is mediated by their culture. The two are deeply interconnected.

Rusty acknowledges this understanding of nature and culture in a reference describing the back to earth movement while he was growing up.

> **Rusty:** In the beginning it was more "We got to get back to our roots, learn how to make bread, cook on the wood stove". Later on, in the late 90's and early 2000's, we called it 'back to the future'[9]
>
> 9 Reference to the 1985 movie called Back to the Future, directed by Robert Zemeckis. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Back_to_the_Future, consulted December 1, 2009. in our family [laughs]. Yeah, so that's kind of the way it is. You definitely can't do it conventionally because we are still stuck in 1942 price wise, what we are getting paid. But everything's gone triple since then for your input costs. So if you are going to keep doing this you need to find a - you either need to sell out to the megacorps [laughs] or find a better way; so back to the future. And learning some of the things they did here in Alberta before they had electricity and that kind of thing at the turn of the century. And we adopted some of those things, you know. Now we have some technology that they didn't have back then, solar power, electric fencing, and modern conveniences like that.

In this passage, Rusty demonstrates an understanding of incorporating information from the past with new forms of technology to promote the values and practices that he feels are beneficial to his role as a contemporary food producer in a local food system. It is not a question of going back to nature; it is a question of understanding nature in a new way.

The concluding phrase in the opening passage “then I have a customer” suggests Rusty understands the relationship between tasting a product and the person doing the tasting. The passage encompasses the learned knowledge necessary to perform the relevant tasks. You need to have a home, a place to take the chicken. You need to have the means and knowledge to prepare the chicken, a cooking facility, oven, fire, barbecue, pot, recipe, and such. The engagement of the senses along with learned knowledge represents a taste experience.

Rusty provides another example of a taste experience by including a moral or value judgement that his products taste better and articulates some reasons why he believes so.

> **Rusty:** This food does taste better than conventional food. The reason it tastes better is it has in it what you need. It has the omega threes and beta-carotene’s, all those things that come from the grass. The beef industry as a whole has to work on taste, a lot, both sides, grass fed and commercial. Cause I’m sure if someone did a study we’d find out there is more Heinz 57 sold [laughs] steak sauce, you know, to put on steak than there is steak or beef. It’s not just beef, people put it on pork, they put it on beef, they put it on chicken, they put it on everything because it needs to have some taste. But if it’s raised properly it doesn’t have that problem. There was a guy here in the Athabasca area, this goes to the taste thing, who would bring in New Zealand beef, grass fed. And we would do blind taste tests and everybody, all the farmers’ would pick the New Zealand piece of beef over everything we raised in Alberta because they had figured it out. Well they have the warmer season, they have better grass, so you can fatten and marble beef on grass. I am getting pretty good at it, like lots of our beef customers, they always buy more beef because of the taste.

The last sentence in this passage begins with a short but very important word that reflects the importance of the role of the individual in the taste experience. The “I” in this case is Rusty as a producer of the taste experience and illustrates the importance of getting people to taste his products? Going back to the opening passage of this chapter we find Rusty stating “all you have to do is a taste test”. So I asked him if this is what he does at the Farmers' Market, have samples of his product and another suppliers for potential customers to compare tastes. He responded:

> **Rusty:** We used to carry a chicken from another place, I won’t say what store it
> was from, a nice lovely pasty white chicken. We had it in the display freezer next
> to our chickens so that you could see the difference between having beta-carotene in the chicken and a white pasty chicken. That did a lot and we used to give out
> samples, but it got so costly because we were cooking four to five chickens for a Saturday market. That’s giving away a lot of product. It’s difficult to recoup that

in your sales, especially when costs start escalating. You know you have to cut
corners somewhere. If you can see the difference in the chicken and you get
courage and buy one and you taste the difference – so.

This passage suggests that Rusty can no longer afford to provide samples of his products for people to taste due to his rising input costs. Rusty's sales volume does not allow him to 'build in' the cost of free samples as his products are already more expensive than similar conventionally produced ones available at grocery stores. Without the ability to present a literal or gustatory taste for potential customers to sample Rusty must again rely on his mantra of "95% of our marketing is spent on educating the customer" to create a taste experience. This becomes even more challenging when faced with the problem of standardized tastes. The globalized industrial food system, through mass distribution networks, big box grocery stores, and fast food chains, has been accused of training consumers to expect an unvarying product in appearance and taste (Starr et al. 2003:315). Rusty highlighted the challenges of educating a customer raised on standardized tastes in the following passage discussing his early years growing up in Virginia.

Brent: Was the idea of 'taste of food' part of growing up for you?

Rusty: Yeah, you keep talking about taste. That is one thing that McDonalds has sort of done right. If you go to McDonalds anywhere in the world it still tastes the same. So their marketing strategy was very good. You could go to McDonalds in Newport News or a McDonalds in Maryland or Richmond or any city you wanted to and you know what it was going to taste like when you got there.

Although not aware of it, Rusty is also describing a standardized taste experience. McDonald's strategy is to standardize the appearance of the food, the appearance of the person presenting it (staff all wear the same uniforms) and the appearance of the restaurant as well (they follow the same design and color scheme). The challenge for Rusty is to create a taste experience that he can employ in his marketing strategy of educating customers. He needs to celebrate the uniqueness of what he does rather than the sameness of what others do. Without the use of product samples for customers to literally taste, Rusty must rely on information to create a taste experience. Korsmeyer suggests that depriving the taste experience of information only serves to distort that experience (1999:91). What we know about what we are buying and eating legitimately affects how it tastes. Knowledge can make a difference.

The Taste of Place

Trubek builds on this notion of the taste experience by focusing on what she refers to as 'the taste of place' (2008). Trubek, like Korsmeyer, acknowledges that 'taste' encompasses all the human senses as well as the full cognitive and cultural realm elicited by the product to the extent that one is capable of experiencing it. Trubek then goes further to emphasize that 'place' refers not only to the physical environmental characteristics of a location, but more importantly, it also includes the people, their customs and traditions (past and present) and their ancestral heritage within a physical and spiritual space. These cultural tastes may then frame our physiological taste experiences (2008:7). It becomes a process of shared experiential knowledge between Rusty, as the producer of the food product and the taste experience, and the customer, whom literally and metaphorically consumes the product and the taste experience.

This process, for Rusty, began in Washington Hospital, on Washington Street, in Washington, D.C. where he was born. He described his ancestral history on his father's side as fourth generation American.

> **Rusty:** And my dad's side of the family is from West Virginia and South Carolina, and as far as I know they were on the Mayflower. Evidently, we come from a long line of truck farmers. That is what they used to call them back in the 30's where they would – the [uses his last name] side of the family started out in South Carolina actually with truck farming which is mostly vegetables. They grow them on the farm then they put them on the truck and drive to the nearest city and sell them.

It is interesting to note that neither Rusty nor his father grew up on a farm and that the family's move to Canada in the 1970's was a deliberate effort to take up farming. As a direct marketer of his products today, Rusty loads up his truck and drives to the surrounding cites to sell them. The parallels to his ancestral roots are both obvious and striking, although Rusty produces meat protein products and does not sell any vegetables. He was raised during the back to earth and organic movements of the 1960's and 70's that were prominent on the East Coast during that period. It was also a time of political unrest in the States due to the Vietnam War. These events were to shape Rusty's identity, as an individual and a local food producer, and lead to his family relocating to Alberta in 1975 to take up farming.

Another major event of his upbringing was a reading disability that saw Rusty spend much of his formative years away from his home and family at a special school located 100 miles away (a foreshadowing of the 100 mile diet barometer for local food promoters?). He describes the school as both a summer camp and year round facility for some students. The private school was also a working farm with horses, cows, and a garden. When I commented that even though his family was not farming he still received some farm experience Rusty replied "Yes and it stuck with me." This is where Rusty learned a lot about gardening as all the students had to help in the garden. Rusty, being a long term resident at the school, got to help out with the livestock, milking the cows, separating the cream, "I learned those kinds of things at camp." It was at this private school that Rusty developed his fondness for working with cattle, "My wife says I would go crazy if I didn't have cattle on the farm."

Rusty described his reasons for moving to Alberta as hating the humidity of the Atlantic coast, preferring the cool weather here and "the other reason is when you look at a road map of Alberta, there is a whole lot of land in between all those red lines compared to the States." This last statement speaks to Rusty's dislike for urban sprawl, the physical and social constraints imposed by that, and for his preference for wide open spaces and a more intimate relationship with nature. In discussing the local community when he first moved to Athabasca, Rusty expressed the notion of being an outsider that appears to reinforce his identify as a rebel farmer practicing alternative methods.

> **Rusty:** I hate to say this about Athabasca but they are still the same way. When you are from away in Athabasca, you are always away. It doesn't matter how long you live there you are still from away. It is a strange community. Yep, it doesn't matter how long we have lived there, people that we market with in Fort McMurray they have moved there about the same time Mom and Dad did; they are from away and we are from away so we are friends with them. And we know other people, and we know our neighbors but it is not the same as having grown up in the same high school, and having gone to school with everybody. In those days everybody that grew up in Athabasca stayed in Athabasca and worked. You either worked for the county, you were farming, or agriculture was probably the biggest employer in the County of Athabasca for quite some time. I am on the outside. I am an outsider and I will always be an outsider. I have been there 30 years and I still am trying to figure out who is related to who, and they are all related [laughs].

This passage reinforces Trubek's message that you do not need a centuries old ancestral heritage rooted in a specific place to promote a sense of place linked with food and foodways. Trubek (2008), through her examples of dairy farmers in Wisconsin, local food activists in the Oakland area, maple syrup producers in Vermont, and wine grape growers in the Napa Valley, demonstrates that by combining sociological and ecological factors, people can create a 'taste of place' or a new taste experience.

One of the main tools Rusty employs to educate the customers and create this taste experience is his brochure (Appendix A). The first image that Rusty reinforces, or 'brands' is the name of his farm and operating business: Big Coulee Farms. The BCF logo is prominently displayed at the top of the brochure. The logo is also featured on the tent Rusty uses at the St. Albert Farmers' Market (Figure 5) and on the ball cap that he always wears when he is selling his products.

Big Coulee Farms is part of the 'place' Trubek describes that gives Rusty and his customers a fixed physical location to identify his image and his products by. The brochure provides directions to the farm and encourages people to visit, "We would be proud to show you our farm." Rusty believes it is important to show and to let people see for themselves that he does what he says he does.

Figure 5. Big Coulee Farms tent at the Farmers' Market, June 20, 2009.

The front of the brochure lists the products that Rusty produces: chicken, turkey, beef, pork, and eggs. The words ‘pasture’ and ‘grass-fed’ are prominently featured, as are the highlighted phrases: “Naturally Raised & Fed; No Medications; Grown Nature’s Way”. The inside of the brochure features a brief description about pasture poultry. Rusty emphasizes that this is “the foundation of Big Coulee Farms”, as they are raised outdoors, free to roam in their movable pens, fed no hormones or antibiotics, and that his pastures are free of herbicides and pesticides. Rusty also stresses the seasonality of his chicken and turkeys as the chicks are started in mid-April when the weather is conducive to them living outside feeding on the grass, and then they are processed in September and October.

A brief history of the farm and family from his brochure (Appendix A) provides insight into Rusty's practices and his values. In 2001, Rusty's dissatisfaction with current farming practices led to the realization that something had to change. As a result, Rusty's father and the family started looking at new ways of farming. Pasturing livestock in a natural, healthy environment led them to pursue the raising of chickens.

The change involved the transition away from conventional grain and cattle farming to focus on grass-fed, pasture raised livestock, "Cows are created to be herbivores (grass eaters) and not grain". Rusty's dad's illness and death from cancer had caused the family to reconsider their use of chemical fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides in regards to their health, the health of the livestock, and the health of the customers who purchased their products. Issues of environmental sustainability became linked to Rusty's understanding of economic sustainability, "It's all about healthy soil".

The brochure also includes a price list and order form with instructions for customers to mail in their deposits with their order. This method of advertising and ordering has a pre-technological quaintness about it that suggests the trust and neighborliness of knowing your farmer. It also reflects that Rusty, as a middle-aged man, who had a childhood reading disability, and has no children, is by his own admission computer illiterate. Although Rusty is satisfied now with the effectiveness of this method of communication he understands the use of the computer would be a valuable tool to assist him with marketing and educating his customers. It is his hope that his youngest nephew, who now lives on the farm with his mother, Rusty's sister, will have the computer skills and the interest in farming to help them out and improve their productive and economic viability. This shows that Rusty is not averse to using technology to improve the 'taste experience'.

Another major component of Rusty's strategy to create a 'taste experience' for his customers is at his booth at the Farmers' Market. Rusty sets up their 10' by 10' tent (with the BCF logo on top) every Saturday morning from mid-June to the Thanksgiving weekend. The signage in the booth emphasizes the same points as the brochure along with photographs from the farm. "Salad Bar Beef' and 'Eggceptional Eggs' are also phrases prominently displayed. There is a poster set up near the cash box that is reminiscent of the images and message that may be found in documentary films such as Food, INC. (Kenner 2009) (Figure 6).

The intent of the poster, whether it shocks or scares the consumer, is to inform them that there is a difference between how Rusty raises his chickens and how large scale producers "grow" theirs. Half of the poster is devoted to the health benefits of the products that Rusty produces **Figure 6. Farmers' Market display, June 20, 2009.** under the heading of "What

The other half of the poster contains two photographs. The top one shows a large scale commercial facility with hundreds of chickens confined; their appearance is a blanket of white, one chicken undistinguishable from the next. There are no people in the photograph. The label right above says ‘Man’s Way’. The other photograph features about a dozen chickens, of various sizes and colors, outside, in a portable pen that is moved around the pasture as the chickens eat the grass in that area. The chickens are free to roam and eat as much or little as they want. There is also a person standing beside the pen, giving the impression that they are carefully watching over the chickens. The label above this photograph reads ‘Nature’s Way. The caption above both photographs asks “Which we would you prefer to eat”. Rusty acknowledges that this is one of the most effective marketing tools that he uses to educate consumers and turn them into a customer.

The most important marketing tool is Rusty himself. I witnessed this first hand when I went to the Farmers’ Market to visit rusty at his Big Coulee Farm’s booth. This presented the opportunity to engage in participant observation while Rusty interacted with shoppers and served customers. It was obvious to me that Rusty thoroughly enjoyed talking with people. He always greeted passersby with “good morning” and “how are you”. He was quite willing to chat with people about most anything, including a farmer’s favorite, the weather. He was not pushy or forceful about steering the topic to his product or the virtues of his farming practices but he welcomed the opportunity to engage with people about what he did for a living. He was polite and patient with people as he attempted to explain terminology and different methods, and he never came across as preachy. It was clear that he believed in what he was doing and was passionate about communicating it to others. When I asked Rusty if he ever got tired of trying to explain the difference between terms like organic, free range, grass-fed, and pasture raised, he immediately responded with a “Nope”. He reiterated that 95% of what he does is education and that you should not get into this type of business if you are not prepared to do the education part. Rusty understands that this is a big part of his livelihood, how he can educate a consumer, make a sale, and build a regular, repeat customer. The main reason Rusty began making free biweekly deliveries into St. Albert and Edmonton when the Farmers’ Market was over was to maintain the connections he has developed with his customers. He saw the building and maintaining of this connection as crucial to his business.

I again raised the issue of taste with Rusty and asked if it was something that either he or his customers talked about.

> **Rusty:** Now it's up to the customer to buy a piece of the product, take it home and taste it. Usually they'll come back. And we don't push the taste in the booth anymore. We let them come back and tell us "That was the tastiest chicken I've ever had." Lots of people talk about our beef taste as well, and the tenderness. All of our beef customers just go nuts with the taste and tenderness of our beef. That's why it was so hard to cull those cows because I thought I've got these cows so they don't require grain. I don't have to feed them grain to keep them; they are easy keepers and they can keep on grass. I must've done something right breeding this bunch of cows that I have.

Then I addressed the issue of taste from the Bourdiouian perspective of class. I asked Rusty if he was aware of the criticisms of farmers' markets being a place for the wealthy who can afford fresh, organic foods, or if he got the sense that some of his customers bought his grass-fed chicken because it was the trendy thing to do.

> **Rusty:** No, no. Every once in awhile you run into somebody who's using you as a status symbol. Yeah, but most of our customers, when they are introducing us to a friend they bring to the Farmers' Market or they bring out here, they introduce me as their farmer. "This is my farmer, and this is where you can get good food".
>
> **Brent:** And you are happy with that?
>
> **Rusty:** Oh Yeah!

It might be suggested that Rusty's use of the phrase "This is my farmer" implies the ultimate status, or power symbol of the wealthy, being in a position to own or control another person, as if you were boasting this is my serf or slave. This elitist position illustrates how localism in food systems may be a way to distinguish 'otherness' (Hinrichs 2003:37). The consumer marking his status from other consumers by saying I have the means to pay someone to grow or produce food for me. Is that not what we all do in a contemporary North American society where very few of us grow our own food, pay someone to grow it for us? The difference is in the physical and social distance between the transactions and the fact that those purchasing food in the IFS are consuming "cheap food" that is heavily subsidized by an integrated corporate food industry that does not provide a livable wage to farmers or food producers that are supplying the food (Rodriguez et al. 2009, Salatin 2009, Pollan 2008, 2006, McMichael 2000, Lappé 1991).

Rusty does not believe his customers seek him out and buy his products because they want to display their wealth and social status. I have yet to see one of his customers drive up to pick up their order of chickens and eggs in their BMW or Hummer, wearing their Prada shoes or Brooks Brothers suits (presuming of course these are recognized as wealth and social status symbols). You are more likely to see a young woman walking up pushing a stroller with two young children, or a retired gentleman walk over from the mall where he has just had his bimonthly lunch out with his wife at Smitty's, or a middle age mom pull up in the family minivan, kids' toys and clothes falling out as she opens the side door to load her order.

Rusty does not see himself or what he does as a social marker of wealth, privilege or higher status, as in Bourdieu's 'taste of luxury'. The appearance of his farm (older buildings, older machinery) his booth at the farmers' market (homemade brochures, signage, product displays and packaging) to his personal appearance (he wants to look like a farmer, and he knows his bright yellow hat is ugly, he wears it because of its visibility), would all support this. Rusty believes people support him, buy his product, and want him to stay in business so they do not have to go back to the grocery store looking for healthy, safe, and tasty chickens, beef, pork, turkeys, and eggs. He sums up this belief by asking me:

> **Rusty:** How many customers go into Safeway and hug the egg guy, or the produce guy? [Laughter] You can ask me any question you want and I can tell you how each animal or whatever I am selling was raised. The produce guy only knows that it needs to be misted. So I think it is the only way that anybody should buy food. Yes, they [my customers] have the same values that we do, and they appreciate that I can tell them how things are raised. They can appreciate that I'm trying to take care of the land so that it's here for more generations, and those kinds of things.

I agree with Korsmeyer (1999) and Trubek (2008) who caution against the simplification of class from a strict Bourdieuian perspective when examining food and foodways. Trubek's flip of the metaphoric "good taste" to "taste good" (2008:8) refers more to the shared and conscious experiential knowledge that arises from the process of creating a 'taste experience'. Rusty does not promote literal taste while direct marketing his products, preferring to let his customers discover that on their own, almost as an extra benefit to why they purchased the product in the first place. He believes most of his customers purchase his products for the health benefits to themselves and the environment, and that the quality and the taste is an added bonus to keep them coming back.

However, Rusty does promote a 'taste experience' by addressing consumers' concerns for safe and healthy food products, and by building relationships that support the beliefs and values for both parties. The face to face interactions that come from a direct marketing approach allows for the sharing of learned knowledge that reflects these values. Big Coulee Farms, as a physical and social place with people, ancestral history, practices and traditions, is a symbol of those values. One is not very likely to hug their 'owned farmer' unless they share their values and support each other, forming a bond that transcends an economic or power relationship. While this type of relationship is not new to the human story it provides a fresh perspective to the role of a food producer within a contemporary local food system.

Chapter 5

The Chicken and Egg Dilemma: A Fresh Perspective

> **Rusty:** Yes, the first thing we did was chickens. They are an eight week project, right. It takes eight weeks to grow a chicken. So that's – you can make a whole bunch of mistakes in eight weeks and still have eight more weeks to fix it with the next batch or whatever. So we started off kind of small with the chickens, as far as I'm concerned. The rest of the family well – and it is a good thing because when you get out and you are marketing, it is not as easy as you might think it is.

This passage clearly illustrates that for Rusty as a food producer within a local food system (LFS), the chicken definitely came before the egg. However, the chicken as a staple meat product of the North American consumer is a rather recent occurrence. Stull and Broadway provide a synopsis of the rise of the poultry farm industry in their book *Slaughterhouse Blues: The Meat and Poultry Industry in North America* (2004). They state that before the 1920's chicken was a relatively rare food, often considered an expensive delicacy. It was during the 1920's that the broiler chicken industry began using a factory-farming model. This model, the corner stone of the industrial food system (IFS), is based on the simple premise that the more you produce the lower the price per unit will be. From the 1930's to 1950's the poultry industry focused on ways to cut costs, reduce the time required to grow a chicken, while increasing the size of the chicken.

Success came quickly, as factory farms were soon able to grow chickens faster and improve feed efficiency. Stull and Broadway (2004) reported that in 1927, the average broiler went to market after 16 weeks weighing 2.5 pounds, but in 1941 the numbers had changed to 2.9 pounds after only 12 weeks. Another advance was the discovery that by adding cod liver oil to the main feed ingredient of corn, the chickens could be grown completely indoors. The chickens no longer required sunlight to synthesize Vitamin D. It was also during this time period that the poultry industry achieved vertical integration by combining production, processing and distribution within the same companies. Vertical integration is a hallmark feature of the modern industrial food system (Belasco 1999:284).

Contract farming became the model of the 1960's. The chicken farmer who raised his own birds as he chose was converted into the chicken grower, contractually bound to raise a poultry company's birds according to certain specifications. While these contracts offered a guaranteed income[10], the grower could no longer market his own chickens or eggs because these integrated companies now owned the eggs, the chickens, the feed, the processing plants, and they marketed the product directly to the grocery stores themselves (Stull and Broadway 2004). The 1990's saw the rise of environmental concerns along with the demise of the small farmer. Many farmers were forced out of business if they challenged the company or could not afford the required improvements to their farming operations. Other chicken growers tired of the powerlessness that they felt under this contract system and quit the poultry business altogether.

[10] The documentary film *Food INC*. reported that a $500,000 investment to set up two hen houses was required to generate $18,000 of income per year for the chicken grower.

Fresh-Frozen

This contract farming model was not attractive to Rusty. The quick turnaround from the start to a final product was one of the things that did interest Rusty at first, as he suggested in the opening passage, but he wanted to control the feed and the marketing of the product. Despite his disdain for government regulation, Rusty does use a government approved facility where the chickens (as well as the beef and pork) are processed, packaged, frozen, and then shipped back to his farm, where he chooses to store them until they are taken to the farmers' market or delivered directly to his customers. All of the products that Rusty sells are frozen except for the eggs. This brought up an interesting point, as one of the main reasons given by shoppers for purchasing food at farmers' markets was the notion they were buying freshness (Feagan et al. 2004:239). Freshness was even considered more important than 'local', or where the product was from (Hinrichs 2000:299).

Feagan and associates used a seven point Likert scale to rate customers' motivation for shopping at farmers' markets. They found that freshness was rated the number one reason for going to the market with a score of 55%. The next closest reason, to support local farmers, had a rating of 21% (2004:240-245). Hinrichs also reported that a study of farmers' markets in Massachusetts found that the overwhelming majority of consumers rated freshness of products ahead of social interactions, price, and local provenance, as their main reason for shopping at farmers' markets (2000:299).

Therefore, I asked Rusty if selling frozen meat caused any problems or concerns for him or his customers that were seeking fresh products or were accustomed to purchasing fresh chicken in the grocery stores.

Rusty: No, not for most of my customers. We use Cryovac bags for that reason. There's no air in that bag and there is never any freezer burn. We've never sold any this old but we've eaten them ourselves, that are four or five years old, right out of those bags, and there is no taste difference what so ever.

Brent: So the emphasis on fresh when it comes to certain products is greatly overemphasized?

Rusty: Well it is. If you were to sit down with someone from the city health department and asked what fresh chicken is, you would be horrified. I'm not going to quote anything but yeah, you would be horrified. All your meat products, there is a different time span for poultry and beef, but when it is fresh, is it fresh? I was horrified when I found out. When a product hits the store and it's fresh, there is nothing to stop them from cutting it up or doing whatever when it goes past that fresh time, and freezing it and putting it back out and selling it. Now when my chicken goes in that bag it goes in there fresh and there is no air in there.

Brent: So, is it the problem, as consumers of food, that we don't really know what fresh means?

Rusty: No. Consumers don't know anything because they are going under the assumption that government is looking out for them, the province is just crawling with inspectors and everything is fine. Well government cutbacks and city cutbacks and all the rest of it – I probably shouldn't say this on tape but I'm going to. We went through the entire summer and fall at the farmers' market and we haven't seen a food inspector yet. The other thing is, when we started out we decided that we were always going to sell frozen product because it's just safer. I don't want to live with – on those hot summer days when its 98' Fahrenheit outside and you sell them a fresh chicken and they plop it in their bag and they spend the next hour and half walking around the Farmers' Market carrying this fresh chicken, and they go home and get sick and it's my fault? No. So we decided right from the get go that we were always going to sell a frozen product. It's safer, it's a safeguard; you get it home, you spend the two hours and it's starting to thaw and cook it, and then we can either refreeze it or eat it. I feel better selling a frozen product than I would a fresh product.

Brent: I think you already mentioned that a frozen product, even if it is frozen a long time, can still taste really good if it's a quality product.

> **Rusty:** Right, it's a good product and its frozen properly there's not – I haven't found one that tastes different yet. Freezing doesn't allow time for the crystallization and stuff to happen and the breaking down of the cells. As opposed to it sat on the shelf for however long fresh in the store and the store took it and put it in some kind of package and froze it, and they have no commercial freezer at the store, so however long it takes it to freeze. At least at the processing plant the freezer doesn't take a couple of days to freeze something, it takes a couple of hours to freeze something 'cause it's a commercial freezer. Our product now is better than when we used to do our own chicken. There is no freshness issue in my mind. But if a customer brings up "Well you guys froze it in October and it's January now". Well yeah, so what's your point? It's rock hard just like the day it was frozen. Nothing's going to change till you take it out of that frozen state. It's just as fresh as when it went into that bag in my mind.

Rusty makes it clear in this passage that he does not see a problem in selling a frozen product in a market that the research suggests values freshness (Feagan et al. 2004, Hinrichs 2000). Nor does he feel it is an issue with his customers. In fact, Rusty believes that he is selling a superior product and that his customers understand that quality, taste and healthfulness of the product are not only not compromised but preserved via the freezing process.

This understanding would appear to be supported by a customer I observed picking up her order from Rusty one day. I had gone to meet Rusty at his biweekly Edmonton drop-off location to pick up four turkeys I had ordered. It was early October 2009 and I (along with three other friends and family members) had decided to give one of Rusty's pasture raised, grass-fed turkeys a try for Thanksgiving. When I arrived Rusty was in the process of collecting payment from a customer for her order and asked if I would give him a hand in loading it into the trunk for her. I agreed as Rusty climbed up into the back of his pickup truck and began to pass me a large cardboard box filled with five frozen chickens. The heft of the box caught me off guard as I carefully negotiated my way over to the customer's vehicle and placed the box into the trunk. I did this four more times for a total of 25 chickens!

When the customer had thanked Rusty, and me for helping load her order, I asked Rusty if she was in some kind of food business or if all those chickens where for her personal use. He informed me, while suppressing a chuckle, that they were for her personal use, and that she has two freezers she stocks up every fall to get her through the year. Rusty continued to explain that he has lots of customers that purchase their meat products in the fall, when the livestock first gets processed, and live off them until the next season. They believe, Rusty suggests, that they are getting quality, healthy products because they know how he raises and processes them. This emphasizes the element of trust that Feenstra identified as an important feature of participation in LFS, such as farmers' markets and direct marketing, for both consumers and the producers (2002:102). I agree with Feenstra that in Rusty's situation, trust is a critical element contributing to a successful relationship. Rusty's customers want him to succeed because they trust that he is doing what he says he is doing, and for Rusty and his customers the proof is in the quality, healthfulness, and taste of the product.

I asked Rusty if this scenario of a customer making one large purchase a year posed a concern, because it would reduce the opportunity for regular contact throughout the year with a large portion of his customer base. This seems to contradict the research that suggests that it is the regular face to face contact between the farmer and customer that is an important part of constructing value and meaning for the food and the people involved in the relationship (Feagan et al. 2004, Allen et al. 2003). Rusty just laughed and said "It's a little hard to freeze eggs."

Rusty explained that most of his meat customers are also egg customers and that they still come to pick up their egg orders every week at the St. Albert Farmers' Market, or every two weeks when he makes his regular deliveries to Edmonton, or once a month when he drives up to Fort McMurray. I asked Rusty when and why he began producing and selling eggs.

> **Rusty:** Right, everything kind of came as the customers – you know, customer demand drives the direct market. If enough people say "Don't you do eggs?" [Laughs] then you think, okay we better start doing eggs. So on and so forth, that's how we've kind of evolved. There were no eggs until well after 2001. People would come up to the booth [at the St. Albert Farmers' Market] and see the chickens and say "Do you do eggs?" You think well, we can probably make money on eggs [laughs]. So you get into laying hens. It is all customer driven; if 60 or 70 people say to you "Do you have pork or do you have lamb?" you know, you think this must be something that people are looking for and you do a little research and figure out if you can do it or not.

This passage demonstrates that Rusty has a good understanding about one of the most important aspects in the direct marketing of specialty products to a niche demographic: listen to your customers. This is supported by Feagan and associates research on Southern Ontario farmers' markets where they reported that in face to face relationships with producers, consumers have the potential to influence farming practices (2004:246). While their research focused on consumer motivation for purchasing directly from farmers, Rusty, as a producer, clearly understands the importance of nurturing these face to face relationships. Providing fresh eggs enables him to maintain regular contact with many of his customers that choose to purchase a variety of products. He may not have become an egg producer if he had not listened to the consumer.

Customers order, Rusty explained, however many dozen eggs they need until the next delivery because they do like to purchase fresh eggs and they know that he has a continuous supply of fresh eggs year round. Despite the year round production of eggs Rusty did emphasize that his customers were aware of the seasonal variation of supply in quantity of eggs available and the color of the yolks. The laying hens slow down in egg production because of the colder temperatures (they spend the winter in a heated barn, but are still free to roam about) and the egg yolks are not quite the same color because the laying hens are not eating the fresh grass filled with all the beta carotenes that give them the deep orange color (they are fed a special vegetable based feed that still does not contain grain, and like a lot of farmers Rusty is unwilling to divulge his secret feed blend used in the winter). He is adamant however, that there is very little change in the quality of the eggs in the winter. While agreeing that the eggs taste better in the summer because of the pasturing, fresh grass and sunshine, Rusty maintains that his laying hens are still happy in the winter and that is what is most important in producing a quality and healthful egg. Rusty adds that his customers also know that the hens are happy.

I was intrigued by this apparent contrast between selling frozen meat (chicken, turkey, beef, and pork) and fresh eggs, and asked Rusty if this meant that he had to employ a dual marketing strategy for his customers: the first one explaining the attributes of his frozen products (or as Rusty likes to say fresh-frozen), and the second strategy emphasizing the virtues of his fresh eggs. During the interview process Rusty clearly distinguished the difference between his eggs and those offered through the industrial food chain and available in the grocery stores by telling this story on a couple of different occasions:

> **Rusty:** Safeway eggs, when they get them in the warehouse, not the store the warehouse, they're six to eight weeks old. So how long do they sit in the warehouse before the store wants a couple hundred dozen? Then how long do they sit in the store in their storage and then on the display shelf? Now an egg would last longer if they wouldn't wash them, but they wash theirs, so I'm thinking their eggs are probably about a year and half before you have to think about them being icky. There icky to start with but that's a whole other story.

Rusty contrasts this with his eggs which are delivered directly to the customer from his farm on a weekly, bimonthly or monthly basis. He describes the egg shells as porous and the longer an egg sits the more the content evaporates and the less they weigh. The eggs he delivers on any occasion are eggs that were collected that week. Rusty is able to maintain this level of weekly freshness because demand for his eggs exceeds supply. One of the ways he controls supply is by only taking 27 dozen eggs to the weekly St. Albert Farmers' Market. He always sells out before noon (the market opens to the public at 10 AM) and he knows he could probably sell 80 dozen. But in order to make sure he has fresh eggs for his regular, direct delivery customers he prefers to limit what he sells at the market. This also serves to maintain consumer demand as Rusty always tells customers that if they want to purchase eggs at the Saturday market they need to get their early in the morning or the eggs will be gone. He will not hold eggs for pickup there, even for regular customers.

Standardization

Rusty further distinguishes his eggs from most factory farm and grocery store eggs by stating that he does not wash or inspect his eggs which only slows down the process without adding any real value; it only makes them look nice and all the same. He does admit to wiping off some of the "nasty stuff" that is on them. Purchasing local, farm fresh products, that do not look perfect or that have a bit of dirt still on them is one of the reported novelties associated with direct marketing or shopping at farmers' markets (Feagan et al. 2004). This also raises another challenge that Rusty routinely has to deal with: the standardization of appearance of food products. I asked Rusty how he deals with the consumers' expectations of what chickens should look like:

> **Rusty:** It has to look like the chicken looks in Safeway, that's what they expect. They think a chicken should be big and pasty and white. My chickens are all yellow. Some new customers will phone up and say I think there is something wrong with your chickens, the color is funny [laughs]. Yeah, the reason they're yellow is because they are full of beta carotene from the grass and the sunshine. The shape of the chicken makes a difference too. Yeah, lots of people look in our freezer and ask how come they are all different sizes? Because they are just like people, that's how they grow. When you do it outside on the grass they are not going to grow like they do force fed in a building. There is no way I can make them look like that.

Rusty is speaking about the pasturing process in which the chicks are placed outside in a large movable pen once the temperature warms up enough that they can be outside all the time (Figure 7). Each pen is sectioned off to contain approximately 82 chicks, giving them enough room to move about freely. The movable pen is specially designed to allow maximum sunshine while allowing the heat to escape the pen. The roof is split on two levels to allow protection from the rain and let the water run off the back which prevents drowning of the chicks. Here the chicks are allowed to eat as much, or as little, grass and insects as they want. When the fresh grass in the area is eaten down the pen is moved to a new area in the pasture where the grass has grown taller and fuller. This 'rotational grazing' prevents the soil from being picked clean and depleted of the micro-biotic elements that make it such good feed for the chicks.

Figure 7. Rusty's chicks in their moveable pen, July 7, 2009.

Rusty explained how this relates to the difference in the appearance of his eggs. (See Figure 8).

Rusty: Yeah, that's why you have different size eggs in my cartons. We don't grade eggs. When they go through a grading station - which is one of the things that keeps them from being fresh in the store – 'cause they're all graded and when they go in that carton they are all the same size, and when they went in that carton they all weighed the same. The best way to tell if it is a fresh egg or not is – well the first thing is you take my egg carton and hold it in your hand and an egg carton from the store in the other hand, you'll be able to tell the difference in weight. Yeah, size, color, weight. Size doesn't really – I mean they want it to look the same in the carton but I guarantee I can get Grade A on everyone of my eggs because Grade A has a certain weight. It doesn't have anything to do with the size of the shell.

Brent: They must also grade for color? You have so many different shades of brown; can you standardize your colors?

Rusty: No, no. The egg is colored when it goes through the chicken in the ovum. On the brown laying hens its brown, on the Americanas [a specific breed of chicken] its green. They way they standardize it in the carton is they pick the same color of tan and put it in the same carton.

Brent: Are your customers used to the different appearance of the eggs? They don't say "Holy smokes, I got a green one; I got a big brown one, a little brown one?"

Rusty: When we find a true new egg customer, who has never bought eggs from us before, we have to open the carton and show them that there are two green eggs in there because we've had so many people bring those two eggs back and say there is something wrong with these two eggs [laughs]. They're not brown, they're green, and I go "Oh, I forgot to tell them". And in the summer when we have new egg customers that have never seen an egg where the chicken's been eating grass and the yolk is orange, like really, really, really orange, dark, dark. People bring them back and say there is something really wrong with your eggs, the yolks are really orange, they've gone bad. Then we have to explain to them, no that's what a fresh egg of a chicken that is eating grass looks like; all that orange is from the beta carotene from the grass. It's an antioxidant, you can go home and eat it, and it will be good for you.

Figure 8. Rusty's eggs, March 14, 2009

Starr and associates reported that this problem of dealing with the consumer's perception and expectations of what their food should look like was a barrier between local farmers trying to practice sustainable agriculture and direct market their products to restaurant customers (2003:301). They found, in their Colorado study, that farmers were angry at supermarket buyers whose rigid criteria train customers to expect an unvarying product. This is the same situation that Rusty is faced with: a consumer that has been trained by the industrial food system to expect a product of a certain size, shape, and color. As these passages above demonstrate, the face to face, personal interaction of the farmers' market is essential for Rusty to educate his customers and explain that there is nothing wrong with his chickens and eggs. In fact he uses the two green eggs in each carton to create an opportunity for highlighting the differences between his products and those typically found in the grocery stores.

Another anecdote that Rusty likes to tell about eggs and freshness concerns a popular commercial from one of the most prominent fast food industry giants.

> **Rusty:** It is just like that McDonald's commercial where the kids are all juggling the eggs and the guy comes through and says "I don't know what you are doing but don't stop." Then the announcer comes on and says at McDonald's you can get an Egg McMuffin with a freshly cracked egg. Well, how would you get an egg if it wasn't freshly cracked? But you see he just uses the word fresh and everybody's mind jumps to it's a fresh egg. He didn't say it was a fresh egg, he said it was freshly cracked. [Laughter] It is hard to get an egg that is not freshly cracked unless it is hard boiled or soft boiled, but it is still freshly cracked when you eat it. But anyways, it is all a play on words.

Rusty also pointed out that one of the reasons that restaurants use those round molds is because with the low quality or "unfresh" eggs produced through the factory farm model the whites are very runny. He contrasted this with his eggs where the pasture raised process means the whites are firmer and hold their round shape around the yolk better, "My eggs stand up in the pan, they don't run all over, and the yolks stand up higher than the white."

Rusty agreed that there is a slightly different mindset in talking about frozen and fresh products but does not believe it is a problem for his customers. He does not employ two different models for marketing his products. Rusty believes his regular customers understand the difference with the different products. He suggests that for new customers it takes them a while to get the hang of it until "they finally realize that these are fresh eggs and you can put them in the refrigerator and keep them for three or four months." Rusty then admitted that freshness is not a feature that he focuses on when marketing his different products, or when educating his current or potential new customers, because he believes he does not have to. He is however, more than willing to discuss the issue if the customer brings it up.

The preceding passages highlight some of the challenges that Rusty faces as a food producer in a local food system. First, that he is a protein producer, of meat and eggs, that each requires a different method of processing and selling: one frozen, the other fresh. Horowitz highlights the problems of being a meat producer in his book *Putting Meat on the American Table: Taste, Technological, Transformation* (2005). Public concerns over food recalls, health safety, animal rights, and environmental sustainability, largely associated with the IFS (McMichael 2000:30) present the local protein producer with extra challenges, but challenges that they can turn to their advantage. Rusty is quick to point out that anytime there is a story in the news about food recalls (particularly meat) his business improves.

Secondly, Rusty markets the bulk of his business by participating in a farmers' market where the emphasis for consumers is on purchasing fresh products, generally vegetable and fruit produce, that are perceived to be picked fresh from the garden and transported directly to the market (Feagan et al. 2004, Fromartz 2006). Thirdly, the difficulty for Rusty and consumers to understand the terminology used within LFS, and to determine what even the simplest words, like fresh, mean.

While Rusty stated that there are government definitions for ‘freshness’ concerning various food products I do not feel it is relevant to present a ‘regulated’ definition of ‘fresh’ here. Factuality in constructing coherence from life story interviews is not a primary concern (Linde 1993:16). As Rusty suggested, it is about public perception and the "play on words" that influence the general consumer of the industrial food system, and neither he nor the fledgling local grazing associations have the resources to counteract such a large scale marketing campaign. This reinforces the importance of educating his customers, even it if is only one customer at a time, to what Rusty believes are the benefits of purchasing and consuming his product.

While Rusty does not use ‘fresh’ extensively in his marketing or education process he does rely on a closely associated concept to promote his products, that consumers participating in a LFS equate fresh food with healthy food (Feagan et al. 2004:243). Gottlieb and associates reported in their study of farm to school programs in Southern California that producers and consumers in a Community Food System strongly equated fresh food with healthier food (2008:289). They found that when fresh farm products were introduced into the cafeteria and supported by nutrition education in the classroom, students chose the healthier meals 75 percent of the time. The students were able to recognize and appreciate the freshness, taste and flavor of the products provided directly from the farms (ibid: 293).

The healthfulness of his products is something that Rusty does promote and believe strongly in. He emphasizes in his brochure that he does not use any animal by-products in his feed, nor does he use hormones or antibiotics, and the pastures are free of herbicides and pesticides. Rusty stresses the terms ‘naturally raised’ and ‘nature’s way’ on the front page of his brochure (Appendix A). Again, for Rusty the proof is in his product, the responses from his customers, and the satisfaction he receives by providing them a healthy and tasty product. Rusty provides a detailed account of his perception of this healthfulness and his customer’s responses in the following excerpt:

Brent: How about in relation to the health of your customers or society at large?

Rusty: It all goes back to what's in – like animals raised on grass, the fat in them is good fat, it's not, I don't know how to describe it other than – we take one of our chickens and cut it up and you have the chicken grease on your hands you can go to the sink and turn on luke warm water and rinse it off. It rinses right off your hands, no problem. That's because it was raised on grass and is not saturated with the wrong kinds of fat so it doesn't get in to your body wrong to clog you up. And the pork's the same way. When you fry bacon or you fry the sausage or you do pork chops or whatever then you pour what's in the pan off in a tin can and leave it – to get it to go hard, it won't at room temperature, you have to put it in the refrigerator. Same with beef, but when you put beef in a feed lot, cram 'em full of grain that they were never supposed to eat, it changes the chemical reaction in the physiology, it goes into the meat wrong and turns out to be a heart attack for you. It's the way they were designed to eat so that when we eat them we stay healthy. They have omega three in them from the grass and it goes into their fat. We just need society to understand that where their food comes from is more important than where there hockey team comes from. [laughter] You and I have talked about this before without the tape on, before we started our interview. There is something wrong with a society that will pay people to entertain you astronomical amounts of money. To play a game, it is just a game. It is either hockey, or baseball or basketball or football or soccer, whatever it is. It is just a game. It doesn't do anything but entertain you or cause a riot. So there is something wrong when a person who is doing his job right to keep you healthy, and he should be able to make a living doing that - keeping you healthy.

Brent: What do you think what you are doing means to the families of the customers that buy your product?

Rusty: It means the world to a lot of them. We have customers that actually get sick if they eat products from the grocery store. That's the one thing that sticks in my mind is that young lady in Fort McMurray that came to the trade show and we were giving out samples at the trade show. She said she was interested in our chicken, she had heard how it was raised and everything. We had just put samples on and they weren't quite done so I stretched my explanation a little bit so the samples would be done at the same time I got finished, and her and the young man that she was there with, they're now married and expecting, so I offered a sample. He took a sample right away and ate it, said it was very good and he liked it a lot. She said I can't have that because I'd never make it to the bathroom, that's how fast if I have a reaction to your chicken. So she said, we are going to buy one and take it home and cook it in the safety of my home where I can eat it. If something goes drastically wrong then I'm at home and everything's good [laughs]. So that was a Saturday, on Monday, we got a call, "I'll take 12 of those chickens please". Beef affected her the same way; pork affected her the same way. I don't know what it is, what I have learned is there is an enzyme in chicken that some people can't – it's just the enzyme in the chicken. And other people it's the antibiotics and all the other stuff and those people can have our chicken and have no effect. But if it's the enzyme it doesn't matter whose chicken it is. And turkey has a different enzyme and they can eat turkey but they can't eat chicken. So we explain that to people when they, you know – we get to talking to somebody in the booth and they say "Well I just can't eat chicken, it makes me sick all the time". So we'll say have you had any chicken raised like this, and if they say yes and it still makes them have the problem, then it's the enzyme not the chemicals in the store bought chicken.

Rusty understands the value of personal testimony, stating that word of mouth promotion from existing customers accounts for about 80% of his business. He even offers a free chicken to regular customers who refer new people who then become regular customers. Rusty believes a big part of this word of mouth testimony is related to his customers promoting the healthfulness of his products. Rusty invited me to attend a 'Field Day' at his farm on July 7, 2009. This 'Field Day' was organized by and for the benefit of a Central Alberta grazing association that was comprised of like-minded farmers and ranchers who were interested in exploring and practicing alternative farming and livestock methods similar to what Rusty was doing.

Rusty also invited a loyal customer and asked him to speak to the group for a few minutes. This customer told the audience that he weighed 500 pounds at the age of 22 which was ten years ago. He was a taxi driver and suffered a mild heart attack and had other health issues related to being obese. These health concerns forced him to take stock of his situation and realize that he needed to make some changes to his food choices and his eating habits. One of his big changes was eating healthier foods which he characterized as locally grown and 'real' foods as opposed to processed, packaged 'nonreal' foods. He suggested that it was not how much you eat but what you eat that was important. While this is not a new or revolutionary idea, he praised the role of Rusty's products in enabling him to lose 300 pounds and become a healthier person.

This individual was also inspired to start a website business to promote healthy eating. He targets severely overweight and obese individuals, many who rely on medication for some of their related ailments. He claims that for some of his clients that have switched to locally grown, farm fresh pasture raised products, they have been able to reduce or eliminate the need for some of these medications. He attributes this to the fact that pasture raised products, like Rusty's, do not have the hormones, antibiotics, fertilizer and pesticide residues that are believed to be associated with health problems for many individuals. While I have not validated the testimony or information this individual presented, this example illustrates the association many consumers make between locally grown, farm fresh products that they can purchase at farmers' markets and the perceived healthfulness of those products.

The preceding passages illustrate some of Rusty's understanding and conviction about the biological ("enzymes", "omega threes", "good fat") and ecological ("raised on grass", "grain that they were never supposed to eat") characteristics of his products. It also reflects his view on the general public's perception of the value of the farmer ("there is something wrong with society…"). This perspective echoes Michael Pollan's view where, in his book *The Omnivore's Dilemma,* he suggests that consumers in North American society spend more time and energy, and create more anxiety worrying about who they get to fix their car than they do about who they purchase their food from (2006:240). Pollan presented this statement after visiting and discussing North American food consumption practices with Joel Salatin, the Virginia grass farmer who has made his Polyface Farms one of the most productive and influential alternative farms in America.[11] Rusty is familiar with Salatin's ideas and practices, and models many of his own farm practices and business principles after Salatin's. I had discovered in our first interview that Rusty was from Virginia and asked him if he was aware of Joel Salatin and what he was doing while he was still there.

[11] Polyface Farm serves 1500 families, ten retail outlets, and thirty restaurants. The farm has been featured in *Smithsonian, National Geographic, Gourmet, The Omnivore's Dilemma and Food INC*. (Weber 2009:183).

Rusty: No, in fact now, in retrospect, of course hind sight is twenty-twenty, when Mom and Dad were thinking of moving, we looked all over. Dad looked here in Canada, we looked all over Virginia. Some of the places we looked at were only 9 or 10 miles from where Joel is. So we could have ended up right in the same neighborhood, but for unknown reasons we are here and Joel is there. We looked at places all around in Virginia. We weren't far off from where Joel is situated. There wasn't alot of land available and it was very expensive compared to what you could get here.

Brent: Was coming across Joel's work one of the first things that showed you some options that we can explore?

Rusty: Yes, in regards to livestock.

Brent: Did you actively try to find out more about him and his work? He was publishing different things.

Rusty: Yes, he published four really great books, *Salad Bar Beef* and *Poultry for Profit* and all of the books that he did. That is what we did basically, we bought those four books and started reading and thinking how can we adapt this to what we were doing. And once you have one of his books, they are just like this great management book and in the back there is everything you ever wanted to know. There are stock grass farmers listed in here and there are 1-800 numbers and there are all kinds of ways to order. All kinds of books, Joel's are the same way, full of his stuff and other people's stuff that is related and once you get your hands on one, then you are off and running.

This interest in research and trying to determine better ways to produce and market his products is something that Rusty continually pursues. At our last interview in November of 2009 Rusty told me of a study that he had just read about in the Stockman's Grass Farmer (an agricultural trade publication specializing in alternative farming methods). He claims it was from a reputable University in the United States that had conducted a four year study and reported on ten health benefits of eating grass-fed beef. He was going to photocopy and laminate the report and put it on display at his booth at the farmers' market for customers to see and show that "it's not something I made up". I agreed with Rusty that would probably help and asked him if people were starting to catch on to the concept of 'grass-fed' products.

Brent: Would you say that promoting ‘grass-fed’ is one of your main strengths? You don’t need big signs saying ‘Fresh Chicken, Fresh Beef, Fresh Pork’?

Rusty: If we were going to do a big sign like that we would do “Grass-fed Product”. Yeah, it’s full of antioxidants from the grass, vitamins and minerals; it’s a wide variety of stuff on that list. The Omega 3 and Omega 6 is in the right balance and it’s really high in Omega 3’s and it’s full of beta-carotene, grass is just full of beta-carotene. That’s why our chicken has kind of a yellowy skin, which somebody new looking at it in the freezer that is their first comment, “Well how come your chickens are so yellow?” Well they’re full of beta-carotene which is an antioxidant.

Brent: Well is grass-fed starting to lead people to understand it is a better quality product, a healthier product?

Rusty: Way healthier, even more than grain fed, anything.

Rusty likes to point out that animals eating grass is not a new or ‘fresh’ idea, it is just the way they are supposed to eat. He believes 'grass-fed' is a label that is simple and easy for consumers to understand. Perceptions of growing grass, green grass, fresh grass all have a strong association to 'nature'. Rusty promotes "Nature's way" in his brochure and other marketing material in reference to his methods and practices. This may be viewed by some customers as a nostalgic connection to a nature that they are not familiar with (born and raised in the city, the "concrete jungle") yet it is a connection that seems to have visceral resonance for customers. Delind suggests that soil is the literal and metaphoric embodiment of people living in a place (2002:222). Rusty's quote "If the soil and my gut have the same thing in them, we have to take care of both of them" illustrates this connection that consumers are beginning to understand; it is not only what you eat but also what the food products you are consuming are eating that you need to be concerned about. Rusty is referencing Salatin's comments that there are three trillion intestinal microorganisms that live in the human digestive tract that "perform an array of useful functions, including training our immune systems and producing vitamins like biotin and vitamin K" (2009:184).

A major component of pasture raised grass-fed livestock is the practice of rotational grazing. The systematic moving of the livestock around the pasture ensures they are always eating a fresh supply of fresh grass with all the micro organic matter that goes with it. The previously grazed area of the pasture is left to rejuvenate naturally using the sun, rain, and deposited waste material from the livestock to produce nutrient rich soil and a fresh crop of grass. Rusty uses this practice because it promotes the sustainability of the soil, which is imperative to the sustainability of his business and livelihood. Small scale or 'local' farmers are not inherently better at practicing sustainable methods, as pointed out by Hinrichs, but by participating in the direct marketing of their products, farmers are under constant "surveillance by concerned customers" (2003:35). This concern for the sustainability or welfare of the farmer is a growing motivating factor for consumers to support farmers' markets (Feagan et al. 2004:245).

Rusty: And as far as I know grass is still free [laughs].

Chapter 6

The Soul of a Carrot

Rusty: Exactly, soil is the basis of all life, there is - you know, I'm reading in Jim Gerrish's[12] book for the second time now and we're on the subject of water in the book. And he says water is only second because we have to have air first [laughs]. But water is the second most important thing. Well I think water and soil go hand and hand, right. You have to have, I mean I can pour water on sand all day, I can make things grow out of it but I have to keep pouring the water on it every day. So, but if I have soil I still have to have water. But if I have enough organic matter in the soil to retain the water that I pour on it, then I don't have to have so much water. Yeah, yeah, we are trying to be ecologically sustainable; we are working with the soil.

12 Jim Gerrish is an author, researcher and consultant who specializes in the management of grazing lands for economic and environmental sustainability. He spent 20 years at the University of Missouri researching and promoting beef-forage systems. http://jimgerrish.com/AGLS, consulted February 11, 2010.

This passage illustrates Rusty's understanding of how an ecosystem works: air + water + soil + organic matter = life. This elementary version reflects the years of his experience as a farmer and the spirituality of his Christian beliefs. Rather than viewing nature as something to conquer, manipulate, or control, Rusty acknowledges that people are part of nature, not separate from it. Rusty emphasizes the importance of "working with the soil" as a reciprocal process required to balance out the basic elements of nature and produce healthy, tasty and sustainable food. This view reflects Latour's position that the modernist's pursuit of the nature/culture duality, where science represents truth and is separate from society, is largely unsatisfactory (2004, 1993), especially regarding food. Rusty believes that nature is not a scientific problem that can be solved technically.

A contemporary example against this holistic approach is nutritional sciences research centered on identifying what nutrients the body physiologically requires from a food product. Recent scientific research has been successful at isolating vitamins, polyphenols and carotenoids, but as Pollan suggests, there is a danger in simply looking at nutrients outside of the context of the food itself, for "who knows what is going on deep in the soul of a carrot" (2008:66). This reductionist approach does not yet explain how nutrients and foods interact within bodies, or consider that food means so much more than sustenance. Similarly, there is just as great a danger of studying food without considering how it is produced, distributed, and consumed. This argument against scientific reductionism is articulated by Jodie Asselin in her thesis *Ways of Knowing: Western Canadian Agriculturalists and Local Knowledge* when she states:

> Reductionism does not give credit to the holistic nature of farming and can subsequently find resolutions to problems that do not benefit the farming landscape as a whole, or which can eventually negatively impact it.
>
> (Asselin 2007:56)

Sustainability

In simple terms Rusty believes the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and although we may not completely understand what the whole is, he suggests, "It all starts with healthy soil, and if the soil and my gut have the same things in them, we have to take care of both." This also illustrates Rusty's understanding of sustainability.

Sustainability is another label that generates confusion and heated discussion in both agricultural and non-agricultural circles (Hassanein 2003:78). DeLind suggests that there are three accepted pillars of sustainability in local civic agriculture: environmental soundness, economic viability, and social equity (2002:219). Hinrichs however, believes that the prevalence and growth of direct marketing beyond the farm requires sustainability to be analyzed from a broader perspective (2000:296). She suggests that it is important to examine the cultural norms and meanings embedded in the social relations between the actors involved. That embeddedness, for Rusty as a food producer within a local food system, lies in the social connections, reciprocity, and trust he shares with his customers. It is rooted in shared knowledge and the shared values of safe, healthy, tasty food produced in a sustainable manner. Rusty continues to emphasize his belief that these values begin with the soil.

Brent: You can keep some of those values but you've got to adapt like you are with certain kinds of new ways of thinking and technology when useful, like solar panels, electric fencing –

Rusty: Yeah, all of those things are handy but you know – just to use an example, I've been reading a new person, Frank Newman Turner[13] and he started farming just before the start of the Second World War. So they were still before the advent of foreign fertilizer and diesel fuel and all of those things, and his point is if your soil is healthy I can produce more with less acres so why do we need to be that big? One of the things he pointed out is it takes these guys with the fertilizers and the chemicals and the sprays hundreds and hundreds of acres to produce eighteen bushels to the acre, whereas he had a five hundred acre farm and he was growing wheat at eighty-four bushels to the acre. But it's because his soil was healthy. There is a big difference between 18 and 84. And it is possible, but his model is cropping and animals, you have to have everything cycling to keep the soil the way it needs to be. And of course modern improved farming is mega, mega acres with

[13] Frank Newman Turner is referred to as the grandfather of modern intensive grazing. His innovations for 60 years ago are being rediscovered by organic and sustainable farmers.
http://www.acresusa.com/books/closeup.asp?prodid=1748&catid=6&pcid=2, consulted February 11, 2010.

gigantic, gigantic equipment and the animals should be in a building somewhere where it is difficult to figure out what to do with all the animal byproducts [laughs]. The free fertilizer, but anyway I digress. I don't think we need the mega to produce food if we do it properly. And to do it properly everything goes back to the soil, everything. If your soil isn't healthy you're not going to have healthy plants, you're not going to have healthy animals, and you're not going to have healthy people.

Rusty does not use fertilizers on his fields or steroids on his livestock. They are pasture raised and grass-fed, free to roam and eat as little or as much as they want. Rusty is dependent on the rain and the sun to make his grass grow but he also understands the relationship that different livestock have to the health of the soil and each other. When I asked why he had horses grazing with his cattle Rusty explained that they each have different parasites in their manure which contribute to the organic balance needed in the soil. It is not just the grass that the livestock eats but the insects and parasites living in the grass and soil that creates healthy, tasty, and sustainable food products. Rusty emphasized the importance of the horses to break down the parasites into the grass and the soil as they wandered around the pasture. He also noted that the horses are good teachers for the calves, showing them the importance of using their hooves to pound the ground to stir up and find food, like a dog pawing. Rusty says when calves learn this it helps them to feed. When the flies are bad the horses use their big long tails to keep the flies away and the cows follow close behind the horse's tail so they can avoid the flies as well. Rusty says the horses and the cows get along well together, and he keeps a few horses for sentimental reasons because he likes them. Two of the horses were broke for riding although they do not get ridden very much. Rusty has one skinny old gelding there that is about 29 years old that he says still loves to be out chomping on the grass.

Rusty is well aware of the importance of economic sustainability to what he does as well. When I asked him to rate the success of the farm and business now, compared to before he made some of these major alternative farming changes, he replied:

> **Rusty:** Unfortunately, financially not much has changed. It is still almost impossible to make a living, but at least I know that I am doing the right thing for the soil and the animals. So that side of the equation is much better than it was. There will be something here for someone to take off with. It will be better than when I got it. When I use the word sustainable it means a lot. It has to be economically sustainable, environmentally sustainable. Sustainable, sustainable, something that can carry on and on and on.

Rusty's comments are supported by his customers who he says "want me to make money". This reflects their desire for Rusty to be able to stay in business even if they have to pay higher prices for his product than they would at the supermarket (Feagan et al. 2004). The customers do not want to start over having to look for a source of healthy, safe, and tasty products. They do not want to have to look for a new supplier that they can trust. They want Rusty and what he represents to be sustainable. This illustrates the importance of the face to face interaction, the intimate relationships that Rusty has built with some of his customers. These relationships are rooted in shared knowledge, experiences, and values that the participants are able to communicate through direct marketing, such as farmers' markets, within a local food system.

Local Food Systems and Place

A local food system (LFS) is not just a counterpoint to the industrial, global food system for Rusty. It is a place and process that gives meaning to his life. It is not one physical place that exists on a map or is defined by proximity to circumscribed empirical measurements. Rusty's place is Big Coulee Farms in Athabasca County, it is the St. Albert Farmers' Market, it is the parking lots at City Center Mall in St. Albert, and Westmount Mall in Edmonton where he meets his customers every two weeks to deliver their orders, and it is Fort McMurray where he travels once a month to engage with his regular customers there.

This illustrates, as Trubek (2008) suggests, that place is also about the people and their practices. In a recent study of farmer and consumer attitudes at farmers' markets, Asebø and associates found that producers considered how their food was produced to be more important than where it was produced (2007:78). Producers wanted to describe to customers how they grew their products and to establish a relationship with them. It was not important to tell customers where they were from. When I asked Rusty if there was anything special in his physical, geographic location that he could use to market his products and image he replied simply "Not really". For Rusty, Big Coulee Farms is not a place fixed at a specific location, it is an image that represents his methods and practices of producing healthy, safe, sustainable, and tasty products from pasture raised, grass-fed livestock that he direct markets within a LFS.

Education is the major component of Rusty's marketing strategy. Rusty believes his role in a LFS is to educate his customers about buying healthy food products raised in a sustainable manner, and that people have choices. The face to face interactions in a LFS foster a social relationship and a sense of trust between the food producer and the customer. This trust enables Rusty and his customers to sort through the confusion of the various terms and labels to focus on the health and the taste of the product, and the sustainability of the soil. Customers need to think about what they eat and where they buy it from so they can make healthy informed decisions. Rusty is not trying to convince customers that his products taste better (as he believes they do) or that you need to buy them (although he would prefer if you did), but he is trying to educate consumers that they can play an active role in choosing what they eat, how it was raised, and who they purchase it from. Hassanein describes this process as transforming "people from passive consumers into active, educated citizens" (2003:80).

The challenge of being a "protein producer" requires extra scrutiny by government agencies. Rusty must have a freezer at the farmers' market to keep his meat products in; a produce farmer does not require refrigeration. All of Rusty's products, including the fresh egg cartons, must be labeled with the farm name, address, and telephone number so the authorities can track him down if there is a health issue with his products; produce farmers are not required to package and label their tomatoes, carrots and other fruits and vegetables. Rusty's egg cartons must have a label notifying the customer that the eggs are uninspected; produce farmers are not required to provide such information.

Despite these extra challenges that a produce farmer does not incur, Rusty persists in selling his "protein" products because he believes there is a need and a demand for these products at a farmers' market. The face to face interaction at the farmers' market allows Rusty to explain that his meat products are frozen fresh right at the processing plant in a commercial freezer. He states that when you thaw and cook them they taste as fresh as the day they were processed. The fresh eggs themselves are a marketing tool that Rusty uses to build and maintain relationships with his customers. Rusty understands that these relationships are vital to his economic sustainability and that customers view the social relationships as a motivating factor for purchasing at the farmers' market, an observation supported in other studies (e.g. Feagan et al. 2004:247, Feenstra 2002:105). Rusty's story supports Lyson and associates (1995) research that demonstrated for the producer, these social relationships are a primary reason for participating in a LFS, even more so than the economic motivation. The LFS and all it entails is a 'place' that marks Rusty's identity.

Food and Identity

Rusty's ancestral heritage and upbringing provide colorful insights to his character, "And my Dad's side of the family... as far as I know they were on the Mayflower". He grew up during 1960's and 1970's, the time of a counter-culture movement on the east coast of the United States. It was a time of the back to earth movement where interest in organic food was growing, "The problem with organic at first, was it tasted yucky". It was also the time of civil and political unrest resulting from America's involvement in the Vietnam War, "Yeah man, come to Alberta, its farmland here to beat the band. So yeah, that kind of thing was quite prevalent then". A childhood reading disability saw Rusty spend much of his formative years away at a special school "... that was actually a working farm. I learned from a very old gentleman how to do many different things, ... and it stuck with me." It was here that Rusty developed a fondness for working with livestock and a holistic understanding that everybody and everything on a farm must work together in order to succeed and be sustainable.

Rusty's role as a food producer participating in a LFS provides meaning to his life. Rusty acknowledges the many challenges of going against the conventional practices and expectations of the contemporary industrial food system, where on one hand Alberta Agriculture says "go big or go home" to farmers, and Rural Development which tells Rusty "you are doing a great job, keep it up". Rusty proudly (and humorously) defines himself as a "grass farmer". Rusty of course does not farm and sell grass; it is his way to express his role of working with nature to produce healthy, safe, and tasty food products. Nor is Rusty certifiably crazy as he suggests in the opening quote from Chapter 1. It is a way to distinguish himself and his practices from what other farmers, particularly conventional farmers, do. It is a way to mark his role as a food producer in a LFS and his personal identity.

It is a role shaped by his distrust of politics and bureaucracy (the Vietnam War, Alberta Agriculture), as he limits his involvement with government institutions to the minimum and refuses to participate in many assistance programs they offer. It reflects his personal beliefs of independence and heritage (refusing to acquire Canadian citizenship while the rest of his family has), and his Christian faith, "I believe in creation".

Rusty's role as a local food producer shapes his family relationships. His wife accompanies Rusty to the Saturday farmers' market and helps out on the farm when she is not working at her regular job. His sister makes custom rustic furniture (as well as works full time) which Rusty promotes at his booth at the farmers' market. Her oldest son works fulltime on the farm with Rusty while her youngest son is still in grade school. Rusty has hopes that the youngest son's computer skills will help him and the farm improve their marketing capabilities. Rusty's mother still lives on the farm in her own house and she still supports Rusty's decision and choice to practice alternative farming methods. She attributes her longevity and good health to the healthy foods that they grow, produce, and eat, although she is tired of eating so much chicken. For Rusty, being a food producer in a LFS is a way of life.

Reflexivity Revisited

I have attempted to tell Rusty's story and portray his role as a food producer and his personal identity as accurately as possible. I have used many, and some extensive passages of his own words to create a sense of who Rusty is and how he sees his role as a food producer in a LFS. This thesis was created through a partnership between Rusty, the individual and the local food producer, and myself as the researcher, interviewer, photographer, transcriber, and writer. We both had our reasons for participating in this project. Rusty no doubt saw this as a way to garner some exposure and recognition, 'cultural capital' as it were, which could help the economic sustainability of his practices. For me the project was to attain something tangible (my M.A. degree) and to further my academic career. It was interesting and rewarding to discover during the research process that our relationship was connected by education: his desire and willingness to teach and mine to learn.

The research process allowed me to literally and metaphorically 'taste' some of Rusty's products. I physically ate some of his chickens, turkeys, and eggs, and I agree with Rusty that they did taste and look different than what I was used to eating from the grocery store. I also had the 'experience' of knowing that they were from livestock that were pasture raised, grass-fed, and free of antibiotics and steroids. Participating as a consumer (by purchasing some of his products) with Rusty, the producer, was also a way to gain his confidence and build trust towards our research relationship. The subjectivity of the experience was enhanced by the shared belief that Rusty's methods and practices produced safe, healthy, and sustainable food products that also tasted good. This coming together of subjective experiences, or "matrix of subjectivity" Ortner (2005:34) referred to, is what creates the taste experience.

Lévi-Strauss, Douglas, Bourdieu, Korsmeyer, and Trubek all acknowledged the significance of metaphor as an important component in exploring foodways. I too (recall post-structuralism's critique of Lévi-Strauss and Douglas) am guilty of using culturally specific metaphors; but rather than to simplify a universal practice, my intention is to broaden and make Rusty's story and the 'taste experience' more accessible and understandable to others. You do not have to buy and taste Rusty's products to get a sense of who he is and what he does. What people find meaningful about their lives is often expressed through metaphor and language. Metaphor enables the individual to express, articulate, and share an experience with others that transforms it beyond the purely subjective.

Going against the grain, questioning and defying authority are common experiences for individuals who perceive themselves as outside the conventional norms of the period. This is how I saw Rusty, a self professed outsider in a community in which he has lived for over 30 years, and a rebel with a disdain for government authority and bureaucracy because "they just don't get it", when it comes to our food. New ideas often come from old ideas that require new interpretations and personal commitment. What is now considered alternative (such as livestock raised entirely in a pasture eating grass) was once conventional practice, a point of irony not lost on Rusty. These ideas are often expressed in a new language using new words and labels. Rusty accepts the label alternative to describe what he does because it challenges the popular conventions and represents choice. People may use the same word or label but attribute different meanings to that label, such as organic. To some it simply means the carrot pulled from their own garden, and to others it means a government regulated and certified product that they assume is healthy and safe to eat.

Metaphors enhance the taste experience. A food product may taste different to different individuals because of their different physical and chemical physiology (taste buds and taste receptors) but they can still share a taste experience based on shared language, knowledge, and meanings. We do not need to fully understand the scientific language or nutrient makeup to know that a fresh garden carrot produced without chemicals and sold at the local farmers' market tastes better than the one mass produced, picked months ago, processed and packaged, and shipped thousands of kilometers to the grocery store tastes better; it just does.

So What? The Essence of Resonance

The life story interview is an effective method to draw our attention to the diverse ways humans make connections and meaning in their lives (Cruikshank 1990:ix). Rusty's story is unique to him. The act of telling his story itself is a way to make meaning in his life. Rusty's story tells us something about his role as a food producer within a local food system. Rusty's particular story informs us of the motivations for local producers participating in a local food system which, like those of consumers, are diverse and embedded in the social relationships that occur within a physical and spiritual space. Yet it is also a story of universality that many people may share in. Rusty's story contains what Atkinson refers to as the element of continuity (1998:69); it has to do with valuing the past, the importance of family, and the inherent connections of the life cycle. Rusty's story highlights some of the many challenges that farmers experience in participating in LFS in Alberta: the struggles of the family farm to compete with corporate agribusiness, the sustainability of providing quality, healthy, tasty food to a growing population that itself is eating up arable farmland, the reliance on fertilizers, pesticides, and hormones to increase production to meet demand, and the frustration of being caught between the global and local mandates of Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, where Rusty states "one hand doesn't know what the other is doing".

All of this despite the growth and success of farmers' markets throughout the province where Rusty is one of over 3000 vendors participating in this form of direct marketing of food products to consumers (Alberta Farmers' Market Association 2007, Lenchucha et al. 1998). Rusty argued that there is growing consumer interest for local protein products at the market but that the number of protein producers is decreasing. This speaks to the increased demand for such products as local eggs, beef, chicken, and pork produced by alternative practices and delivered through alternative channels. Rusty was quick to point out early on in the interview process, with an appropriate sense of irony, that how he and other like minded Alberta farmers practice farming and deliver their food products to consumers used to be the conventional method.

Rusty's story informs us that the role of a food producer participating in LFS is increasingly motivated by the face to face social interactions that engages the producer-consumer relationship in discussions about sustainability. And it is not just the romantic or nostalgic image of sustaining the family farm; it is the sustainability of providing safe, healthy, and tasty food products that matters. In turn, it is the sustainability of the soil that provides those products. And it is the sustainability of the local communities based on trust and shared values fostered by face to face social relationships. Rusty and other Alberta producers participating in a LFS understand that they are not going to overthrow the global food system (GFS) or break the industrial food chain where food is treated as a commodity for the masses.

Rusty and his story represent an alternative to the GFS, an alternative where the participants have a choice to be active participants in determining how their food is produced, distributed, and how it tastes. The increase and success of farmers' markets and local direct marketing programs over the past 20 years illustrates the growing demand for alternatives to the GFS and suggests that more and more people are expressing their choice to participate in these LFS (Gottlieb et al. 2008, Feagan 2007, Feagan et al. 2004, Hinrichs 2000, Lencucha et al. 1998). This contemporary engagement with food illustrates the powerful sociological meanings that resonate for individuals participating in these LFS. It is imperative that social scientists acknowledge the significant impact that this phenomenon represents in order to create awareness, present data, and provide social and historical context to policy makers in order to understand that food is a different kind of commodity. Continued research on LFS and food and identity through an anthropological perspective provides a holistic approach to the diverse and dynamic relationships between people and food. My research examines one individual food producer participating in a LFS, and as Trubek (2008) and Feenstra illustrate "Data are nice; stories are better" (2002:103) in influencing stakeholders and policymakers.

Lévi-Strauss and Douglas, as founders of food anthropology, illustrated through their research that there is more to the role of food in society than consumption. Food and its production and distribution are powerful sociocultural features that give meaning to individual social relations. Although the universal story exists, the individual story is more interesting. The individual story came before the universal story. Upon concluding our final interview Rusty himself summed up the topic of our discussions with, "It's about the human story".

It is important to acknowledge that Rusty's story is still in progress; his life is not over yet. Implicit throughout our meetings, interviews, and Rusty's stories was the importance of shared values between Rusty and his customers. These shared values around safe, healthy, tasty, and sustainable food involve the moral imperatives centered around food and foodways (Trubek 2008, 2006, Mäkelä and Arppe 2005, Haden 2005, Lévi-Strauss 1969, 1962, Douglas 1966). So, when I asked him how he teaches values, he replied with his characteristic laugh, "If I knew that I could write a book and be a millionaire". For now he has to be content with educating consumers one at a time, a process he endures because he has too, but also one that he seems to thoroughly enjoy.

The life story interview is also an effective research method to collect data that conveys the subjective experiences of an individual. Rusty's story tells us something about him as a person. I believe Rusty's story represents what Trubek (2008, 2005) would refer to as his foodview. His perceptions of healthy food and farming practices serve as categories to frame and explain these social relationships which give meaning to his world and his identity in that world. Whether you believe it is a nostalgic reconnection to the land, a new concern for the sustainability of that land and the food it produces, or an intrinsic and spiritual connection to a certain cosmology, for Rusty's story to mean something it must resonate some truth to him, the consumer, and the reader. Rusty projects a visceral belief that what he is doing with his life is good for him, good for the food he produces, good for the customers who purchase his products, and good for the soil. For Rusty, soil represents life.

Rusty: What I am going to do in my lifetime is leave this here for someone else to carry on with. Hopefully I will be able to teach and get it to where that person can take what I have built up and continue to make it better yet. So that is what basically drives this guy to do what he does.

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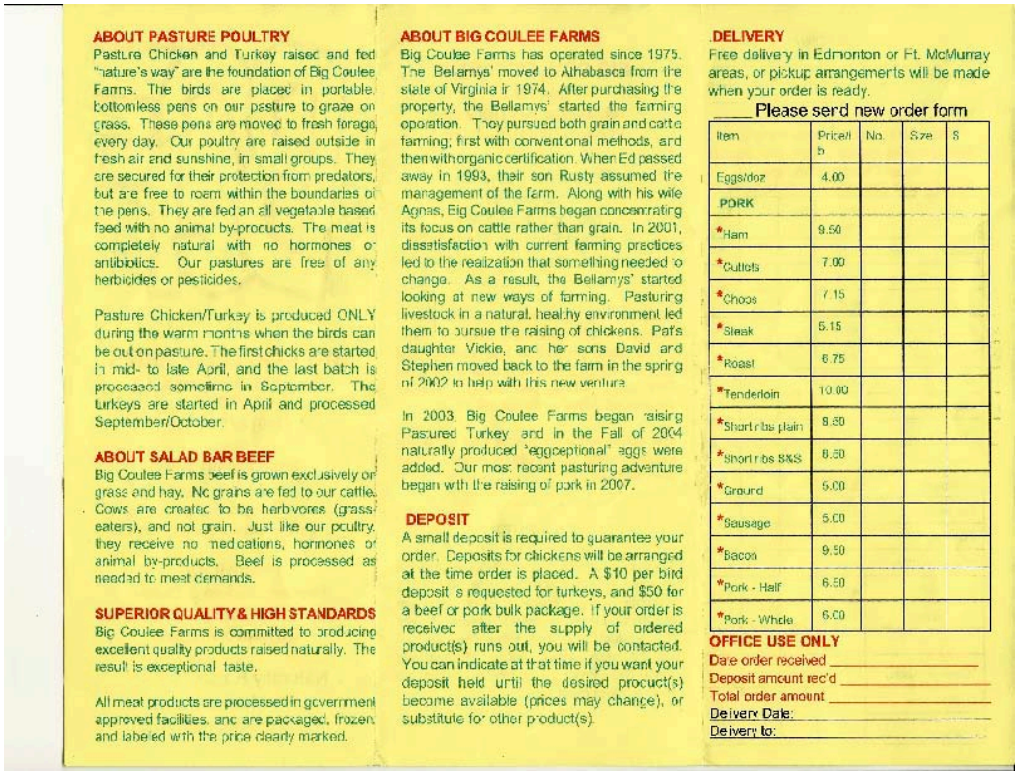
Appendix A



ABOUT PASTURE POULTRY

Pasture Chicken and Turkey raised and fed "nature's way" are the foundation of Big Coulee Farms. The birds are placed in portable, bottomless pens on our pasture to graze on grass. These pens are moved to fresh forage every day. Our poultry are raised outside in fresh air and sunshine, in small groups. They are secured for their protection from predators, but are free to roam within the boundaries of the pens. They are fed an all vegetable based feed with no animal by-products. The meat is completely natural with no hormones or antibiotics. Our pastures are free of any herbicides or pesticides.

Pasture Chicken/Turkey is produced ONLY during the warm months when the birds can be out on pasture. The first chicks are started in mid- to late April, and the last batch is processed sometime in September. The turkeys are started in April and processed September/October.

ABOUT SALAD BAR BEEF

Big Coulee Farms beef is grown exclusively on grass and hay. No grains are fed to our cattle. Cows are created to be herbivores (grass-eaters), and not grain. Just like our poultry, they receive no medications, hormones or animal by-products. Beef is processed as needed to meet demands.

SUPERIOR QUALITY & HIGH STANDARDS

Big Coulee Farms is committed to producing excellent quality products raised naturally. The result is exceptional taste.

All meat products are processed in government approved facilities, and are packaged, frozen and labeled with the price clearly marked.

ABOUT BIG COULEE FARMS

Big Coulee Farms has operated since 1975. The Bellamys' moved to Athabasca from the state of Virginia in 1974. After purchasing the property, the Bellamys' started the farming operation. They pursued both grain and cattle farming; first with conventional methods, and then with organic certification. When Ed passed away in 1993, their son Rusty assumed the management of the farm. Along with his wife Agnes, Big Coulee Farms began concentrating its focus on cattle rather than grain. In 2001, dissatisfaction with current farming practices led to the realization that something needed to change. As a result, the Bellamys' started looking at new ways of farming. Pasturing livestock in a natural, healthy environment led them to pursue the raising of chickens. Pat's daughter Vickie, and her sons David and Stephen moved back to the farm in the spring of 2002 to help with this new venture.

In 2003, Big Coulee Farms began raising Pastured Turkey, and in the Fall of 2004 naturally produced "eggceptional" eggs were added. Our most recent pasturing adventure began with the raising of pork in 2007.

DEPOSIT

A small deposit is required to guarantee your order. Deposits for chickens will be arranged at the time order is placed. A $10 per bird deposit is requested for turkeys, and $50 for a beef or pork bulk package. If your order is received after the supply of ordered product(s) runs out, you will be contacted. You can indicate at that time if you want your deposit held until the desired product(s) become available (prices may change), or substitute for other product(s).

DELIVERY

Free delivery in Edmonton or Ft. McMurray areas, or pickup arrangements will be made when your order is ready.

____ Please send new order form

Item	Price/lb	No.	Size	$
Eggs/doz	4.00			
PORK				
*Ham	9.50			
*Cutlets	7.00			
*Chops	7.15			
*Steak	6.15			
*Roast	6.75			
*Tenderloin	10.00			
*Short ribs plain	8.50			
*Short ribs BBQ	8.50			
*Ground	5.00			
*Sausage	5.00			
*Bacon	9.50			
*Pork - Half	6.50			
*Pork - Whole	6.00			

OFFICE USE ONLY

Date order received _____

Deposit amount rec'd _____

Total order amount _____

Delivery Date: _____

Delivery to: _____

Appendix B

Outline Guide for Life History Interview

Preamble: Indentify myself and my position and relationship with the University of Alberta.
Introduce the project and provide an overview of background information.
Review the focus and intention in detail.
Discuss the structure of the project, methods involved, time commitment, etc.
Review consent form, obligations, responsibilities, guiding ethical principles.
Obtain written consent from participant.

Ultimately the life story interview is about the interviewee's story. My role is to be a guide in drawing out that story. As Atkinson (1998) suggest the less structure a life story interview has the better, and usually the fewer questions asked the better the story. While this reflects the general approach to my study I also have some direct research questions in mind (see ethics application). To that end I have prepared this as an outline guide for the interviews.

Interview #1 The early Years
Rationale-to establish rapport with the participant; make them feel comfortable with the interview process and the voice recorder
-explore the participant's early years, growing up as a child, family life
-to get the participant to reflect back on their youth, through memory and nostalgic recollection to probe for insight into possible connections to agriculture, food habits, alternative decision making that goes against the perceived norm
-build a foundation for subsequent interviews, possible areas to explore

Guide questions:

1. To start with, tell me about yourself and your living situation.
   Probe*Occupation/work? Who you live with?
   *How long in your current situation?
2. Tell me about your family background Ancestral heritage.
   Probe*Tell me where you were born.
   *Do you know where your parents were born? Grandparents?
   *Tell me about your family; parents, siblings, grandparents, etc.
   *Describe your relationship with them.
   *What feelings come up when you think about your parents as you grew up as a child?
   *What did your parents do to earn a living while you were growing up?
   *What about your grandparents? Other extended family members?
3. Describe the community you grew up in.
   Probe*What do you remember about the place growing up as a young child?

*Was it a farming/rural/urban community?
*What was the population? Ethnic Background?

4. What was it like growing up in your house or neighbourhood as a young child?
   Probe*Was your family different from other families in your community?
*How? Why?

5. What family, cultural celebrations, traditions, or rituals where important in your early life?
   Probe*Tell me what you remember about them.
*Did food play a role in any of these events?
*If so, describe.

6. Was religion important in your family while growing up?
   Probe*How did this influence you?

7. What was your role in helping out in the kitchen/home?
   Probe*How involved were you food preparation, production (i.e. cooking, preserving), purchasing, and consumption practices growing up as a child?
*Did you go grocery shopping with your parents? Tell me about it.
*Did your family have a garden? Can you describe it?
*What was your role in helping out with the garden?

8. What were some of your interests growing up as a child/teenager?
   Probe*What do you remember about school?
*What were your favorite subjects in school?
*Were you active in any sports or other activities?

9. What are some of your fondest memories growing up?
10. What beliefs or ideals do you think your parents tried to teach you?
11. What was the most important lesson you learned as a child outside of the classroom?

Interview #2 Moving to Alberta

Rationale-to inquire about and to get the participant to reflect about their move to Alberta and their present location. Probing for possible connections relating to agriculture, food choices and practices, ideologies and alternative lifestyle decisions.

-Habitus (Bourdieu) structure and practices evolving?
-what motivated the move and what decisions were involved in the process?
-how was the family involved in this process?

Guide questions:

1. Why did your family move to this present location?
   Probe*Have you lived in other places since leaving your original home?
*Where there any experiences within these places related to farming and food?

2. Describe the process of your family moving to Alberta and this community?

Probe*Were there specific reasons for choosing this region, community, farm land?
*Was the farm already established when you moved here?
*What type of farm was it? Grain, other crops, livestock, etc.?

3. What type of farming did you practice when you first go settled?
   Probe*Describe some of the farming practices used when you first began
4. Describe some of the struggles, challenges and success from the early years.
   Probe*Economic, social, political, environmental?
*What condition would you say the farm and the land were in when you moved here?

5. What was the community like when you first moved here?
   Probe*What was the farming community like?
*Were they a close knit group that helped each other out?
*How would you describe the farmers (neighbours) in those early years?

6. Did you belong to any local associations that promoted or supported farming?
   Probe*Would you say your family was active in the farming community?
7. Describe the years leading up to 2001 in terms of your farming experience.
   Probe*What was happening in agriculture in general?
*What was happening in your region? Commodity prices, costs, etc.?
*What were the economic, political, environmental issues affecting you during the time period?

8. What factors influenced you to change from conventional farming practices of the time to your current practices and beliefs?
   Probe*Economic, political, environmental/sustainable, religious, social, etc.?
9. Describe the transition process in terms of challenges, struggles, and successes.
   Probe*Was it difficult of easy?

Leave time to explore and probe issues from the first interview that may need clarification or require further investigation.

Interview #3 The Present and the Future

Rationale: To explore the present material level by drawing on the ideological and reflexive aspects that has shaped the interviewee to his current situation?

-how are individual practices, beliefs, and cultural values shaped by and in turn how do they then shape the local environment, specifically the local food environment?

-to explore how these practices and cultural values, used in his farming business, food and agricultural decisions, may provide alternative perspectives and influence the beliefs and the behaviours that shape other aspects of his life.

Guide Questions:

1. I wanted to explore something from the last interview that suggested you were part of the hippy or back to earth movement of the time. Can you expand upon that?
   Probe*Would you describe yourself as a hippy back then?
   *What was the role of organics in the back to earth movement?
2. Can you describe the Aboriginal presence when you first moved here?
   Probe*What impact or relationship did they have on agriculture in the area?
3. What products did you sell right after the transition in 2001?
   Probe*Where did you sell them?
   *Who was your typical customer?
4. Describe the process of trying to market your products then.
5. What was the role of your sister and her sons on the farm when they returned in 2002?
6. What products do you sell today?
   Probe*Where do you sell them?
   *Who is your typical customer today?
7. Has your marketing strategy changed since you first made the transition?
   Probe*How/why?
8. How do you personally feel about the way you now farm and conduct business?
   Probe*What do you like or dislike about it?
   *What areas are you still trying to improve upon?
9. What do you think about Joel Salatin's comments: that an alternative farmer needs to be a sissy?
   Probe*Not masculine/not hardwired to be sensitive to nature?
   *solar and instinctual energy?
   *the need to build forgiveness into the system?
   *create a forgiving food system?
10. Describe the presence or impact of the forest industry in the area?
    Probe*The oil and gas industry?
    *Fort McMurray and the tar sands projects?
11. Describe what the following term means to you?
    Probe*Organics, sustainable, free range, grass or pasture fed?
12. How would you compare the success of the farm and business now to before you made the change in farming practices?
13. Do you consider your decision to make the transition from conventional farming to be a financial success?

14. How do you think your current beliefs and values regarding your farming and business practices are shaped by other social and cultural factors like religion, politics, economics, environment, health, etc.?

15. How do you think your beliefs practices, and values used to make your farming and business decisions influence your beliefs, practices, and values in other aspects of your personal life?

Probe*Family, social, economic, politics, religion, environment, etc.?

16. Has your role or position in the community changed since you shifted your agricultural and business practices?

Probe*How/why?

*Do you think the community shares your beliefs and values concerning your farming and business practices?

17. What is in store for you in the future in terms of your farming and business practices?

Probe*What would you like to see happen to your farm and business?

Leave time to explore and probe issues from the second interview that may need clarification or require further investigation.

Potential follow-up questions to always have at the ready:
What was that experience like for you?
What happened next?
Tell me more about that?

Appendix C

Interview #4 Follow-up
The rationale for this interview was to follow up on some of the data from the first three interviews and to clarify some of the details I was not quite sure about.
-to prepare for my upcoming conference presentation.
-to provide richer context to the data already collected.
-to verify some of the information provided in the earlier interviews.
-to take more photographs, without snow, to use in presentation.
-to continue to develop our relationship to enable me to pursue this project as my Master's Thesis for the next year.

Guide Questions:

1. What is the size of the farm?
   Probe*Has it always been this size?
2. How many animals do you have now?
   Probe*How many did you have before you changed to alternative farming methods?
3. What products do you actually sell?
   Probe*Do you sell your products at the farmers' markets or do you just take orders?
   *Do you sell any fresh meat or is it all frozen?
4. Explain the different sizes, shapes, and colors of your eggs?
   Probe*Do you strive for any kind of standardization in your products?
5. Do you use the terms conventional and alternative farming?
   Probe*Describe them to me?
6. Do you plant any crops right now?

Leave time to explore and probe issues from this interview that may need clarification.

Potential probe questions to always have at the ready:
What was that experience like for you?
What happened next?
Tell me about that?