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From value to values: sustainable consumption at farmers markets

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Abstract Advocates of environmental sustainability and social justice increasingly pursue their goals through the promotion of so-called "green" products such as locally grown organic produce. While many scholars support this strategy, others criticize it harshly, arguing that environmental degradation and social injustice are inherent results of capitalism and that positive social change must be achieved through collective action. This study draws upon 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork at two farmers markets located in demographically different parts of the San Francisco Bay Area to examine how market managers, vendors, and regular customers negotiate tensions between their economic strategies and environmental sustainability and social justice goals. Managers, vendors, and customers emphasize the ethical rather than financial motivations of their markets through comparisons to capitalist, industrial agriculture and through attention to perceived economic sacrifices made by market vendors. They also portray economic strategies as a pragmatic choice, pointing to failed efforts to achieve justice and sustainability through policy change as well as difficulties funding and sustaining non-profit organizations. While market managers, vendors, and customers deny any difficulties pursuing justice and sustainability through local economics, the need for vendors to sustain their livelihoods does sometimes interfere with their social justice goals. This has consequences for the function of each market.

Keywords Economic embeddedness · Farmers markets · Food · Race · Social justice · Sustainable consumption

Introduction

The past decades have witnessed an incredible rise in the popularity of local and organic food and in direct marketing models such as farmers markets,[1] u-picks, and community supported agriculture. This rise is supported by a literature and philosophy that envisions sustainable agriculture as a means to reconnect to local place and civic life (see, for example, Kloppenberg et al. 1996; Lyson 2004). Together, these economic forms and the ideology that supports them make up what is commonly referred to as sustainable agriculture. Supporters view sustainable agriculture as both an industry and social movement that "equitably balances concerns of environmental soundness, economic viability, and social justice (Allen et al. 1991, p. 34). Sustainable agriculture's social change goals are in line with the emerging just sustainability paradigm, which sits at the intersection of ecological sustainability and social justice (Agyeman 2005).

Many scholars acknowledge and even celebrate economic exchange based on this moral worldview as a strategy for social change (DeLind 2002; Lyson 2004). Others, however, fear that so-called "sustainable consumption" has become an easier, more individualistic substitute for collective action (Magdoff et al. 2000; Guthman forthcoming; Szasz 2007). This critique is particularly appropriate to sustainable agriculture's social justice concerns. Indeed, Allen (2004) argues that the sustainable agriculture movement has struggled with social

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[1] I choose not to use the apostrophe in order to denote that farmers markets belong to all those who participate, rather than merely to the farmers.

justice goals such as farmworker rights and food access precisely because it emphasizes the economic success of small farmers.

Markets function according to a logic predicated on individual choice and the maximization of self-interest. Collective action, on the other hand, asks individuals to temporarily sacrifice their own needs for the good of the group (for example, a striking worker giving up wages so that everyone can receive better pay). While economic sociologists have certainly established that markets are embedded in social contexts (Grattnover 1985) and that those contexts can be emotional (Zelizer 2005) and even moral (Beamish and Biggart 2006), economic exchange remains governed by a "marketness" and "instrumentalism" that conforms to the individualist logic stated above (Block 1990). According to Hinrichs (2000, p. 297), who applies this "new" economic sociology to farmers markets, "a more critical view of embeddedness recognizes that price may still matter and that self-interest may be at work, sometimes even in the midst of vigorous, meaningful social ties." In order to pursue collective goals—environmental sustainability and social justice—through economic strategies, farmers market managers, vendors and customers must actively weave together individual economic and collective political goals. In this paper, I explore the frameworks through which they do so. More specifically, I analyze and deconstruct farmers market managers', vendors', and customers' understandings of the potential for sustainable consumption to bring about positive social change.

The farmers markets I study exist in vastly different demographic and cultural contexts. One market, located in West Oakland, brings produce grown by "chemical-free"[2] African American farmers to an area comprised largely of low-income, food-insecure African Americans. Managers and vendors at the West Oakland Farmers Market frame economic support for their market as a tool for racial empowerment. The other market features locally grown, organic foods and exists in a North Berkeley neighborhood nicknamed the "gourmet ghetto" for the numerous high-end restaurants found there. While some market participants are people of color, both the market and its surrounding area are predominantly wealthy and white. What these farmers markets share is a foundation in ethics. While many farmers markets are managed by marketing associations, my cases are run by non-profit organizations with explicitly stated social justice and environmental sustainability goals.

[2] These farmers use the term "chemical-free" to indicate that they use organic practices, but are not certified by the USDA or any other third party.

After a brief review of the literature and description of my research methods and cases, I will describe the narratives through which farmers market participants align local economic exchange with just sustainability. Farmers market participants describe their vendors as governed by moral values in contrast to the greedy, industrial agribusiness system motivated only by profit. Indeed many participants construct farmers market economics as not only morally but politically embedded in anti-corporate struggles for social and ecological change. In addition, many participants characterize local economics as a pragmatic, do-able alternative to failed attempts to reform a government that promotes corporate capitalism, environmental destruction and, in the case of West Oakland, institutionalized racism. Drawing on vendors' and managers' experiences with failed policy campaigns and non-profit organizations, farmers market participants reinforce their belief that morally embedded economic exchange is not only congruent with just sustainability, but the most promising channel through which to pursue it.

However, contradictions between financial and ethical goals do occur at each of these markets. Because environmentally sustainable products tend to carry a premium price, these contradictions tend to involve participants' social justice priorities. This has particularly important consequences in West Oakland, where social justice concerns are more prominent.

Scholars often posit collective action as the solution to the limitations of morally embedded economic exchange as a social change strategy. As farmers markets managed by non-profits with stated just sustainability goals, my cases offer an important lens into the relationship between collective and economic strategies. For that reason, my research illuminates several directions for future work on the relationship between sustainable consumption and collective action.

Debating sustainable consumption and local food

Scholars have debated the question of whether exchange strategies can bring about just sustainability. Many who believe consumption inadequate to the task derive their work from Schnaiberg and Gould's Marxist-inspired and influential concept of the treadmill of production, which posits ever-increasing economic production as responsible for environmental degradation (1994). The tension between economic strategies and what Magdoff et al. (2000) term a "left analysis" is exemplified by their editorial response to Henderson's optimistic portrayal of local food system activism in the edited volume *Hungry for Profit*. "A complete transformation of the agriculture and food system, it might be argued, requires a complete transformation

of the society," respond the editors (Magdoff et al. 2000, p. 175). Local food systems, they claim, are insufficient to challenge capitalist, industrial agriculture.

Sustainable agriculture scholars and activists, however, have found potential in the ability of sustainable consumption to create meaningful environmental and social change. Consumer demand may sensitize corporate agriculture to environmental and community concerns, which can be seen in the recent introduction of organic product lines to corporate behemoths like Wal-Mart and Safeway. This would indicate the possibility of large-scale, consumer-led changes in the production of food (Murdoch and Miele 1999). Furthermore, local sustainable agriculture may reinvigorate democracy, bringing together "the economic, social, cultural, and political dimensions of community life" (Lyson 2004, p. 28). Because sustainable agriculture brings environmental activism into both rural and urban spaces, it can even help to "unbind" environmental activism from its traditional focus on wilderness preservation (Gottlieb 2001).

Literature focused specifically the social justice aspects of sustainable agriculture and local food is critical of sustainable consumption. Social justice concerns are marginalized by the movement's emphasis on the economic survival of individual small farms (Allen 2004). Guthman criticizes sustainable agriculture activism for reifying notions of private property (2004b). DuPuis and Goodman (2005) take issue with the movement's unreflexive use of the term local, a trope that has often been deployed by political conservatives and even white supremacists. In addition, the high cost of local, organic food prohibits low-income people from participating in local food systems (Hinrichs 2003). From this perspective, the sustainable agriculture movement's difficulty attending to social justice concerns is directly tied to its strategic emphasis on encouraging individual consumption choices rather than generating policy aimed at changing production.

While much of this literature is quite critical of local food system activism, perhaps the most pressing concern is that it eclipses the potential for broader collective action, or what Julie Guthman calls "the politics of the possible" (see also Szasz 2007). Even DeLind, who is supportive of civic agriculture, argues "something is wrong when the metaphors and logic of this [economic approach to civic agriculture] begin to eclipse or negate more complex identities and self-awareness" (DeLind 2002, p. 218). Because they rely on economic strategies, local and civic agricultures reproduce neoliberal subjectivities (Guthman forthcoming), reifying the notion that social change can and should be pursued through individual market decisions. The limits denoted by these analyses mirror calls for sustainable consumption to be more explicitly tied to broader collective action (Princen et al. 2002).

Often unaware of these critiques, individuals and organizations are increasingly adopting sustainable consumption as a strategy toward achieving just sustainability. My research examines the narratives through which they understand this strategy and its relation to the more collective, policy oriented ones advocated by the scholars described above.

Research approach

Data contained in this article draws largely on my experiences as a participant-observer at two farmers market for 18 months between April 2005 and November 2006. During this time, I undertook the role of regular customer and occasional volunteer in order to observe and interact with farmers market managers, vendors and customers. This allowed me to understand each market's just sustainability goals and the ways that various strategies are deployed and understood. I also conducted 35 interviews with market managers, vendors, and regular customers, through which I explored these themes in greater depth. Interviews lasted between 20 min and 1.5 h,[3] and were digitally audio-recorded and transcribed. I also administered a brief survey to 100 customers from each market, from which I concluded that each market's just sustainability goals are shared by its clientele.[4]

I entered the West Oakland Farmers Market well aware of the exploitative potential inherent in relationships between middle-class white researchers, such as myself, and low-income communities of color (Said 1994). Initially somewhat suspicious of me, the market manager worked with me to design an approach through which West Oakland residents would benefit something from my study. We devised a strategy that involved paying participants for their interview time and hiring a West Oakland resident who attended a local university as a research assistant. After several months I became a fixture at the farmers market, and was invited to attend vendor meetings when they began to occur. This series of five meetings, which revolved around management disputes, gave me an opportunity to witness managers' and vendors' explanations of

[3] Some interviews were conducted during the market and tended to be quite short. Others were conducted outside the market and lasted much longer. I always attempted to procure time outside of the market to do interviews, but after failing to do so with several key North Berkeley vendors I conducted shorter ones instead.

[4] Each survey was conducted through a sample of convenience. Through both open and closed-ended questions, respondents were asked why they shop at the farmers markets. In West Oakland, collective responses such as support for local farmers outnumbered personal interest responses such as procuring food. In North Berkeley, personal interest responses predominated, but by a very small margin.

why they participate in the West Oakland Farmers Market and what they hope to accomplish by doing so.

In North Berkeley, access was immediate and unquestioned. When I broached my research topic, vendors, managers, and customers were generally excited about my study. A voluntary advisory committee of farmers market managers and regular customers meets monthly to make decisions pertaining to prepared food vendors. Their meetings are open to the public and I attended six, which provided insight as to the priorities and principles of the farmers markets' most dedicated supporters.

During the farmers markets and related meetings, I jotted notes about conversations and interactions. These regularly included verbatim phrases, which served as mnemonic cues from which I later wrote detailed, expanded fieldnotes. From my jottings, I aimed to produce a richly evocative representation of the farmers market experience. I also wrote theoretically informed ethnographic "asides" (Emerson et al. 1995) in which I began to explore preliminary directions for analysis.

As I acquired more data through observation and interviews, I searched for emergent patterns and coded accordingly. This approach is consistent with Glasser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory methodology. Through my asides, I explored theoretical relevance to existing scholarship in the tradition of Burawoy's (1991) extended case method.

The North Berkeley and West Oakland farmers markets

Every Thursday evening, a busy North Berkeley street in the so-called "gourmet ghetto" is blocked off by about 20 tent stalls. Equal parts festive spectacle and commercial venue, the market features tables artfully arranged with rainbows of brightly colored produce, bread, fish, and sweets. A wide, grassy median running through the center of the street is dotted with trees and provides a place for customers, especially those with young children, to gather and savor their purchases. The market is *exclusively* organic, reflecting the affluent yet progressive character of the neighborhood. Indeed my survey results reveal that 78% of market patrons are white, 48% have at least a bachelors degree, and 31% earn more than $100,000 per year. The North Berkeley farmers market embodies a logic in which the consumption of locally grown, organic food is a way to connect to a sense of beauty and community associated with nearby rural areas. While some participants are involved in non-profit organizations working to make this produce accessible to low-income consumers, others view the consumption of high-cost organic produce as a result of individual ethical consumer choices rather than economic ability (Alkon, forthcoming).

Several miles to the south, amid West Oakland's notorious "lower bottoms" district, bright orange tents and funk music create a community event from a drab, ordinary street. This market aims to connect two groups. One is the remaining African American farmers, whose numbers are so few due, at least in part, to a century of discriminatory practices through which they were denied the USDA loans that helped even small white farmers transition to mechanized agriculture (Gilbert et al. 2002). The other is the residents of a predominantly African American neighborhood containing numerous liquor stores, but no place to buy fresh, culturally appropriate food (Alameda County Department of Public Health 2005). The market's mostly African American vendors[5] offer a variety of "chemical free" (though not certified organic) produce and other products. While the clientele is much smaller, and no grassy median is available, many customers and vendors visit for hours. The market began in 2003 as a partnership between Mo' Better Foods, a non-profit organization operating a farm stand at a local high school and the West Oakland Food Collaborative, which was dedicated to supporting food-security activists in West Oakland. Sometimes casually referred to as a "black market," foods offered highlight African American cuisine such as greens, yams, and black-eyed peas, and special events such as Juneteenth and Black History Month celebrations highlight African American culture. While prices are lower in order to make this food available to West Oakland residents, my survey revealed that the market's customers are primarily middle-class blacks hailing from wealthier parts of the San Francisco Bay Area and low-income but highly educated young whites who have recently moved to the neighborhood. Managers' efforts to encourage the participation of the low-income, African American neighborhood residents the market was designed to serve have been largely unsuccessful. While the North Berkeley market is quite lucrative, West Oakland vendors barely break even. For this reason, there is high turnover among vendors.

While marketing surveys reveal that health concerns, rather than environmental ones, motivate the overwhelming majority of organic food consumers (Klonsky and Greene 2005), West Oakland and North Berkeley farmers market shoppers are often motivated by ethics. When 100 West Oakland customers were surveyed and asked to evaluate the importance of various rationales for market attendance, 58% assigned the highest value to "support for black farmers and small businesspeople." In North Berkeley, 49% named

[5] While participants often refer to the market as a "black market," and the most prominent farmers are black, Hmong and Mexican farmers have also been included.

"support for local farmers and small businesspeople" as most important. My fieldnotes and interview data reveal that participants view farmers markets as a way to lessen the ecological cost of both food production (lack of pesticides) and transport, and to sympathize with those perceived to be struggling economically. Managers, vendors, and customers alike view local economic exchange as a way to pursue just sustainability. The next section of this paper presents the frameworks through which participants in the farmers markets I study align these goals—traditionally pursued through collective action—with morally embedded economic exchange.

Embedded exchange as economics

Economic sociologists argue that *all* economic exchange is paradoxically characterized by both an individualist logic aimed at the maximization of self-interest and social relations. Participants in the farmers markets, however, characterize industrial agriculture as governed only by the pursuit of profit; in so doing they emphasize the social nature of their own economic exchange.

Human need not corporate greed

Farmers market managers, vendors, and customers stress the morally embedded nature of their own economic transactions. They attribute environmental degradation and human oppression not to capitalism itself, but only to large corporations described as divorced from the results of their decisions. In this way, market enthusiasts align local consumption with just sustainability while minimizing contradictions between capitalism and their social change goals.

Most often, farmers market participants encourage customers to perform economic transactions with market vendors in order to provide economic support for ecologically sustainable and environmentally just livelihoods. Because farmers market producers do not use pesticides and travel relatively short distances to attend the markets,[6] support for these businesses allows for a smaller amount of natural resource use and builds, rather than destroys soil fertility.

In a letter to its members, Ecology Center director Martin Bourque emphasized the positive consequences of economic support for the Berkeley Farmers Markets:

> The Ecology Center measures our success on the success of the small family farmers who grow our fresh fruits and vegetables all year long…. [By shopping] at the Berkeley Farmers Markets, you're safeguarding a way of life while feeding yourself: protecting family farms and rich topsoil.

Buying from North Berkeley market farmers is depicted as a way to ensure environmental sustainability and small business. Similarly, in an e-mail to the Mo' Better Foods mailing list, West Oakland market founder David Roach described the need to purchase food grown by black farmers:

> In our efforts to re-develop a direct connection between Black farmers and [residents of] the East and West sides of Oakland, we ask that you shop weekly at the Mandela Farmers Market. I cannot tell you, how gratifying it is to see the same people each and every week, rain or shine, supporting our farmers, by shopping at our market.

Again, the idea of support is central. But in West Oakland, customers are asked to both support struggling producers and to sustain the market itself so it can provide for a food-insecure community. Recognizing this, one middle-class survey respondent responded to a request for any additional comments by stating "in this neighborhood, support for a market like this is very important to keep it afloat." Purchasing from market farmers is a way to both ensure the economic survival of African American farmers and to increase the food access of West Oakland residents.

Participants further align farmers market consumption with just sustainability rather than capitalist economics through comparisons to large corporations. Linda, a North Berkeley market manager, posits this opposition in the following way:

> [The market is] a way to counter the corporate globalization that's going on really fast right now by creating a local economy where the money that you put into your community goes back into the community and not some corporation that wants to take your money away.

According to this logic, the negative consequences of capital accumulation are attributed only to large corporations. Local economies, on the other hand, are embedded in concern for local people and place and can therefore provide an alternative to environmental destruction and human exploitation.

In West Oakland, the farmers market is similarly posited as aligned with local communities in opposition to larger businesses. Dana, the activist who convened the West Oakland Food Collaborative, exemplifies this logic:

> [The West Oakland Farmers Market is about] finding a way to make a living in a community from our own

[6] Most market vendors travel less than 100 miles. The average food in a grocery store is estimated to have traveled 1300 miles (Halweil 2002).

> innovation and talent. Building a network within the community, which is equal to building a community that takes care of each other's needs. We can self-sustain outside of the dominant system. I feel like all the systems around us are breaking down. Trying to build a community where we're focused on health and morals and values and neighbors instead of consumerism, and how to build that and make it self-sustain.
>
> [Our] consumerism isn't profit driven. It's more meeting needs driven. And it's true, we are trying to get each other to consume. And we do want to buy and sell from each other. But I think it's more on a scale of… if we consume in a way that helps us sustain our neighborhoods or our communities, that's different than consuming in a way that sustains a mega business that's separate and distinct from us. I think our bottom line is a little different. It's not all profit motive.

Like many farmers market participants, Dana views local-economics as embedded in "health, morals, and values" while she characterizes other types of economic exchange as not only destructive but fated to collapse.

In order to continue to buy and sell from each other outside "the dominant system," farmers market participants must encourage local entrepreneurs, and especially local farmers, to supply goods. According to David, the West Oakland market founder, the market provides "a way to get your business started outdoors, and we're working to get you [more permanently established]." A former business teacher at a local high school heavily influenced by Booker T. Washington's model of black empowerment through economic development, David promotes local entrepreneurship because it creates a vibrant local economy in which both commerce and employment can occur.

According to participants at each market, this morally embedded local economy can provide a competitive challenge to corporate capitalism. Kirk, the North Berkeley market special events director, declared that "we do not want to see our food supply controlled by corporations. They're blowing it in so many other ways and they already control so much of the food supply!" Farmers markets such as North Berkeley allow him to "know where [my food is] coming from so that I don't have to be a part of that, so that I can find an alternative to that and feed that." By attributing only to corporations the destructive qualities that many scholars assigns to capitalism, Kirk maintains a narrative in which local, sustainable businesses, such as those featured at the farmers market, are aligned with just sustainability.

Moreover, and even more optimistically, some farmers market participants believe that local entrepreneurs will eventually force destructive corporations out of business. One West Oakland customer described the motivations behind her own entrepreneurial goals. "Everyone has to put out a product," she said excitedly. "That's how we're gonna beat the big boys and overthrow the corporations. We need to put out a product!" According to this logic, consumers will choose to support local businesses, creating more demand for locally produced goods and less for those produced by corporations.

Proponents of farmers markets believe they provide economic support for local entrepreneurs in the hopes of creating vibrant, local, morally embedded economies. As individual purchasing decisions are mobilized to build local food systems, consumers draw power away from an environmentally and socially destructive industrial agriculture. According to this logic, environmental and social justice reform will come through shifting market demand.

Sacrificing for the cause

While farmers market participants recognize that vendors generate income through market sales, they emphasize altruistic rather than instrumental motivations for market participation. On one occasion, market managers discussed their respect for one farm employee,[7] a middle-aged white man involved in a number of volunteer pursuits. "Bob is great," Rosalee said. "He's worked for Blue Heron [farm] for about 13 years or so, just 'cause he's friends with [the owners]. He doesn't do it because he needs to. He [used to be an] accountant." Market managers regard his motivations, which are based on voluntarism rather than economic need, in a positive light. These managers' conversation implies a somewhat lower level of respect for farm employees for whom financial motivations are primary.[8]

Farmers, market managers, and customers often perceive the decision to farm organically as a willingness to sacrifice more lucrative financial opportunities to contribute to the larger social good. When I asked Herman, a market manager, to describe his decision to work for the farmers market, he said he wanted to better understand "the practical side of farming, what it takes to run the farm as far as, for example, business and marketing and how to stay afloat as a farmer because it's hard to make a living." While some farmers have confided that they're able to live middle-class lives, others stress the financial difficulties of

[7] I use the term farm employee to refer to the primarily white individuals hired to work at the North Berkeley market. I reserve the term farm labor for the primarily Latino/a workers who do the bulk of the cultivation. The farmers in West Oakland are too small to hire either non-family farm labor or employees to work at markets.

[8] Klienman (1996) found that admiration for those whose contributions are perceived as based on altruism and economic sacrifice serves to reinscribe privilege.

farming. When asked why she farms, one young woman farmer, who comes from a wealthy family, replied, "I think probably all of us do it [because], we gain some deep emotional satisfaction from it. Because we certainly don't make any money. We don't make shit." Another vendor, who often laments his own financial woes, described the homes of several of the other farmers. [One farm couple] doesn't live in a big house," he said. "They live in a small one. [Another couple] lives in a trailer." These responses applaud organic farmers for choosing to farm because it provides a social good, despite the lack of economic returns.

In West Oakland, amid meager sales, vendors constantly reaffirm the preeminence of just sustainability over economic goals. One afternoon, I overheard Jason, at that time the market manager, discussing a new vendor. "He just sees it as a business opportunity," he said. "I'm looking for people who do more than that." Many other farmers have participated in the market for brief periods of time, but left due to meager sales. As one packed up early on his first day, Charlotte, a long-time vendor, remarked "they wanted to make money and that's not what this market's about."

Vendors are eager to talk about the sacrifices they make to participate in this farmers market. Leroy, a market farmer, views the market as an opportunity to provide healthy food and nutritional advice to a population in need. "There's a lot of people I love here, and they're sick," he said emphatically, "so I'm doing everything I can to be here." "There are sometimes that we don't make no money, but there's something here," said Mr. Scott, another market farmer. "This connection [between black farmers and black urban communities] should have been made so many years ago." West Oakland farmers market vendors and managers trumpet their dedication to just sustainability while criticizing those for whom economic motivations are most important.

Vendors and managers emphasize the economic sacrifices made by middle-class individuals who choose to become organic farmers and vendors selling at low-income and therefore less lucrative markets. In this way, they distance the capitalist practices at the core of the farmers market from a capitalist system characterized as greedy and destructive.

Embedded exchange as politics

According to farmers market participants, local economic consumption is not only a different, morally embedded kind of economics, but also a new kind of politics. In participants' frameworks, local economics is a pragmatic, do-able alternative to working within an increasingly neoliberal political system. Against a backdrop of failed national and local policy campaigns, participants characterize local economics as a way to build just sustainability in spite of, rather than through, a political system unable or unwilling to guarantee it. In this way, farmers markets are just one in a field of community organizations decrying "the inevitable failings of state provision of welfare, crime control, education and much more, and demanding that individuals, families, communities, and employers take back to themselves the powers and responsibilities that, since the nineteenth century, have been acquired by states, politicians and legislators" (Rose 1999, p. 2).

Voting with your dollar

Due to the overwhelming rollback of environmental protection and entitlement funding that has occurred in the past few decades, it is not surprising that advocates of just sustainability look to other strategies. Recognizing the improbability of government action on environmental and social justice issues, Rosalee, a North Berkeley market manager echoed a popular refrain, stating "I feel like I have more power with my dollar than with my vote." Similarly, Kirk, the North Berkeley Farmers Market special events director, describes his decision to work for a farmers market rather than attempt to influence policy in the following way:

> I think that people continue to work on the government, but the government hasn't shown us anything good for an awfully long time. Democrat or Republican, they still don't get it…. With the government, it's like fighting fires with them. Trying to control the spread of GMOs and the release of the new most toxic chemical, like trying to stop the move from methyl bromide to methyl chloride or whatever it is…. We can't even get methyl bromide phased out and that's been worked on for years! No matter how much money has gone into the organic market, it's just a small fraction of what agribiz can muster.

Kirk emphasizes local economics as a response to the perceived improbability of policy reform. While Kirk bemoans the difficulty of creating national policy aimed at the creation of just sustainability, several North Berkeley market vendors describe their own failures to do so on the local level. Inspired by the previous successes of nearby areas, Judy LaRocca of LaRocca Vineyards, was active in Butte County's campaign to ban genetically modified organisms (GMOs). However, Butte was one of four California counties whose voters failed to approve ballot initiatives in 2006. "We're gonna be eating some pretty scary things pretty soon," LaRocca told a customer during a market following the measure's defeat.

Yvette and Mike Hudson of Hudson Fish Company worked with a coalition of activists to lobby the federal government for the non-renewal of Pacific Power's lease on the Iron Gate Damn on the Klamath River. While it produces a minimal amount of hydroelectric power, the damn blocks salmon runs, denying access not only to commercial fishermen but to Native American tribes who approach access to traditional fishing runs as an issue of food security (Norgaard 2005). When the Bush administration announced its myopic plan to address declining salmon populations by eliminating the summer fishing season, Yvette discussed the need to close the dams with farmers market customers. "The feds killed all the salmon, so we're going out to protest so at least they won't renew the dam leases," she explained. "I mean, if I have to sacrifice, it would be nice if the people who made the problem fixed it." Despite the protests, the Bush administration severely restricted salmon fishing on the Klamath River, which affected only small and subsistence level fishermen, while declining to remove the damn.

These examples support farmers market participants' beliefs that political reform in the interest of just sustainability is improbable. The improbability of political success lends support to participants' desires to pursue their social change goals through morally embedded economic exchange.

Feelings of political disenfranchisement experienced by North Berkeley participants pale when compared to the understandings evidenced by West Oakland Farmers Market vendors. In West Oakland, political efficacy is so low that the state was never discussed as a potential ally. In fact, when safety violations occurred, such as customers bringing dogs or bicyclists riding through the market, vendors stressed the importance of rule enforcement because, in the words of one farmer, "the state would love to shut us down." African Americans generally tend to express lower levels of trust in government, particularly in the wake of allegations of racially motivated voter fraud during the 2000 and 2004 elections (McLean 2006). The treatment of black farmers by the USDA, which is publicized by the West Oakland Farmers Market, also gives credence to a worldview in which the state is a perpetuator of institutional racism.

The NGO-industrial complex

In West Oakland, economic exchange is often described as an alternative to pursuing just sustainability through what one vendor refers to as the "NGO-industrial complex." While the market is managed by one non-profit organization, and several others sponsor booths, the farmers market's central goal is to pursue just sustainability through local economics. Several market vendors are former NGO employees. For example, Leroy Musgrave worked for several non-profit organizations to teach gardening to Oakland youth. Twice, his employment ended dramatically due to funding difficulties and interpersonal dynamics with program directors. In each case, according to Leroy, the land was sold, leaving him without a job and the youth without a garden they were beginning to learn from and enjoy. After these experiences, Leroy decided to farm on his own, rather than work for non-profit education projects.

Some West Oakland vendors feel that the funding structure of non-profit organizations often distracts them from the interests of the local residents they intend to serve. After participating in radical political actions, including anti-police brutality campaigns, protests against the International Monetary Fund and organizing with Anarchist People of Color, Xan, a West Oakland vendor, graduated from college with the goal of starting a non-profit organization. Xan describes the process through which she became disillusioned with the non-profit sector and came to adopt a business model:

> What I saw in the process of researching what it takes to do it and working for them, I realized that most non-profits are actually run like businesses. All the bureaucracy and dynamics…. Most non-profits spend 60% of their time and energy fundraising, and that's just not a model I want to replicate. And I thought it would be interesting if you could just be a business and I thought about a lot of the models from [the Black] Panthers allegedly selling drugs and guns to, now, the Huey P. Newton project that sells hot sauce.

While she still identifies as anti-capitalist, Xan aligns small businesses with justice and sustainability by describing them as a preferred alternative to the non-profit model.

Both the North Berkeley and West Oakland farmers markets exist fundamentally to create ecologically sustainable and environmentally just food systems. Each market pursues that goal through the development of a local economy. In order to do this, farmers market participants must distance the kinds of economics they promote from those of the corporate capitalist system, which they regard as responsible for environmental degradation and social injustice. They do so by positing local economics as morally embedded in concern for the local community while aligning larger businesses with the need for ever-increasing profit that characterizes the treadmill of production. Participants also describe local economics as an attainable alternative to failed political campaigns and frustration with non-profit models. Local business, according to this logic, is not only consistent with but the most proper vehicle for market participants' social change

goals. Through these narrative strategies, farmers market participants minimize tensions between capitalist economics and just sustainability.

Remaining tensions: limits of economic strategies

Many scholars have been critical of consumption, no matter how morally embedded, as a substitute for political reform (Princen et al. 2002; Szasz 2007). Despite market participants' claims that tensions between just sustainability goals and economic strategies do not exist, I have observed situations in which a vendor must choose between her or his social change goals and economic needs. This is more applicable to social justice goals than environmental ones, because ecologically produced goods tend to carry a premium price. For this reason, these tensions have particularly significant consequences in West Oakland.

Participants in the North Berkeley and West Oakland farmers markets have seldom considered the limitations of pursuing just sustainability through local economics. When I asked Linda, a North Berkeley market manager, whether she feels that vendors' needs to succeed economically get in the way of their social and environmental goals, she replied, "No, I've never felt that." She paused a moment to think about this new idea before deploying the above-mentioned support narrative described above. "Because part of the sustainability is being able to support the farmers. They should be making money for what they do." She depicts the economic success of local farmers and entrepreneurs as a pathway to sustainability.

When contrasts between vendors' economic needs and just sustainability goals do occur, they are not interpreted as such. For example, Antonio, who sells vegan, organic Mexican food at the North Berkeley market, claims that his business helps to establish a just and sustainable food system. As a Mexican American man, he is particularly concerned about environmental and health issues among Latino/as. But when I asked why he chose not to sell at the Fruitvale farmers market, located in a nearby, predominantly Latino neighborhood, he cited lack of sales. While in Fruitvale, Antonio's products could have served as a healthy, culturally appropriate choice, the need to sustain his business pushes him to cater to an affluent, largely white clientele. The compromise Antonio makes parallels Allen's (2004) critique that the sustainable agriculture movement often marginalizes social justice concerns such as food access in order to emphasize the economic success of small businesses.

And while North Berkeley market participants often differentiate vendors from those interested primarily in profit, several North Berkeley farmers describe sustainability largely in economic terms. The following quote represents the viewpoint of the farmer who was most extreme on this point:

> People talk about sustainable agriculture. The first thing I think about in sustainability is financial sustainability…. While a lot of the work is enjoyable and you can't put a price on it, some of it is frustrating and difficult so you need to be paid for your time. There's a number of things that I'm trying to accomplish. First and foremost is making a living.

Tellingly, while this farmer "made a ton of money" selling his first farm to a large organic-industrial company, he continues to employ a largely undocumented labor force who have no collective bargaining power, despite the fact that some of them have worked for him for over two decades. While he claims an environmental ethic motivated him when began farming over 20 years ago, this farmer expressed frustration with what he calls "the groove quotient," in which "starry-eyed kids" see organic farming as a kind of "drop-out, cop-out." For this farmer, ecological and environmental justice goals pale when compared to financial ones.

This farmer's attitudes and decisions are likely fostered by the influence of industrial agriculture on the organic sector (Guthman 2004a, p. 301). As a result, "the conditions set by processes of agro-industrialization undermine the ability of even the most committed producers to practice a truly alternative form of organic farming" (ibid). While this particular farmer could afford to share power with his employees, neither the state nor his customers require it of him. Other farmers claim that they would prefer to do this, but are prevented from doing so by the need to succeed economically. Guthman describes the conventionalization of organic agriculture, through which, as the industry grows, it comes increasingly to resemble the industrial agriculture it seeks to replace. This conventionalization trajectory is perhaps the most serious limitation of morally embedded economic exchange as a political strategy.

While market managers and customers promote and support local organic producers in the interest of justice and sustainability, vendors must prioritize their own economic needs. To a certain degree, because organic products carry a premium price, ecological goals are consistent with economic ones. Social justice priorities, on the other hand, such as providing food to those without access and offering benefits to farmworkers are necessarily at odds with increased profits. But because participants construct the economic success of local, organic farmers as a pathway to just sustainability, they are unable to understand this contradiction.

In West Oakland, because justice concerns are the most prominent, reliance on economic strategies has

consequences for the market's ability to continue. After selling strawberries and other produce in West Oakland for several years, one farm family left the market when offered a space in a more profitable one. While they understood and sympathized with the West Oakland market's goal to provide for those without other forms of access to fresh produce, they eventually chose to participate in a more profitable market. Many other vendors have come to West Oakland for only a few weeks before leaving, presumably because sales are so meager. These examples highlight a difficult component of pursuing environmental justice through economic strategies. Entrepreneurs are necessary to supply the product, but cannot be compensated as they would be in wealthier locales.

Like Linda in North Berkeley, the West Oakland market managers leave these tensions between capitalism and just sustainability unresolved. When I asked David, the market founder, how his social change goals interact with capitalist strategies, he responded, "It's not about social change and capitalism because I don't like the word capitalism. Capitalism is about how do you capitalize on, a few people trying to capitalize on the majority of people and that's not going to do anything for social change." Exploitation, according to this worldview, is rooted in individual desire rather than the logic of the system. David's denial of capitalism's role in the West Oakland Farmers Market prevents him from seeing why retaining vendors has been so difficult.

Power to the people: collective action at farmers markets

Scholars have suggested that the limitations of pursuing just sustainability through local production and consumption would be less troubling if economic strategies were linked to broader collective action (Murphy and Cohen 2001; Princen et al. 2002). Indeed the most serious challenge to ecologically sustainable and socially just agriculture—conventionalization—could be prohibited by state regulation (Guthman 2004b). The farmers markets I study encourage networking and provide policy-oriented activists with a venue in which to do their work. By advocating for policy that can support a just and sustainable food system, activists move beyond a focus on local economics to challenge the industrial agriculture system. However, the promotion of collective action receives much less attention from market managers, vendors, and customers than economic exchange.

In North Berkeley, the Ecology Center manages an information booth that features flyers for various events. Some flyers solicit participants for collective action on causes ranging from the protection of old growth trees to environmental justice campaigns to close down noxious factories. In addition, individuals collecting petition signatures for environmental and other progressive causes often target the farmers market as a fruitful sight. And while those seeking cash donations are not allowed to solicit within the market, they can often be found approaching customers at its edges. Through such grassroots organizing, these activists connect moral economies to political processes with similar goals.

Similarly in West Oakland, volunteers from the Ella Baker Center's "Reclaim the Future" program have distributed literature concerning their work. Prominent activists working with the EBC are aware of the market, and consider its founder and manager to be allies. In 2007, the Ella Baker Center, along with a coalition of ecological and environmental justice activists, lobbied the City of Oakland to establish a "green jobs core" to offer extensive training and paid internships in renewable energy and energy efficient products to Oakland residents with what they call "barriers to employment." While this is not agricultural policy, linking sustainability and employment is very much in line with this farmers market's goals.

Ecology Center director Martin Bourque claims that the Berkeley Farmers Markets serves to educate policy makers about the possibility of ecologically sustainable and socially just agriculture. He compares the farmers market's ban on GMOs and methyl bromide[9] to another Ecology Center project, the Berkeley Recycling Program. Activists pointed to the Berkeley Recycling Program, the first in the country, when lobbying California officials to begin a statewide one. Because mandatory recycling had been done in Berkeley, activists could claim it was possible at the state level. Similarly, when writing letters in support of national organic standards defined to exclude GMOs, the Ecology Center was able to point to its market's successful ban. Bourque hopes that the market's policies may also help to lay groundwork for future and broader restrictions on GMOs or methyl bromide.

Farmers markets can create vibrant public places in which grassroots organizers discuss their political work with those already interested in local, organic food. These examples illustrate the ways that farmers markets can link economic exchange to broader collective action embedded in the same moral framework. However, market participants, and even the physical design of the markets

[9] Methyl bromide is widely considered to be one of the most noxious pesticides in US industrial agriculture. While it has been linked to both ozone depletion and farmworker health, it continues to be used on strawberries and other crops. The North Berkeley market's requirement for exclusively organic produce would bar the use of methyl bromide or GMOs. However, this ban still affects prepared food vendors as well as the few non-organic produce vendors at the Ecology Center's two other markets.

themselves, prioritize economic exchange over collective action. So for example, while the non-profit organizations running each market are aligned with policy campaigns, market managers do not use the market as a site to campaign. Even at the Ecology Center table, the physical space in which most North Berkeley collective action occurs, flyers for collective action take up a small amount of the space dominated by sustainable merchandise and politically conscious bumper stickers. And in West Oakland, there is no space designated to political organizing at all.

Conclusion

In choosing to advocate for just sustainability through a particular kind of consumption, farmers market participants negotiate contradictions between economic strategies and their just sustainability goals. Participants cast support for market vendors as a way to lessen the ecological costs of food production and sustain the livelihoods of individuals whose work is morally embedded in an ethical worldview. Individuals who sacrifice more lucrative economic opportunities in order to participate in organic farming or to sell at a market in a low-income neighborhood are particularly well regarded. Proponents of farmers markets also posit morally embedded economic exchange as a pragmatic, doable alternative to policy change. They point to federal and state governments that subsidize agribusiness and are increasingly hostile to ecological and environmental justice issues. Several West Oakland vendors have turned to business models after disappointing efforts to pursue their just sustainability goals through non-profit organizations.

While farmers market participants cast their economic and just sustainability priorities as wholly compatible, vendors sometimes sacrifice the latter to maintain the former. This is particularly true of social and environmental justice goals, which, unlike ecological ones, do not demand higher prices. Citing economic necessity, North Berkeley vendors choose to work in wealthier locales, which prevents even those who recognize the needs of food-insecure communities from attending to them. In addition, agribusiness exerts significant influence on organic standards and practices through which the latter increasingly resembles the former. In West Oakland, vendors often leave the market due to a lack of sales. Market managers, vendors, and customers, however, do not recognize these contradictions as consequences of their desires to pursue a political goal—the implementation of a just and sustainable agricultural system—through economic exchange.

As farmers markets managed not by marketing associations but by non-profit organizations with stated just sustainability goals, my cases have the potential to link local consumption to collective action. While each of the non-profit organizations managing the market do so in important ways, the bulk of market managers' emphasis remains on promoting local economic exchange.

The relationship between sustainable consumption and collective action stretches far beyond the scopes of farmers markets and agriculture. The so-called "green economy," increasingly advocated by the popular press as the solution to environmental problems, represents an exciting area for research. Future work could examine how sustainable consumption is understood in industries other than agriculture, the role that social justice issues play in green consumption, and whether and how advocates of sustainable consumption promote collective strategies. The green economy represents an increased valuation of environmental issues. The task for academics and activists alike is to build bridges between proponents of sustainable consumption and sustained collective action.

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