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**Gone to Market:**

*Perceptions, Motivations, and Values of Farmers Market Participants in Burlington, Vermont*

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## **Abstract**

This study applies mixed methods research to investigate agents' perceptions of and motivations for participating in farmers markets. Trends in values among farmers market staff, vendors, and customers of three farmers markets in Burlington, Vermont are examined within the broader narrative of the local food movement in the United States. Extrapolated through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and anonymous customer surveys, differences in participants' goals reveal tensions between what an ideal farmers market should look like and accomplish. The concepts of value and alternative economies present in farmers markets are situated within an evaluation of anthropological theory on value, economy, and community. Finally, farmers markets' accessibility is discussed in relation to federal nutrition assistance programs and their impact on farmers market economies.

*Key Words:* Farmers market, local, nutrition assistance, value, alternative economy

## **Index of Abbreviations**

BFM: Burlington Farmers Market

EBT: Electronic Benefit Transfer

ONE: Old North End

SFVT: Slow Food Vermont

## **Introduction**

### ***Prelude***

“People are constantly learning, they’re making that social connection, that transparent connection between farm to table with their farmers, and I think that’s empowering for people who are so encumbered by the laws of modern speed in 2014 that oftentimes they have to live vicariously through those real meaningful experiences...Even though it’s not always genuine, they’re not always able to get that experience through going to the co-op or going wherever, being able to see that transparency and even though they don’t grow their own food or produce their own food, that’s as close as they’ll ever get to it, is getting it from the farmer who’s got the dirt under his fingernails...They can see that, and I think that’s meaningful for people whether they acknowledge it or not” (BFM Prepared Food Vendor 01, Personal Interview July 3, 2014).

“I sort of sympathize with [the customers], I mean I don’t have to buy my vegetables and it’s like yeah, food’s expensive...Sometimes I feel a little defensive because we worked really hard, we work really hard to get this to you, and...I don’t think it is more expensive than they would find it in the grocery store, but they have a perception of that often. Sometimes it is but a lot of times it’s actually not” (ONE Agricultural Vendor 02, Personal Interview August 1, 2014).

These two interviews with vendors from two different farmers markets in Burlington, Vermont struck to the core of my interests in beginning this project. First, I wanted to know if farmers market visitors had a broader meaning for coming to market than buying their groceries; the above prepared food vendor believed farmers markets were as much about sociality as they were about purchasing weekly dinner ingredients. Secondly, I was interested in better

understanding the pricing at farmers markets, and whether or not the foods offered there were always as expensive as customers perceive them to be.

The agricultural vendor explained that while people often perceive farmers markets to be expensive places to shop, in reality their prices are often lower than the grocery store on any given product. If this was true, why did the farmer still feel guilty over the food prices at market, and why did customers continue to insist that farmers market food was too expensive? As evidenced by the responses from these two vendors, there are several values embedded within the interactions and transactions that take place at farmers markets, complicating what may at first seem to be only economic exchanges of money and food. Based on the anthropological social theory that claims economic actions stem from one's culture, this thesis will explore how different understandings of the term *value* are intertwined into the motivations, beliefs, and exchange systems among different farmers market agents.

### ***Overview***

Food, no matter how we obtain it, comes at a price, and the perception of its cost often fluctuates depending on what the food item is and where it is being purchased. In the United States, farmers markets have been rapidly expanding as a form of direct sales, with the number of markets nationwide tripling between 1994 and 2009 (King et al. 2010:1). The United States Department of Agriculture defines a farmers market as “markets that feature two or more farm vendors selling agricultural products directly to customers at a common, recurrent physical location”, and there are currently 8,387 USDA-recognized farmers markets nationwide (USDA, AMS 2015). This is an increase from 2014 when there were 8,268 farmers markets across the country (USDA, AMS 2015). Despite their growth in numbers, however, farmers markets are



still not the most popular outlets to purchase food in the United States. The American public generally views farmers markets as expensive places to shop, where only a few items, if any, may be purchased on a weekly or seasonal basis (Claro 2011; King et al. 2010). When compared to grocery store price averages, however, studies have repeatedly shown farmers markets to be consistently less expensive than purchasing the same in-season foods at the supermarket, especially when comparing organic food prices (Claro 2011; Low et al. 2015:37-43; McGuirt et al. 2011; Sommer et al. 1980). Even while many people use the argument of price as to why they do not purchase more – if any – food at their local farmers market, many markets still see a returning crowd of shoppers and visitors each week. If people are not going to buy food at a farmers market, why do they go at all?

Perhaps the goal of purchasing food or concerns about its price are not as important in the minds of farmers market customers as are the social reasons for attending. Yet, if vendors and market staff are coming to market to create business and sell their products, and customers are coming there with intentions other than purchasing food, are farmers markets able to cater to both party's priorities while remaining economically viable? This thesis argues that farmers markets fill a market demand for direct sales as well as a demand for interactions between food producers and consumers, but differing goals within these groups require different modes of assessment when evaluating priorities and achievements of the farmers market. I propose that farmers markets' success and growth are both limited by differences in expectations between market customers and the vendors. Based on data collected in Burlington, Vermont, I show how customers prioritize social aspects of the market and desire changes to facilitate the sociality and promote the fun atmosphere of the market, while vendors and managers are focused on economic success and the expanding business of the market. My research suggests that changes to

accommodate one set of preferences will therefore likely require compromises between the two differing sets of expectations and perceptions of the farmers markets' success.

### ***The Loca(l)vore Movement***

The locavore (or localvore, as it is called on the east coast) movement is the name given to the growing trend since the early 2000s to eat “foods grown locally whenever possible” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2015). Reflecting the movement’s popularity, the term locavore was chosen as the Oxford English Dictionary “Word of the Year” in 2007 (Nizza 2007). “Locavore” was coined in 2005 by four women in San Francisco who wanted a way to describe what they perceived to be a more environmentally friendly food system, encouraging others to purchase and consume foods that come from within a 100-mile radius of the home (Wu 2005). The 100-mile radius became known as the local “foodshed” (Wu 2005). It is important to note that there is nothing inherently positive or negative about any scale, and that eating locally does not guarantee lower energy expenditures or healthier or environmentally sustainable foods (Born and Purcell 2006). That being said, the early motivations behind the locavore movement emphasized the desire to lower personal reliance on industrial agriculture as well as a call to reduce negative environmental impacts of the modern food system.

Ongoing re-evaluations of the importance of eating local foods call into question the efficacy of eating locally in bringing about systematic change in the food system. In regions such as the Midwest for example, eating local foods could mean reducing the diet to no more than the corn and soybean crops currently grown in the majority of the nation’s breadbasket. In other, colder areas of the country, eating locally would also be highly dependent on eating seasonally, with growing seasons numbering only 120-180 days and therefore severely limiting the diversity

and quantity of foods available, compared to the nearly year-round growing seasons of warmer regions such as southern California (The National Gardening Association 2014). The popularity of the locavore movement, represented in the quantity of direct to consumer sales and consumer willingness to shop at farmers markets, has also remained highly concentrated in the northeast and west coast regions (Low et al. 2015:3, 6, 8). Though the movement continues to expand, its popularity is limited and its scope is not always systems-wide. This becomes problematic when locavore enthusiasts push for national changes based on the regional capabilities of their own food system that may not exist elsewhere in the country. These incompatibilities across food systems may result from differences in climate, geography, or food policy. The geographic polarity of the movement has also popularized specific regions and destinations on either coast, such as the famous Chez Panisse restaurant in Berkeley, California and the town of Hardwick, Vermont. While the success of the food movement in certain areas is something worth celebrating, it does not validate ignoring the progress and setbacks in other areas' as they work to change their own food systems.

### ***Local is the New Organic***

When the organic food movement witnessed revitalization during the 1970s back-to-the-land movement, organic food was largely synonymous with ecologically sustainable agriculture, small-scale food systems, local production, and improved quality of life for both food producers and consumers (Guthman 2014). When “organizations began to define ‘organically grown’”, however, it was defined “specifically as a production standard for farmers (and later processors), not as a food safety standard for consumers and surely not as an alternative system of food provision” (Guthman 2014:111). Thus “in the process of codification, many of the more radical

goals associated with organics were sacrificed” (Guthman 2014:111). Buying certified organic kale, for instance, therefore promised nothing about the labor practices or treatment of workers on the kale farm, and there was no mention of alternative food systems such as increased direct markets or community gardens in the kale’s description. Instead, the certification promised a discreet set of production standards only.

While organic certifications from the United States Department of Agriculture can clarify the type of practices used in producing certain food items, consumers are beginning to understand that organic promises nothing beyond its definition:

“The USDA organic seal verifies that irradiation, sewage sludge, synthetic fertilizers, prohibited pesticides, and genetically modified organisms were not used” in the production of organic crops, and “that producers met animal health and welfare standards, did not use antibiotics or growth hormones, used 100% organic feed, and provided animals with access to the outdoors” in the case of organic livestock (USDA 2013).

Just as in the 1970s, a modern organic certification cannot guarantee environmental activism, short food supply chains, agroecology, or social justice in the food system. While these values in organic foods played a significant role in the pre-certification organic movement, priorities in organic farming standards have shifted, as reflected in the USDA policy. With more and more organic farms scaling up and resembling conventional farms – or indeed being only one plot of a larger conventional operation – consumer faith in organic foods is faltering (Guthman 2014:44, 46-51).

Organic agriculture guarantees neither long-term environmentally sustainable practices nor social equity for all involved in the organic food production chain, and there is no inherent

connection between the purchase of organic produce and supporting community-level farms (Guthman 2014:46-51). Now, customers are frequently more interested in shopping for local produce than they are for organic, and they are beginning to understand that “there are many diverse goals and ideas included in in the term ‘sustainable agriculture’” (Allen and Sachs 1991:1). To some consumers, organic may still seem to be the most fulfilling aspect of sustainable food, but to others, local foods are gaining consideration when choosing which “sustainable” foods to purchase.

“Many consumers believe that frequenting direct sources, rather than purchasing products with complex value chains and certifications such as the USDA organic program, is a more effective means of influencing environmental quality or reducing uncertainty (increasing credibility) about a particular claim” (Thilmany et al. 2008:1308).

While the organic movement once carried the flag for sustainability and social justice, organic is “simply not making big news anymore” and people are now more frequently making these associations with local food (Matthews 2011:54). Consumers are recognizing that “organic is important, but it shouldn’t be a religion” (Figueroa 2014). Oftentimes, small local producers forgo the official USDA organic certification due to the expense of obtaining and maintaining the seal of approval. For a small farm, annual expenses of a USDA inspection and organic approval can cost between several hundred and several thousand dollars, oftentimes too large of a fee for small farms to easily afford (USDA 2013). In place of the official certification providing consumers with information about the organic food product, in direct and intermediary markets consumers can usually ask producers about their production practices to decide for themselves if the food is organic, or at least produced with values they identify as important.

This engagement does require a certain level of added consumer effort, but it could be argued it is no more trouble than searching among food labels to identify which contain the USDA organic seals in the grocery store. While focusing on local or organic production models is not a panacea for the ills of the current modern food system, the fact that customers are beginning to say, “I guess strawberries aren’t in season anymore’, and not ironically” means that more is being taken into consideration than just a food’s certification or lack thereof (Belli 2007:36). Seasonality, often linked with provenance, is now coming into light as consumers grapple with the many terms and slogans used to advertise produce at market. Organic is just a growing practice, and local is subjective at best, but a broader public understanding of the possibilities of what these words imply means increased consumer awareness of the complex systems responsible for their food production. At the Burlington Farmers Market, for example, customers frequently asked farmers about their growing practices and could learn that many of the farms at the market were indeed organic although they did not carry an official USDA certification. At this market in particular, apple producers frequently came under criticism from non-local market visitors for not being organic. Many more customers, however, understood the extreme difficulties of raising organic apples in the northeast and were content to purchase local apples grown as sustainably as possible. At the Old North End Market, customers would ask about vendors’ practices and ethics if their businesses were not based directly out of Burlington. Ultimately, customers had the buying power to decide for themselves if a producer who lived less than twenty minutes away or one whose food was unofficially organic was worth their business. More often than not, customers would indeed buy the vendors’ foods after these informational exchanges.

## *The Resurgence of Farmers Markets in the United States*

According to a joint report by the USDA and the Economic Research Service, “as of 2014, there were 8,268 farmers’ markets in the United States, having grown by 180 percent since 2006” (Low et al. 2015:2). Though these numbers do not always reflect increased sales to farmers due to increased transportation and marketing costs, they do represent “increased consumer interest” in direct to consumer sales (Low et al. 2015:2). This growth in farmers markets’ popularity in recent years is due not only to a surge of interest in the consumption of local foods and in supporting local businesses, but also because of renewed appreciation for the concepts of community and community participation. Increasingly in the United States there are movements to create more public spaces conducive to community-engagement and public health such as parks and pedestrian walkways (American Planning Association 2015; Levitz 2014). The hope for these spaces, similar to the goals of many farmers markets, is to bring members across the community together to socialize while simultaneously improving the community’s atmosphere and environment. At farmers markets, I argue that social values such as these sometimes outweigh the value customers place on the economic goals of the farmers market. This pushes the farmers markets to reflect these interests and they become places more focused on socializing than on purchasing groceries, but this is not necessarily a bad thing as increased public interest in farmers markets generally means improved sales for farmers.

What a farmers market consists of varies greatly among markets, but the identifying definition of a farmers market, according to the USDA, is “a common facility or area where several farmers or growers gather on a regular, recurring basis to sell a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables and other locally-grown farm products directly to consumers” (Lakins 2007:2). Depending on the day of the week and time of day the market is held, farmers markets can range

from mostly prepared foods on a Friday night market to a midweek craft fair to a nightly or weekend market providing produce for dinner. In Vermont, the driving definition of a farmers market is the meeting of “two or more producers of Vermont agricultural products” for “five or more regularly scheduled times” throughout the year (Vermont Farmers Market Association 2013). There are currently seventy-five registered farmers markets within the state of Vermont, some operating year-round (Vermont Farmers Market Association 2013).

### ***An Abbreviated History on the Concept of Markets***

The concept of a market – the system in which people transport and exchange goods and services – is one of the oldest features of human societies and one discussed early on within the economic anthropological literature. In order to better understand the genealogy of market economies and the complex dimensions in which people take part in exchange, I offer a brief analysis of these concepts from Adam Smith (1976 [1776]), Friedrich Hayek (1945), and Keith Hart (1973). I will begin with Smith as he proposes an early liberal view of the market, then turn towards Hayek’s view of markets as the most central and efficient way to participate in human life. Finally, Hart provides insight into the informal economy, perhaps the most suitable perspective when studying the farmers market economy. Through Hart’s analysis of the intertwined existence of the formal and informal market economy, we can gain insight into the complex systems of exchange present within farmers markets’ economies.

In his *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith proposes three main tenements of the market economy: it is natural, it is social, and it is self-regulating (1976 [1776]). Smith understands the market as an extension and development of humans’ natural inclination to exchange, claiming the division of labor in market economies is the “consequence of a certain propensity in human



nature...to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another” (1976 [1776]:17). Because humans are inclined to participate in exchange, Smith theorizes that by designing our economy to accommodate these tendencies we can increase not only the number of goods and services exchanged among people but also the degree of usefulness people hold in one another’s lives (1976 [1776]). Smith’s famous dog metaphor further exemplifies humans’ ability to make deliberate exchanges and contracts as distinct from any other animal species (1976 [1776]:17). While “nobody ever saw a dog make a fair and deliberate exchange of one bone for another with another dog”, humans are unique in their ability to craft exchanges in which the objectives and outcomes are clear: “Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want” (Smith 1976 [1776]:18). In this way, the market can help make people useful to one another using their individual talents and resources, thereby creating a more manageable and more highly functioning society. By bringing people into contact with one another in the context of social exchanges, the market continues to be self-regulating in the exchanges desired and satisfied among participants.

As a neoliberal economist, Hayek proposes a return to Smithian economics in the mid-twentieth century (2003 [1945]). Hayek emphasizes the market as the most efficient way for humans to develop exchange networks, particularly focusing on the transaction of information rather than the exchange of goods and services (2003 [1945]). Hayek’s analysis of the importance of the market contributes to the understanding of farmers markets as places of complex exchanges which entail goods, services, and knowledge, discussed in this paper as economic, social, and cultural exchanges. Hart also provides insight into farmers market economies by recognizing the importance of informal economies in addition to formal economies through a case study in Ghana (1973). While “the distinction between formal and

informal income opportunities is based essentially on that between wage-earning and self-employment” in Hart’s paper, and most people at the farmers market could be considered self-employed, it is the concept of two different levels of economic engagement that fits well with the economic opportunities realized at farmers markets. The formal economy of a farmers market primarily consists of the money earned from a vendor selling her goods, with this portion of income going towards paying the vendor’s labor, production, and employment costs. The informal economy of farmers markets, however, is just as important in contributing to vendors’ income as the formal economy. Informal economic activities include trading and bartering for other vendors’ goods, and building relationships among vendors and customers to guarantee future business. As Hart emphasizes, it is essential to recognize that the market of formal exchange and the dynamics of the informal economy are intertwined and cannot be clearly separated within any one transaction or exchange event (1973). This is particularly true with the exchanges made at farmers markets, and will continue to be discussed in this paper under the varying definitions of exchange and value present at farmers markets.

### ***Vermont’s Food System***

Similar to many other states in the country, Vermont depends on a complex combination of Vermont-produced, nationally produced, and imported foods to sustain its residents. Vermont is also unique, however, in the success many of its small-scale food producers and food industries have found. Cities such as Burlington, Hardwick, and Stowe, among others, are excelling in bringing the best of Vermont’s food products to the general public through farmers markets, food hubs, food co-ops, and restaurants. Vermont foods such as artisan cheeses, maple products, and craft beer are gaining notoriety nationwide, while Vermont milk and beef are

already widely sold on the national market (USDA 2012). With a public that is becoming more interested and engaged in increasing Vermonters' consumption of Vermont-made foods and improving the level of nutrition and independence in the food system, tourists and locals alike need not look far for locally produced foods. Organizations such as Dig In Vermont (2015), The Center for an Agricultural Economy (2015), the Vermont Fresh Network (2015), and the Farm to Plate Network (2015) are working to facilitate the on-the-ground connections among consumers, producers, and distributors from Vermont and beyond. These organizations then employ a wide range of publicity efforts, including websites, social media outlets, and public forums to expand the accessibility and knowledge of Vermont's food system and its many food products.

Despite the incredible bounty that Vermont provides throughout the year, not all Vermont residents can afford to purchase it. To help low-income residents who cannot afford to pay for all of their own food, the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known as SNAP, works to help United States residents pay for food on a monthly basis (USDA, FNS 2014). SNAP is “the largest program in the domestic hunger safety net”, and it provides nutrition assistance in the form of “electronic debit cards” (USDA, FNS 2014). The debit cards are “known as Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards,” and they “can be used in more than 246,000 approved retail stores nationwide to purchase food. Eligibility is based on financial factors such as income and expenses available to the household, as well as immigrant status” (USDA, FNS 2014). In Vermont, SNAP comes in the form of 3SquaresVT, “a federal USDA program (formerly *food stamps*) that can help stretch your food budget so you can put three healthy meals on your table every day” (Agency of Human Services 2015a, emphasis original). Other government assistance programs include, but are not limited to:

- WIC, or The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

- Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP)
- Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP)
- National School Lunch Program (NSLP)
- School Breakfast Program (SBP) (USDA, FNP 2014).

There are also several national food distribution programs that act as both emergency food distributors and assistance programs for pregnant or breastfeeding women, Native Americans, and the elderly (USDA, FNS 2014).

While federal nutrition assistance programs do help lessen the burden of purchasing groceries for millions of people across the United States, the programs do not come without their own shortcomings. Benefits are only distributed once monthly, often resulting in families buying most groceries in the beginning of the month and ending up with little to no budget for food by the end of the month. In Vermont, additional benefits for shopping at farmers markets include Farm To Family coupons (Agency of Human Services 2015b) and the Harvest Health Coupon Program (NOFA 2014), but coupon distribution times and locations are often not convenient for working adults to access. Due to the wide array of national and statewide coupon and discount programs offered, there is also a general confusion among benefit recipients about which programs offer which benefits and where each can be used. For those benefit programs only accepted at farmers markets, markets are also not very convenient as they are usually not open daily and do not offer extended hours to accommodate those who work on weekends or weeknights, when markets are frequently held. While nutrition assistance programs are helpful to those who cannot bear the financial burden of food, there are still many limitations to how well the program works on an individual level.

### ***Field Site Selection and Research Objectives***

Keeping in mind both the amazing accomplishments of Vermont food producers and the struggle for all Vermont residents to access healthy, fresh, and local food, I can better explain why I chose Burlington, Vermont as the fieldsite for my research. Nationally, Vermont continues to accrue accolades as one of the most progressive states in the food movement, and it ranks first in the country for “direct-to-consumer farm sales through farmers’ markets, farm stands and CSA’s” (NASDA 2015). Within Vermont, the city of Burlington has been gaining similar recognition for its dedication to farm-to-table restaurants, farmers markets, and the new Masters in Food Systems program at the University of Vermont. The Burlington Farmers Market alone attracts 8-10,000 visitors weekly according to a 2012 estimate by the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont, and in 2014 it won the *Seven Days*’ “Seven Daysies” award for “Best Food Event” in the state (*Seven Days* 2014). While the attention given to Vermont’s food system continues to expand, the barriers to participating in the local food movement are simultaneously rising for people of low income.

I chose to study three of the farmers markets in Burlington, Vermont – the Burlington Farmers Market, the Old North End Farmers Market, and the Slow Food Vermont Agricultural Market – to better understand not only how farmers markets function in their role of getting fresh foods to the community, but how and for what purpose community members utilize farmers markets in the Burlington area. Among the three markets of interest, many of the same vendors participate in more than one of the markets, offering the same foods and produce at different times and locations each week throughout the summer. Despite this overlap, however, Burlington community members consistently express polarized perceptions about different farmers markets in town. These narratives include assumptions and opinions about the quality of

food and the atmosphere at each of the markets. For example, some markets are perceived as selling high quality yet overpriced foods, while other markets are thought to offer lower quality foods because of the market's lower food prices and general location. Additionally, many community members perceive farmers markets to be expensive places to shop, considering the food offered there elitist. If people want lower priced local foods, however, why do they speak poorly of the lower priced foods already offered at alternate farmers markets in town?

It was because of these perceptions that I wanted to better understand the underlying goals and motivations of people participating in farmers markets and what values they place in their exchanges at market. In order to accomplish this, I endeavored to examine the sociocultural as well as economic values held by farmers market agents. Through mixed methods research on the socioeconomic complexities of Burlington's farmers markets, this study aims to contribute to the emerging national interest in localized food systems and help in understanding the following:

1. What are the main priorities and values of farmers market vendors and customers, and are there differences between these groups' goals at market?
2. Is purchasing food the main goal for a majority of farmers market visitors, or do they come to the markets primarily to fulfill other values?
3. What strategies, if any, have the Burlington Farmers Market, Old North End Farmers Market, and the Slow Food Vermont Agricultural Market adopted to attract and accommodate socioeconomically diverse residents? How do federal nutrition assistance programs impact the farmers markets?

### ***Significance***

The anthropological and multidisciplinary perspective of this paper facilitates an investigation into the complexities within the literature about the inner workings of local food systems. This study contributes to the broader research already done on similar topics while exploring a deeper understanding of Burlington's food system and, more generally, the value and exchange systems present within farmers markets. My research brings new data to the field through mixed methods research, including anonymous surveys, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation. While these techniques are not unique to the discipline, Burlington's farmers markets as the foci are fairly new within the literature, especially when poised in a cross-market comparison. Overall, this study will be focused on bringing new data to the field of modern food systems research while offering insights to farmers market managers and vendors on how to improve market growth and increase customer appeal and accessibility.

## **Methods**

In spring 2014 I received an exemption approval from the University of Vermont's Institutional Review Board to begin field research on three of Burlington's farmers markets throughout the summer 2014. After receiving approval, I attempted to gain contact and forge connections between my three markets of interest: the Burlington Farmers Market, the Old North End Farmers Market, and the Slow Food Vermont Agricultural Market. Due to the typically busy schedules of farmers and farmers market organizers in spring just prior to the market and growing season, it was at first difficult to reach the market managers through email and phone calls. Eventually after gaining contact with the managers, both agreed to my interest in working with and researching the markets between the months of June through August 2014.<sup>1</sup>

## ***Research Sites***

Perhaps the most well known out of the three farmers markets of interest, the Burlington Farmers Market is a weekly Saturday market running from May through October located on the green in City Hall Park and on the section of St. Paul Street adjacent to it. The market is open from 8:30am-2:00pm with an average of 90-95 vendors and an estimated 8,000-10,000 weekly visitors. This population count comes from an estimate conducted in 2012 by the Northeast Organic Farming Association. The Burlington Farmers Market is managed by a paid, eight-member steering committee made up of seven market vendors and one community member who actively participates in the farmers market, in addition to the market manager who presides over meetings. The market manager is a salaried position, in addition to several paid employees who

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<sup>1</sup> The same person manages both the Burlington Farmers Market and the Slow Food Vermont Market.



work during market hours to manage traffic, set-up, break-down, and complete all debit and EBT transactions done through the market manager's tent.

The Old North End Farmers Market is located in the heart of the Old North End neighborhood of Burlington, setting up on the green of Dewey Park at the intersection of four main roads and across from the Integrated Arts Academy at the H.O. Wheeler School. The market is open on Tuesdays from 3:00-6:30pm from June through October and typically hosts four to six vendors. Because there was no previous population estimate for the Old North End Farmers Market, I spent my first few markets focusing on finding an average weekly customer population and came up with 300 people. I did this by observing market activities and recording anyone who walked through the park past the vendors, keeping count manually in a notebook. Market vendors and the manager alike were slightly surprised to hear how many people were visiting their market weekly. The market manager, who is paid an hourly wage, along with several volunteers who rotate shifts to staff the EBT machine, run the Old North End Market. The volunteers are compensated using the Member Workers program associated with City Market/Onion River Co-Op, the local food co-op in downtown Burlington. This allows the volunteers to receive a monthly 12% discount for working at the market for four or more hours.

The Slow Food Agricultural Market is the newest of the three farmers markets in Burlington, opening for the first time in the summer of 2013. This is a farmers market sponsored by Slow Food Vermont, the local chapter of the international group Slow Food, “a global, grassroots organization” which aims to “prevent the disappearance of local food cultures and traditions, counteract the rise of fast life and combat people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from and how our food choices affect the world around us” (Slow Food International 2015). The Slow Food Market runs every Wednesday, weather permitting, from

approximately 3:00-6:00pm beginning in July and lasting through October. It is located on the College Street sidewalk of City Hall Park. This market typically hosts between eight to ten vendors, but it was also lacking a population count. After carrying out a similar method as implemented at the Old North End Farmers Market, I found an average of 550 people visiting the Slow Food Vermont Market weekly. This average should be taken as a slight overestimation, however, as the Slow Food Market exists on a popular sidewalk in town bustling with activity, therefore making it difficult at times to distinguish true visitors to the market versus people walking by for other purposes. The Slow Food Market is run entirely on a volunteer basis, with a head market manager, a managing assistant, and several volunteers from either the community or from Slow Food Vermont who help to set up tables, arrange vendors, and act as an information source about Slow Food Vermont during market hours.

***Funding***

In the spring of 2014 I received the University of Vermont Public Impact Summer Research Award from the University of Vermont Office of Undergraduate Research, whose funds allowed me to have a stipend towards room and board for the summer, as well as funding allocated for participant incentives. The distribution of my grant can be seen in the tables below:

	Research Equipment and Supplies
Participant Compensation	300
Total Allocated	300

	Personal Living Expenses (June-August)
Housing	566/month
Total Allocated	1,698

Subjects who participated and returned a voluntary and anonymous survey were offered the chance to enter a raffle for \$25-worth of wooden coins, paid in the form of market tokens redeemable at the farmers market only. Drawings were held once a week for twelve weeks at two of the three markets, and all funds for both housing and compensation were used. Because the Slow Food Market is not registered with the state of Vermont as an official farmers market, it does not have a token system in place and no other form of compensation could be used for participant incentive as addressed by my IRB protocol. Hence, the funds were used for customer compensation at only the Burlington Farmers Market and the Old North End Farmers Market.

### *Ethnography*

Despite growing up in a small Massachusetts town with several old cow, pig, and vegetable farms, the extent of my knowledge of local food as a child was limited to one farmer's outrageously good homemade chocolate milk, some seasonal corn, pumpkins, and tomatoes if we passed by a farm stand on the ride home from town. My parents stressed a balanced diet, but local foods were never of great importance. In high school I worked in the farm stand of a small family farm one town over from me, and I began to better understand the challenges of farming on a small scale and for a public only marginally interested in local, fresh foods. While customers in the stand often balked at the prices of produce, the family that owned the farm often struggled to sustain themselves economically. By this time, many of the neighboring farms had shut down or the land had been sold for housing developments in many farmers' last chance to make a living from the land. The local farmers market had never been a huge success for either

vendors or customers as products were limited, vendor fees were high, and advertising was limited. Many food producers knew the farmers market was no place to make money.

In 2012, I came to Burlington to attend the University of Vermont. During my first few weeks at school, my friends and I would mosey downtown to the Burlington Farmers Market, and I was blown away by the size and variety of products there each week. Here, it seemed, the farmers market flourished, and I was curious as to how I could become more involved with such an amazing community event. I continued to visit the farmers market throughout the school year, but I went mostly to spend time with friends and only occasionally did I purchase any produce.

As a student at the University of Vermont, I often feel surrounded by a community of students and residents alike who are passionate about supporting local food systems and making healthy food more widely available and affordable. In the summer of 2014 I volunteered as a cooking instructor for Hunger Free Vermont's The Learning Kitchen program, hosted at the MIDDSummer Camp in Middlebury, Vermont. This camp was designed as a feeding program for children whose families were on or qualified for the 3SquaresVermont program, providing most of the children's meals throughout the week and teaching them how to manage chickens and small vegetable garden plots in addition to basic cooking skills. Volunteering with The Learning Kitchen helped me to better understand not only the challenges of shopping on a very tight food budget, but also the barriers to trying different fruits and vegetables that many people face such as unfamiliarity, price, and a lack of the needed cooking utensils and kitchen spaces to prepare them.

With this project, I wanted to enhance my understanding of the complex systems in place that allowed for such an impressive market as the Burlington Farmers Market to take place in the same state where feeding programs such as the MIDDSummer Camp are needed to help

Vermont residents get enough food on a daily basis. As a young woman who identifies as white and middle class, I am not only privileged in my ability to go to a university to study these topics, but I can volunteer at feeding programs without depending on them myself. In addition, I can go to the farmers market without depending on it for groceries. Though my identity places me within a majority of Vermont's residents, I believe my experiences within the Massachusetts and Vermont food systems have helped me to better understand the broad spectrum of access, success, and failure of local food systems in small communities.

The majority of my time spent working with the three different farmers markets this past summer was grounded in mixed methods research, looking at individual markets as separate "cultures". This enabled me to form cross-market comparisons in my data wherever possible. The bulk of my data drawn from participant observation comes from spending time at the three weekly markets from set-up to break-down, in addition to attending monthly steering committee meetings for the Burlington Farmers Market. All fieldnotes were first hand-written in a notebook during market hours and meetings, then expanded upon and typed up at night, usually on the same day as they were taken. The steering committee meetings for the Burlington Farmers Market were usually about three hours in length, and were most often held in a restaurant downtown where dinner was paid for by the market, acting as committee member's compensation. These meetings served as monthly check-ins to discuss:

- any issues or current events surrounding individual vendors or the market as a whole
- planning for the next season's markets (both winter and summer), and
- revisions and additions to market rules, guidelines, and the list of approved products at market.

Over the course of the summer (June through August), I completed an estimated thirty to forty hours of research per week, with approximately fourteen of those hours consisting of participant observation at the three markets.

My perceived position and presence in the three farmers markets sometimes challenged my ability to collect data or write notes, often resulting in delayed transcription of the day's events once I got home from the market. At the Burlington Farmers Market, I began my research as a shadow to the manager, then became an assistant to the assistant manager and the rest of the market staff, and finally I was offered an hourly wage for one official work hour while I could observe and assist market staff and vendors the rest of the time as a volunteer. Even in my "off" hours, however, I was often asked to assist in market duties or help vendors watch their tents, and so I frequently chose to actively participate and include those interactions as data instead of taking a step back from market activities and maintaining ethnographic distance.

At the Old North End Market, I was solely a volunteer from start to finish of my project, which was helpful in understanding expectations of my time at the market. Though I usually arrived before the market and stayed through breakdown to help with the EBT table or to help other vendors with their tents, during market hours I was fairly free to roam around the market. I was able to talk with vendors, watch customers interact with one another and with market vendors, and I also shadowed the EBT table to better understand the various government benefit programs. During the Old North End Market, due to my flexibility as a volunteer and the smaller scale of the market, I frequently had enough time to take notes and ask many questions during market hours. This was helpful when having to elaborate on my time at the market after the market day had ended.

The Slow Food Vermont Agricultural Market was entirely volunteer-based, and as I was not expected to come early to help with set-up I would usually arrive just before the market started at 3:00pm. I spent my time at the Slow Food Market shadowing the market manager, answering questions about Slow Food Vermont, and talking about the different vendors, but I would also walk around and talk to the vendors myself to better understand their experiences at the market. I frequently stood at the Slow Food Vermont information table to interact with many customers and passersby. Throughout all of this, I had a good amount of time to take notes during the market, clarify different vendors' and volunteers' thoughts and personal statements about the market, and ask many questions. In this way, my time spent at the Old North End Market and the Slow Food Vermont Agricultural Market were most similar to one another in my ability to volunteer but take enough time to write notes while at the market.

### *Surveys*

Aiming to survey 1% of the customers for every day I attended the three markets, I used the aforementioned population counts and surveyed this percentage of people at the Burlington Farmers Market (n=1000), Old North End Farmers Market (n=24), and Slow Food Vermont Agricultural Market (n=15), respectively. I approached customers on a randomly selected basis, and I considered for approach anyone within the perimeters of the market location. Participants had to confirm that they were over the age of 18 before taking the survey. Surveys consisted of fifteen multiple-choice questions in addition to several optional write-in questions, asking customers about:

- priorities when coming to the market,
- their perceptions of food quality and food prices at market,

- how they experience the overall market atmosphere, and
- products or changes to the market desired by customers.<sup>2</sup>

No identifying information was collected from survey participants, and the raffle tickets were offered separately from the survey to maintain anonymity. A non-related third party selected the winning raffle ticket to guard against bias in choosing a winner. The raffle was for \$25 in market tokens, redeemable only at the corresponding farmers market. Winners were notified by both phone and email as provided on their raffle ticket, and prizes were either mailed to winners' homes or picked up at the next week's market. The Slow Food Vermont Market had no token system, and therefore no weekly raffle was created for this market. Despite my expectations of customers being less willing to take a survey without monetary incentive, customers at the Slow Food Market were actually most willing to participate in the survey. Several customers even took the survey home to fill it out and brought it back with them the next week at the market, frequently expressing to me the high values they placed on coming to this market and in helping to give feedback to enable it to grow.

Challenges to reaching my market survey goals included participant willingness, weather, time of day, advertising about the raffle, and a lack of promotion by market staff at some markets where I was not always present. Lack of interest and inclement weather greatly decreased the number of customers willing to take a survey, and morning shoppers in particular at the Burlington Farmers Market were too busy collecting groceries and did not want to pause for the survey. Finally, with only one small laminated sign advertising my project and its associated raffle, I was left to mostly self-promotion and oral advertising of the raffle when I asked someone to take the survey. This challenge was complemented at some markets by the market

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<sup>2</sup> Specific questions asked on the market customer survey may be found in Appendix 2A.



staff's either unwillingness or lack of memory to promote the survey and raffle whenever I was away from market, or when I left a stack of surveys on a table while I wandered the market asking people to fill it out in person. Despite these challenges, however, I was able to reach all of my survey percentage goals for all three markets.

### *Interviews*

I completed a total of fifteen semi-structured interviews between June and August 2014, thirteen of which were divided among vendors from all three markets, and the remaining two including the different market managers.<sup>3</sup> In the beginning of the summer, I sent out a general announcement either in written form or in person, depending on the market size, to inform vendors of my project and to gauge initial interest from individual vendors. After receiving more notifications of interested vendors than my IRB allowed me to interview, I selected up to five vendors from each market whose classification in their respective market was either agricultural or prepared food products. The third main product category at market, crafts, was not of particular interest to my research and was outside the scope of this project.

All vendor interviews were conducted at the vendors' location of choice, which was usually either on their farm or at their home within the state of Vermont. All interview participants granted permission to record their interviews for later analysis. Interviews focused on understanding vendors' social and economic priorities at market, and asked vendors:

- to describe their experience at their respective market,
- how they perceived the quality of their and others' food products at market,

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<sup>3</sup> Because the same person manages both the Burlington Farmers Market and the Slow Food Vermont Market, one interview was completed with this manager asking the same questions from each market's perspective.

- their perceptions of the presence or lack thereof of the EBT program at their market, and
- their overall perceptions and interactions with customers.<sup>4</sup>

Interviews ranged from forty-five minutes to three hours, and all were transcribed using transcription software, then hand-coded to focus on shared themes across the data.<sup>5</sup> Managers from the markets were asked many of the same questions, though they focused more on the managers' and the markets' goals as well as the managers' priorities at market.<sup>6</sup> Again, priorities were analyzed through both social and economic themes in the data.

Prior to the completion of this paper, I sent all interviewees the edited quotes I wished to include in my data analysis to confirm their approval. While this was not required according to my IRB, I thought it would be a courtesy to my interviewees for providing me with so much of the data for this project. All requests to edit quotes were honored, and the final versions of these quotes appear here. While some interviewees recognized that their opinions have shifted since the time of their interview, they acknowledged that their quotes remained honest to their mindset at the time of my research. Any of the opinions quoted in this paper may therefore not accurately reflect participants' current attitudes or beliefs.

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<sup>4</sup> A list of vendor interview questions may be found in Appendix 2B.

<sup>5</sup> A table of the codes used may be found in Appendix 1.

<sup>6</sup> A list of manager interview questions may be found in Appendix 2C.

## **Findings**

### ***Introduction***

Based on data collected at the Burlington Farmers Market, Old North End Farmers Market, and Slow Food Vermont Agricultural Market in Burlington, Vermont, there are three main groups of participants needed to maintain a farmers market. The market manager, vendors, and visitors/customers make up the foundation of any given farmers market, but these groups hold a wide range of values, priorities, and motivations for participating in the market. Market managers and vendors are largely focused on the economic success of the market as a whole as well as the profitability of individual businesses at the market. Despite the majority of customer surveys claiming that food shopping was their main goal at market,<sup>7</sup> their write-in responses and observed actions demonstrate that customers and farmers market attendees frequently place a higher value on the social aspects of farmers markets. These include, but are not limited to: meeting friends and neighbors, making connections with farmers (whether or not they are purchasing food from that vendor that day), and spending time downtown and in the greater Burlington community.

At the Old North End Farmers Market, customers heavily prioritize food shopping. Despite these priorities, vendors are frequently disinterested in selling their food products there due to a lack of predicted sales based on customers' socioeconomic class. While vendors' perceive customers to be unable or unwilling to spend money at the farmers market, it is at this market in particular that customers are actually most interested in purchasing groceries and are very dedicated to attending the market weekly. Customers largely desire food products currently unavailable at the market such as meat, eggs, and yeast breads. These goods are only absent,

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<sup>7</sup> The percentages of survey respondents who listed food shopping as their highest priority at the BFM, ONE Market, and SFVT Market were 52%, 85%, and 45%, respectively.

however, due to vendors' unwillingness to sell in the neighborhood based on customers' lower socioeconomic standing. The missing market for desired goods creates an obstacle to the market's growth as customers' desires continue to not be met in the foods available for sale. While many food vendors believe there would not be enough business to make the ONE Farmers Market worth their while, several different food categories might actually find considerable success at market to fill customer demand.

### ***Literature Review***

To better understand the operating beliefs and values of people who participate in farmers markets, I will engage with the broader literature on social theory while focusing on the multiple dimensions of value people associate with economic exchange and community engagement. To make sense of how the farmers markets are perceived by the market staff, vendors, and customers, it is necessary to comprehend how these agents structure their world and understand their respective places in it. First, I will address why Pierre Bourdieu's concept of capital contributes to only a partial understanding of the economic systems of farmers markets, making the case that the concept of value provides a more fitting construct for my analysis in this paper. Second, I will apply the concepts in David Graeber's *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value* (2001) to provide insight into the many different forms of value present within farmers market participants' worldview. Third, I will engage with Marcel Mauss' *The Gift* (1967) as a stepping off point for understanding different aspects of the gift economy that exist within farmers markets. While my study is situated within a capitalist society, certain elements of farmers markets do not strictly follow capitalist rationalization. An additional and alternative socioeconomic standpoint is therefore required to capture the dynamics of the various forms of

economic exchange at market. Finally, I will interweave the stories of several other farmers market studies completed throughout the United States that evaluate the impact, both social and economic, of farmers markets on their respective host communities.

Bourdieu is famous for his discussion on capital, defining it as “accumulated labor” which enables individuals “to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor” (1983:241). Bourdieu is one of many who has built upon and complicated Marx’s theory of capital; for Bourdieu, capital “is what makes the games of society – not least, the economic game – something other than simple games of chance, offering at every moment the possibility of a miracle” (1983:241). Examining capital in its three major forms (cultural, social, and economic), Bourdieu provides a detailed analysis of the conversions that are possible from one form of capital to another. While these definitions and the ensuing analysis are well conceptualized, applying the concept of capital alone to a farmers market economy omits the broader notions of value present in farmers market exchanges. Understanding capital helps to recognize why some people who attend farmers markets have more money to spend there than other shoppers, or why some vendors and managers return every year in the hopes of expanding their business. Capital does not, however, explain the values of farmers markets agents.

For example, many individuals with high social and economic class come to the weekend farmers market to display their wealth in the form of their attire or in their ability to purchase large quantities of food from the market. While observing the passersby at the Burlington Farmers Market, each week I would see particular groups of young people ranging in their 20’s and 30’s who would come to the market wearing all designer fashion clothing or the most expensive brands of outdoor clothing and footwear. These visitors would then very slowly promenade around the entire market, while emphasizing their presence in the most central aspect

of the park. Around the fountain, these people could often be seen sitting or standing in groups chatting and passing time. Compared to many of the vendors and the market staff – myself included – who were already sweaty and wearing nothing more than shorts and dirty T-shirts from hours of setting up the market and working, these well-dressed counterparts seemed to explicitly juxtapose themselves as a higher class participant group of the Burlington Farmers Market.

Outward displays of higher socioeconomic class were not limited to this younger age group, and many families, middle aged adults, and older individuals would also walk around the market poised as if modeling in a fashion shoot advertising the farmers market. Similarly, every week there were people who would bring large, expensive, hand-woven baskets to use as their grocery “bags”. These people would leave with their baskets overflowing with not only staple products such as produce, bread, meat, and cheese, but they would also purchase many of the specialty products of the market such as candied nuts, crafts, and unique garden plants. These customers also came at the busiest times of the market in the late morning and afternoon rather than the early morning hours in which most visitors completed the bulk of their grocery shopping. By arriving several hours later to fill their baskets, these high class customers could then socialize with as many townspeople and vendors as possible. This enabled them to display not only their monetary wealth in the form of their attire and purchased goods, but also in their extensive social relationships displayed at market.

For every person who can afford to shop at the market, however, there is another equally wealthy individual who claims the food is still too expensive and that they cannot afford to purchase it. Then, there are the people who come to the farmers market either to use nutrition assistance benefits or who very nearly qualify, yet who purchase as many groceries from the

farmers market as they can given their income. Utilizing the concept of capital would predict that people with more economic capital would be purchasing more goods from the farmers market than those with less economic capital, and that those with higher levels of economic capital would subsequently have higher levels of social capital. This does not account, however, for the varied levels of social and economic classes shopping at the farmers markets and purchasing more or less of their weekly groceries there. Value, rather than capital, can begin to bridge the gap between what people might be expected to achieve given their access to capital versus their actual decisions and actions based on personal values.

David Graeber proposes a re-evaluation of anthropological theories on value due to their lack of synthesis throughout the discipline's history (2001). By engaging with theories from some of the most famous social scientists, including Bourdieu, Appadurai, Mauss, and Malinowski, Graeber weaves together different proposals on the definitions and understanding of value throughout the discipline to join in a modern interpretation of value and values in human societies (2001). Graeber begins his work considering three main definitions of value:

- “1. ‘Values’ in the sociological sense: the conceptions of what is ultimately good, proper, or desirable in human life
2. ‘Value’ in the economic sense: the degree to which objects are desired, particularly, as measured by how much others are willing to give up to get them
3. ‘Value’ in the linguistic sense, which...might be most simply glossed as ‘meaningful difference’” (2001:1-2).

Each of these three definitions is not thought to be mutually exclusive, but attempting to understand how one classification inherently includes the others has historically left some anthropologists in a theoretical rut (Graeber 2001:2-20). My point in including these definitions

here is to maintain the concept of value as a multifaceted one that represents a variety of definitions and frameworks among disciplines and within the broader public. For this paper, I will primarily draw on the sociological and economic definitions of value, but the linguistic sense of the term may be present within the discussion without being explicitly addressed.

Expanding the concept of capital to the concept of value allows a more flexible approach to understanding the varied degrees of socioeconomic exchanges at farmers markets. This paper agrees that “it is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory”, as economic rationale stems from the sociocultural world of any given individual (Bourdieu 1983:242). Bourdieu sees capital as something that,

“takes time to accumulate and which, as a potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form, contains a tendency to persist in its being, is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible” (1983:241-242).

While values may take time to develop and may evolve with the beliefs of an individual over their lifetime, values do not necessarily discriminate based on varying levels of social or economic capital. Perhaps people in similar socioeconomic classes will hold beliefs more similar among one another than across classes, but this is not always true. If it were, we might expect to see all higher-class people buying the majority of their foods from farmers markets, and the majority of lower-class people abstaining from purchasing any food from farmers markets. Instead, what we see is a wide array of values held across the classes that motivates certain individuals to participate in farmers markets.



In this way, where Bourdieu's sense of capital – whether social, cultural, or economic – might limit the possibilities of who could be interested in participating in farmers market exchanges, the concept of value expands the potential pool of participants and actions to include people with widely different levels of accumulated capital. As observed in my research at the BFM, ONE Market, and the SFVT Agricultural Market, the set of values held by farmers market participants include, but are not limited to:

- Supporting ecologically sustainable agriculture
- Buying directly from producers
- A desire for fresh, local foods
- Actively participating in the greater community in which the farmers market occurs
- Having more agency in food choices

Participants' ability to choose the values they wish to hold and act on does not mean these values are present for all participants, nor are they true at every farmers market. Instead, the emphasis is on the rationalization for selling or shopping for food at a farmers market rather than going somewhere else where market-based values such as cheaper prices or a more time- and energy-efficient shopping experience are predominant. The image of the farmers market must be painted with broad brush strokes, encompassing not only the exchanges and displays of capital but also the embedded values from which those actions stem in any one individual. This paper will therefore emphasize the values, rather than the quantification of the forms of capital, of farmers market participants.

The act of exchange is common across all cultures, but the nature and expectations embedded within the exchange differ from one culture to the next. Considering any given farmers market as a unique place where people of various cultural backgrounds converge, the

nature of exchange at different markets will vary as a consequence. In the form of exchange found within some gift economies, Mauss presents the idea of gifts as total services, or all-encompassing exchanges including economic, social, and cultural importance (1967:76-77). In relation to his own fieldwork, Mauss defines the three fundamental obligations when agents interact in a gift exchange: the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to repay (Mauss 1967:37-41). All three of these aspects, Mauss argues, are absolutely essential to exchange and are expected to occur in endless cycles among participants.

Among the many exchanges I observed at the three farmers markets, most exchanges fell into the following three categories:

- Food and other products for monetary payment between vendors and customers, vendors and market staff, and among vendors
- Time and effort during market hours for paid compensation between market staff and vendors
- Social and cultural capital among staff, vendors, and customers, as well as among customers

When the exchanges involved economic capital, such as a customer paying the price of a purchased food item, or the vendors' market fees going towards the paid managerial positions at market, the obligation to give was fairly obvious among all agents involved in the exchange. Similarly, those receiving the economic capital were often eager to meet their obligation to receive. The obligation for those receiving economic capital to repay the exchange was relatively straightforward for vendors (they must give the customer the purchased food), but for managers and market staff their repayment came in less obvious forms. Instead of repaying vendors in material objects or direct monetary compensation, I observed how market staff at all three

markets expressed reciprocity in terms of their effort, dedication, and expertise offered to the farmers market in order to help it succeed each season and each individual market day.

The obligation to repay among vendors who interacted in trading and bartering for food and other goods stands out as a particular example of the gift economy nuances within the capitalist farmers market system. Mauss notes “the gift not yet repaid debases the man who accepted it, particularly if he did so without thought of return... We must always return more than we receive” (1967:63). Indeed, vendors who chose to engage in trading and gifting of their products often professed a certain expectation not of their trade partners to reciprocate, but for themselves to always be prepared to offer their own products lest the exchange relationship feel too one-sided to any one participant. Of course, it is important to remember that “acts of generosity are not free from self-interest” (Mauss 1967:72), but nonetheless trading vendors carried out “the duty of giving as a liberty, for in it there lies no risk”; it would never harm a trading relationship to give more than one received, and more frequent giving quite often meant more frequent receiving among actively trading vendors (Mauss 1967:69). Vendors who chose to trade their goods frequently mentioned that there was no system in place to keep track of who gifted and who received something last, or to mark the value or amount of certain gifts; rather, they knew their relationship with any given trade partner was ongoing and open to variation and flexibility in what was traded and in what quantity. This contradicts the capitalist rationale of keeping strict records for what is owed and what is due.

“This economy of gift exchange fails to conform to the principles of so-called natural economy or utilitarianism...it is something other than utility which makes goods circulate...it is a complex notion that inspires the economic actions...a notion neither of purely free and gratuitous prestations, nor of purely interested

and utilitarian production and exchange; it is a kind of hybrid” (Mauss 1967:69-70).

It often seemed vendors placed more value on the relationship they gained from trading with other vendors than the goods themselves, and each participant felt that their own gift was never as valuable as the gift they received. Finding utility within the trading relationships was not as important as maintaining the relationship for its own sake. Barter was neither pure gift nor a pure commodity; rather, they held a comfortable position between the two.

Farmers markets differ from societies grounded in a gift economy, however, in how one farmers market agent may break from the cycle of obligations without severely impacting the rest of the exchange system. For example, a vendor may refuse a sale at any time, but this does not hinder their future obligations to give and receive with other customers. Similarly, market staff may not dedicate themselves to improving their market to the best of their abilities each week, but they will still gain their monetary compensation throughout the season. Although the reciprocity expected of the market staff will remain in place, their wages will not be immediately revoked for coming to market with a bad attitude or lack of interest. In this way, farmers markets cannot be wholly understood as a site where the gift economy predominates, as the exchanges at market will continue to happen even if one aspect of obligation is omitted either by a particular actor or in a single event of exchange.

Although no form of exchange can be clearly demarcated into economic, social, or cultural, some exchanges more explicitly omitted exchanges of money. I will refer to these particular instances as social and cultural exchanges. At all three farmers markets I observed social and cultural exchanges that included, but were not limited to:

- Building relationships between vendors and customers

- Strengthening market visitors' ties to their community
- Trading information between vendors and customers and among customers about how to prepare specific foods
- Market visitors gaining recognition from one another for their attendance
- More specifically, earning a reputation as someone who shops for local food and is engaged with food producers and the greater community

Obligations within these exchanges become arguably more nuanced than the obligations realized in monetary-based transactions and exchanges. This is not to say, however, that money is absent from social and cultural exchanges; rather, economic practices are shaped by and serve to shape one's culture and sociality.

To be seen at a farmers market often implies that not only are people at least marginally interested in shopping for local food, but that they are engaged in their communities and have accrued enough resources to spend both time and money at the market. Conversation topics overheard weekly at all three farmers markets included the significance of supporting local businesses; taking pride in Vermont producers' food and craft products; and the importance of other sociopolitical and community-based events such as protests, public forums, and a myriad of social movements. Furthermore, by coming to the farmers market on the weekend or in the middle of a typical work day during the week implies that the individuals present can afford to not be working during market hours, demonstrating their abilities to spend their time and, if they buy something, money, at a farmers market. Other exchanges such as recipe sharing, socializing with vendors, and showing knowledge of specific ingredients or preparation methods can further propel one's reputation at the farmers market while also implying an obligation of reciprocity among the exchange's participants. Vendors who shared recipes with customers once were often

expected to do so again, and people who socialized together one week were likely to talk again the next week.

Social and cultural exchanges can also have economic consequences embedded in the rationalization for the initial exchange. For example, building a strong social relationship with a particular vendor can often lead to discounted or gifted foods later on in the relationship. These exchanges benefit both the consumer and the producer as the consumer can often expect these discounts and the vendor can rely on the customer's repeated business. Strong social ties among vendors can also lead to vendors sharing special prices on their food with one another, and often trading for one another's food and other goods. Customers who are close with certain vendors and well-connected vendors can also benefit from the sharing of limited knowledge about special food items or quasi-secret sales kept from the general public. Through these exchanges, participants strengthen their ties to one another and help to guarantee continued relations and exchanges in the future.

One example of this type of exchange included one day at the BFM in which a vendor who sells mostly meat and cheese products brought a special cut of meat to market not usually for sale. This cut was intended for another vendor, who that week would be bringing fresh seafood despite his stand only officially selling Vermont agricultural products. Both the special meat and the seafood products were not for sale to the general public, with the exception of a small portion of the seafood. The meat vendor said she would tell her favorite customer, who always bought large quantities of food from the market and who had been buying this vendor's meat for many years, about the other vendor's seafood. The meat vendor cited the customer's dedication, friendliness, and historical spending at the market as qualifications for sharing a little-known delicacy at the market. This particular exchange event strengthened not only the

social ties among the vendors and the customer, but it also increased the second vendor's income for the day and likely in the future as the vendors will continue to share special products and prices with one another and with selected customers.

Farmers market economies do not perfectly match the format of a gift economy nor of a capitalist commodity market due to the practices and assumptions embedded within farmers market practices. At any given farmers market, food is for sale as a commodity and vendors are there to earn income; here, the capitalist incentives are obvious. Other forms of exchange, however, such as the sociocultural exchanges previously discussed, are attached to the commodity exchanges at market and are sometimes more significant than the economic exchanges alone. People who participate in farmers markets therefore hold a slightly different worldview than people who prioritize only the commodity market, because the vendors and consumers understand and expect that they will have to engage in some sort of relationship with one another at the market. These relationships need not be complex nor exist on a highly personal level for either participant; for some farmers market shoppers, seeing the face of their food producer is the maximum interaction they are willing to engage in while they choose not to build a deeper relationship with vendors. For others, producers and consumers at market will know about each other's families, friends, social lives, and work schedules. In both of these extreme examples of the level of engagement possible at a farmers market, there is more to participants' expectations than the sole exchange of money for a commodity. This is what separates the economy of a farmers market from the economy of a mid-sized food distributor such as a food hub or a community supported agriculture (CSA) pick-up location, where human interaction is not always possible (or desired).

Previous studies on farmers markets throughout the United States illuminate consumer motivations and farmers markets' impact on their communities. Selfa and Qazi's research focuses on customer motivations underlying the desire for local foods, categorizing these motivations into three concepts: "place" (provenance of food), "taste", and "face-to-face" (interactions with producers within direct markets) (2005). This study finds that "local food systems" are defined differently depending on the social and geographical status of producers and consumers, especially between rural and urban communities (Selfa and Qazi 2005:456). This particular finding is relevant to the way different groups of farmers market participants defined their ideal image of a farmers market throughout my study, with varying concepts of "local" and differing ideas about the purpose of farmers markets changing depending on an individual's level of agency in the market. Selfa and Qazi also report a trend in which people who live in rural areas more frequently make a connection between buying local foods and supporting local businesses and the local economy than do urban residents (2005:457). When the researchers "examined consumer behavior related to buying local foods in direct markets, there were no strong differences between urban and rural purchasing patterns," only in the motivations behind those purchases (2005:457). In Vermont, Burlington features many unique qualities as the most densely populated area in a very rural state, perhaps offering an explanation for the high rate of interest in local farmers markets. While Burlington is considered an urban area in relation to the rest of the state, rural influences and people with rural backgrounds from the rest of the state could impact the values consumers hold about the effects of buying local foods.

Thilmany et al. explore the many values consumers associate with purchasing local foods, delineating the proclaimed attributes of local food into private, or personal benefits, and quasi-public qualities, or product traits whose benefits extend beyond the individual (2008).



Thilmany's paper revolves around the concept of utility, or all of the values embedded within a purchase that convinces a consumer to choose certain products over others while maximizing both private and quasi-public attributes. These attributes were frequently the themes of discussion among managers, vendors, and participants in my research, with quasi-public benefits frequently stated as more important than private benefits. Oberholtzer and Grow (2003) found similar responses to questions about the impact of farmers markets on the community, with "making a place for social activity and promoting a sense of community, in addition to providing fresh food for consumers and positive economic impacts for local businesses" the main goals of market managers in their research (Brown and Miller 2008:1296). In general, farmers markets are found to have a positive economic impact on both local and national scales, even when sales taken away from grocery stores due to farmers market purchases are taken into consideration (Hughes et al. 2008). Through both direct and indirect economic impacts, local businesses surrounding farmers markets are also found to benefit from increased sales on market days, despite concerns over the potentially opposite effect (Henneberry et al. 2008; Lev et al. 2003; Myers 2004; Otto and Varner 2005).

Up to this point, we have gained an understanding of the importance of evaluating the motivations and goals of farmers market participants in terms of value rather than capital. These values are not bound by class or accumulated capital; instead, they are formed based on individuals' personal beliefs and preferences and can change over the course of time without a change in accumulated capital. We have also explored the many variations of obligation within exchange systems, and how the nature of repaying can vary according to the agents involved. With these concepts in mind, I will now enter into a discussion on the intended and realized impacts and opportunities of the three different farmers markets in Burlington, Vermont.

## *Differing Priorities at Market: Vendors, Customers, and Managers*

### *Vendors: Making Money, Making Connections*

While there was some differentiation in vendors' goals across the three markets, not surprisingly a few goals all vendors held in common were making money, expanding their businesses, and increasing sales. Second to financial success or sometimes discussed jointly with it were stories of making connections with customers, other producers, and local chefs for potential wholesale accounts. Discussions on the accessibility and affordability of local food featured primarily at the ONE Farmers Market, while making connections with consumers was the dominant concern of vendors at the SFVT Agricultural Market.

At the Burlington Farmers Market, vendors most often mentioned making money as their first priority at market. Explaining the econo-centric rationale for participating in the BFM, one vendor mentioned, "I don't think the market's really there to support other business necessarily because we're businesses ourselves" (BFM Prepared Food Vendor 02, Personal Interview July 21, 2014). The BFM manager voiced similar opinions, stating, "The driving purpose of the Saturday market is simply to make money. It is not to educate customers. It is to provide wholesome food and beautiful crafts, but it is to make money...it is a business" (BFM Manager, Personal Interview July 20, 2014). This differed from the perceived purpose of the SFVT market, despite many of the vendors and the manager being the same at both the BFM and SFVT Market: "The Wednesday market I think is for those vendors who are more interested in the quality of the sale versus the quantity of sales" (BFM Manager, Personal Interview July 20, 2014). This falls in line with the perceived desire of both customers and vendors at farmers

markets to be able to have a conversation, get to know one another, and better understand the food the vendors are purveying.

At the SFVT Market, Slow Food volunteers reminded vendors weekly that they were part of a bigger movement to share the story behind their food, and that while sales may be low in the first few years of the market, they would eventually increase. Frustrations with the general lack of sales were expressed with slight irritation yet understanding due to the market's nascent status: "It's extremely slow...food. It's low selling too...It's a very slow market in all sorts of ways" (SFVT Vendor 03, Personal Interview July 28, 2014). Despite these frustrations, however, vendors had faith that the market would grow to the point where it would not be financially damaging to their business to participate, when the market would repay them in kind for their efforts at sustaining it:

"As long as we're not bleeding money, we don't care! We're there for the great cause, so it doesn't matter, we're there...It's not all about selling your product. Of course, selling the idea to those who need to see some money coming in from this enterprise, it would have to make sense from that standpoint too, but it's being part of the big picture is what's important" (SFVT Vendor 02, Personal Interview July 23, 2014).

Speaking on the vendors' behalf, another vendor agreed:

"The vendors seem to realize that there is a need for a mid-week market, a good mid-week market, and I feel like that's why people are committed to continually going every week even if it doesn't make sense for them financially as a business decision" (SFVT Vendor 05, Personal Interview August 7, 2014).

For the amount of time selling at market takes away from a work day in the fields or in the kitchen, and given that most vendors try to pay themselves for the time they work at market, many vendors were fairly frustrated with the current lack of sales at the SFVT market. All SFVT vendors, however, expressed a determination to remain in the market to help it grow, hoping they would receive improved returns with each year they stayed. In other words, the vendors recognized their obligation to give their all towards improving the market, believing they would soon realize the obligation to receive the benefits of participating in a high quality farmers market.

While vendors at the ONE Market mentioned their sales within the broader narrative of why they choose to participate in the ONE Market in particular, none of the vendors classified making money as their first goal at market. All of the ONE vendors I spoke with, however, happened to be doing considerably well financially at the market. Both agricultural vendors who were interviewed listed the ONE Market as one of their largest income generators, and the prepared food vendor was surprised with how much she was able to make each week as well while selling her foods at wholesale prices. At the ONE Market, “It’s way cheaper than at City Market...The prices are reduced here...We ask people to do wholesale prices, so it’s actually cheaper than the co-op already, and for most things it’s definitely cheaper than the downtown market” (ONE Manager, Personal Interview July 28, 2014). Without wholesale prices being a rule enforced by the market management, vendors were already aware of the prices they needed to offer in order for their products to sell successfully:

“I know that if I was at a different [market] like Burlington or say Shelburne, I could be charging more for these goods, but I wanted to be sensitive to the fact of the neighborhood that the market is occurring within...So I definitely price things

as low as I could within reason to make it worth my time to be there” (ONE Prepared Food Vendor 01, Personal Interview July 23, 2014).

ONE Market vendors generally felt good about their market’s ability to serve the Old North End community, and they enjoyed the diversity of people their market brought together:

“I think it’s a big plus for this market, both the EBT and the Farm to Family, and a lot of that is because this area is economically depressed and so that’s a big plus for these people to be able to get fresh fruits and vegetables and that sort of thing...I think as for the customers, they’re not embarrassed because that’s the environment that they live in so they know that it’s not just them, it’s other people too, and you know as a vendor, I’m happy with it. I think it helps them nutritionally to be able to have access to those programs” (ONE Agricultural Vendor 01, Personal Interview July 29, 2014).

A second farmer agreed:

“I just really enjoy as a vendor selling to the diversity of people that we do, and I feel like it brings us closer to a goal that we all sort of share on our farm, which is wide access to produce. And so, I love it for that reason” (ONE Agricultural Vendor 02, Personal Interview August 1, 2014).

Even while offering mostly wholesale prices, however, vendors in the ONE found they were making more than enough money to convince them to stay in the market, with one farmer mentioning that it would not be a wise financial decision for her farm to ever leave the market.

Another farmer expressed similar financial success at the ONE Market:

“We do just as well per hour at that market as we do downtown...Not before the Farm to Family coupons come out, but after the Farm to Family coupons come

out, yes...The last few weeks our farm has done about 2/3 EBT, Farm to Family versus cash...It's usually probably about half and half, it probably evens out to about half or sometimes less, but around half. A third to a half for the whole season comes from Farm to Family, and that's not what it is at downtown at all...It's maybe 5% of our sales downtown" (ONE Manager, Personal Interview July 28, 2014).

Despite the differences in the make up of this farm's income from each farmers market, the hourly earnings at each market were nearly equal when all of the federal nutrition assistance tokens and coupons were taken into consideration. This is one example of the paradox when other vendors express a fear of low sales at the ONE Market, while the vendors that are already there are finding great financial success within the Old North End neighborhood.

For those vendors already selling in the ONE Market, perhaps it is the satisfaction of their financial concerns that allows them to then realize other values regarding the social justice aspects and general atmosphere of the ONE Farmers Market. While ONE vendors still value their businesses' economic vitality and success, weekly predicted sales allow for a more lax emphasis on these interests. Vendors not already participating in the ONE Market perceive joining the market to be a decision of great risk, fearing they would not make enough sales to compensate for the cost of investing time to travel to and sell at the ONE Market. Because these businesses have not experienced the ONE Farmers Market from a vendor's perspective, they are unable to move beyond the values they place in economic success to think more broadly in terms of the many sociocultural values at work in the ONE Farmers Market. Outside vendors therefore do not always

hold the same values as ONE vendors in terms of prioritizing or equalizing financial values with the other social and cultural values fulfilled through their participation in the market.

Interestingly, vendors at all three markets felt their prices and sales were not dependent on prices at other popular retail outlets such as the grocery store or the local food co-op. Rather, vendors said they could price their products according to popularity while oftentimes charging the most for items typically considered “the cheap cut of meat” or basic stew vegetables due to the high demand for them. In this way and as one vendor said, “We kind of function outside of the economy of the grocery store”, where foods are priced according to the complex economies of scale behind each unit’s cost of production (BFM Meat Vendor 01, Personal Interview August 6, 2014). As one farmer put it, “Rule of thumb when you’re setting a price is: you charge what the market can bear, and that’s without looking at quantity or quality of your product. I think in this market in particular you have to take into consideration some of the economics as well”, meaning the general socioeconomic class of the Old North End neighborhood as previously discussed (ONE Agricultural Vendor 01, Personal Interview July 29, 2014). Overall, vendors enjoyed the difference in being able to decide their own prices based on demand at the market. Commentating on why he feels farmers markets and direct to consumer sales make the most sense for small producers, an agricultural vendor noted:

“That’s why the farmer has gotten taken to town because the farmer, they know that they have to sell the product, right? And when there wasn’t more options to sell the product, they were always the one that was getting the lowest price”

(BFM Meat Vendor 01, Personal Interview August 6, 2014).

At the farmers market, farmers and other food producers are able to have a certain level of predicted sales based on the large population size coming to market each week, thereby alleviating some of the price pressure food producers often feel when trying to sell product through intermediary and third-party markets.

Recognizing the compromise between needing to earn a living and needing to sell product and please customers, one farmer understood that while “I think the quality of my product is high...I think there’s a natural ceiling for how much you can really charge for stuff” (BFM Agricultural Vendor 01, Personal Interview July 28, 2014). Another agreed, saying “Well, there are some prices, you can’t go crazy on it” (SFVT Vendor 03, Personal Interview July 28, 2014). That being said, the farmers market offers a finite time period each week for these vendors to earn as much as they can without discouraging customers with outrageously high prices or spending too much time engaged in individual customer interactions:

“I view the market as 8:30-2, so I have 5.5 finite hours to sell my product...I have that 5.5 hours of finite time, I want to be engaged in the least amount of dialogue as possible, and I want to sell as much as I can in that time and avoid extraneous conversations” (BFM Prepared Food Vendor 01, Personal Interview July 3, 2014).

Similarly, a different prepared food vendor noted, “I just try to sell, because that’s what I’m there to do. I’m there to make money and sell as many [products] as I can” (BFM Prepared Food Vendor 02, Personal Interview July 21, 2014). Here, we see vendors who prioritize values surrounding the economic vitality of their businesses over the social aspects of engaging in consumer education and socializing at the farmers market. Of course, it might be expected that many vendors would favor these values due to their label at market as someone selling goods to



others. A layer of complexity is added and values slightly shifted, however, when the vendors become the customers in exchanges at the farmers market.

Besides making sales, the other economic endeavor that vendors often mentioned as important parts of their weekly market routine included buying and trading food from other vendors, a frequent yet easily missed transaction while observing the market. Because vendors often blend in with customers, and due to the large size of the BFM with an average of 95 vendors each week in the summertime, vendors often do not recognize one another. In the mornings especially, I could hear introductions being made across the park from one vendor to another, inquiring about the type of products the other sold and usually walking away with a purchase. The relationships between trading vendors was particularly interesting to observe due to the congenial nature of their bartering and lack of an obvious concern for economic gain during a trade. As one vendor explained, “There’s bartering but I have no idea who’s ahead and who’s not. Some days I might just give them stuff just because I feel like I’ve been taking too much, but we don’t really know” (BFM Meat Vendor 01, Personal Interview August 6, 2014). Even vendors that do not need any food in particular will still purchase or trade for it each week, either to keep up the relationship or simply, as one vendor put it, “because it excites me!” (SFVT Vendor 05, Personal Interview August 7, 2014). Bartering enforces a sense of camaraderie between vendors who are already connected while also creating opportunities for new vendors to become acquainted through the act of trading. For the vendor that bought food just because it excited her, she said her business does “a lot of trading, which I love about market...It feels like we do it with people who are more friends or that we’ve known for a long time. Often people will go around, do you want to do a trade? And we go, sure” (SFVT Vendor 05, Personal Interview August 7, 2014). Trading for food is therefore about more than obtaining the food; it

involves a sense of both personal enjoyment and shared relationships between vendors that perpetuate trading each week.

Many vendors mentioned their enjoyment of participating in their weekly farmers market because of the social relationships it enabled between vendors and among the greater community of Vermont food producers.

“Right now– and it has been for years – it’s a social outlet. We get to meet people outside our community, people that are similar to us that have no children, which doesn’t happen in this community. And you get to know a lot of really interesting entrepreneurs, and that’s who you’ll find, actually just about everybody started up their own business” (BFM Cheese Vendor 01, Personal Interview August 1, 2014).

In the mornings of the BFM, and all throughout the afternoons at the ONE and SFVT Markets, vendors could be seen talking together beneath their tents, sharing stories of how busy their season has been, and even lending a hand to set up a tent or unload their trucks.

“We had something, well it’s called the spirit of cooperation. You help your neighbors, help them unload, we help them load, we hold spaces for them when they go get their car, we trade goods with them, we buy some too... we’ll help anybody really if they’re struggling” (BFM Cheese Vendor 01, Personal Interview August 1, 2014).

At the smaller markets as well, vendors appreciated the general camaraderie among vendors:

“I think because we are small, we actually talk to each other a lot more than some of the other markets that we go to...And that’s kind of neat because you get to get

ideas from them and vice versa and just see what's going on on their farm versus what we might be doing. It's nice to talk with other farmers and see what's happening on their farm. You know if I'm having a bug issue, are you having a bug issue with this? What are you doing for it?" (ONE Agricultural Vendor 01, Personal Interview July 29, 2014).

This particular farmer also articulated a firm belief in vendors' cooperation with one another, possibly due to what a BFM vendor considered a result of all vendors doing well at the market. The latter vendor claimed,

"It's a very friendly market because it's a very lucrative market. No one's fighting for the same dollar...Because it's very lucrative, everyone's happy because everyone's making money, doing well...I feel like there's so much economic opportunity with all the money that's flowing in, you don't have those cutthroat mentalities that you would see in other places. And you do see it at farmers markets. I don't think you'd see it here because everyone's doing well" (BFM Prepared Food Vendor 01, Personal Interview July 3, 2014).

Again, we see the satisfaction of economic values allowing the expression of other, sometimes non-dominant values among vendors at the farmers market. Values such as vendor relations, perhaps going so far as to call them alliances, and in certain cases friendships, are formed during each market season and are maintained due to a mix of social and economic values. Vendors understand that they all will have a large number of sales and income generated by their participation in the farmers market each week, so they do not necessarily view one another as financial competitors. Instead, vendors can focus on exchanges of information and advice as

partners striving to succeed in the same general sphere of business. At the ONE Market, vendors felt a similar level of collaboration and trust among vendors:

“I do think too that the vendors will help each other and help the customers. Like if I don’t have eggplant today but I just saw that [another farm] has some, if somebody’s looking for eggplant, I’m going to tell them, they’ve got it - but come back in a couple of weeks when I’ve got it!... Sometimes if they happen to stop at my tent first and they don’t see something and they ask, I’m going to tell them who’s got it” (ONE Agricultural Vendor 01, Personal Interview July 29, 2014).

Even when vendors were selling similar products, whether it was out of professional courtesy or individuals’ kindness, vendors still felt supported by one another: “The first [market] I think I was right next to the vendor who was selling something really really similar, and there was a lot of support between us despite that” (SFVT Vendor 03, Personal Interview July 28, 2014).

Understanding that many customers come to the farmers market specifically to gain a social interaction with their food producers beyond what is possible in a grocery store, the SFVT Market particularly highlights the importance of building relationships between food producers and consumers. Vendors as well as the market management agreed to the importance of making these connections with the public about the food they are eating:

“I mean I think by definition as a vendor, I’m there to sell things, but, by the same token – particularly with the Slow Food Market – I don’t feel like a salesperson, I don’t feel like I’m trying to sell anything; I feel like I’m trying to share with people” (SFVT Vendor 02, Personal Interview July 23, 2014).

Due to the intentional difference of the SFVT Market that is meant to allow vendors to connect on a deeper level with their customers, one vendor said she felt like “The Slow Food Market gives me permission to really slow down and talk to people” instead of rushing through sales and conversations like she has to at other farmers markets (SFVT Vendor 02, Personal Interview July 23, 2014). A different vendor expressed a similar appreciation of the time the SFVT Market gives her to learn more about her customers than she would at a different market.

“For us what is really valuable is taking the time to talk with our customers...whether it’s about what they did with their family on vacation, or we have a lot of repeat customers and a lot of people that come specifically to see us, so knowing about our customers and establishing relationships is really really valuable for us and really important for us in terms of establishing our business... We do have a lot of people that just come to chat. They may buy things some weeks, but not all weeks, but they just come to see us and support us... I love market because I love telling people about what we do and why we do it” (SFVT Vendor 05, Personal Interview August 7, 2014).

There was only one discouraged vendor at the SFVT Market who felt that customers were still not interested in learning about his product, but he acquiesced to their attitudes because he assumed it would be impossible to make a very deep connection with every single customer he talked to. Regarding the extra effort this vendor went through to source high quality ingredients, he remarked:

“The vast vast majority of people that come up don’t really know or care [about the ingredients’ provenance] and for the most part that’s fine with me. I don’t need to tell the entire story to everybody; I hope that they enjoy what they get,

and I hope that they're interested in it and that if they're not already interested in it, it is maybe a starting point for them to think about it a bit more. But I think the vast majority of the people, they don't care" (SFVT Vendor 01, Personal Interview July 21, 2014).

Other reasons vendors wanted to sell at the SFVT market included educating the public about their food and teaching them how to cook, make a meal, and share it with family and friends.

"They email me, I email them back, we talk a long time about where I'm from, what I've learned, how I've learned it. Usually if there is a connection it's because they have some experiences that are matching mine...or they've been to places where I've learned to prepare food or they know my food somehow, or we talk about recipes, our favorite recipes, things like that...That's the fun part...And I like educating them. I mean that's a big important part for me, I think that's why I like it. I like to teach them what they're eating and how they're eating it" (SFVT Vendor 03, Personal Interview July 28, 2014).

One vendor at the SFVT Market even posted a sign to his stand each week that read, "Ask me what's for dinner", implying that he wanted to have a conversation as simple yet as personal as the food that he would make from his own products, trying to show customers they could do the same. Each week, there usually was at least one brave soul who would indeed ask him about the sign, and he would launch into a description of some of the amazing flavor combinations that could be made with his foods. While the sign was a bit of a sales tactic as well, it did enable conversations between the vendor and his customers, and it always brought a smile between the two. The manager liked the concept of the sign, believing in its honest purpose to start

conversations with customers, noting that “At the Wednesday market, having that sign ‘Ask me what’s for dinner’, [the farmer] honestly wants you to ask him, what should I have for dinner?” (SFVT Manager, Personal Interview July 20, 2014). Like the manager mentioned previously, at the SFVT Market, the vendors focused primarily on the quality, rather than the quantity of sales.

Thus far, we have seen how vendors at all three farmers markets describe financial success and building relationships with both customers and one another as their main motivations for participating in farmers markets. At the BFM, vendors emphasized the importance of earning money while at market, but this did not prevent the BFM vendors from expressing other values such as building social connections and trade relationships with other vendors. Vendors felt that because the BFM promised lucrative weekly sales for individual businesses, they were able to broaden their perspective of the market from just a center of financial exchange to one of social and cultural exchanges as well. The ONE vendors felt a similar security in their weekly sales, and enjoyed the social exchanges among vendors that were mainly for the purpose of partnership and friendship rather than economic competition. Vendors not already participating in the ONE Market fear that their values surrounding economic success would not be fulfilled at the ONE Farmers Market, but those vendors already participating in it typically find quite the opposite. ONE vendors are able to successfully realize both financial and social values. Finally, at the SFVT Market, vendors especially prioritized their ability to make meaningful connections with their customers. While SFVT vendors still placed value in making money, and many wished they were earning more at market to make it worth their while, they understood that the current emphasis for the SFVT Market was on exchanges of social values.

### ***Customers: Food Shopping, Socializing, and Making Connections***

The majority of survey responses at all three markets listed food shopping as customers' highest priority at the farmers market, but among markets there were sizeable differences in the majority's percentage.<sup>8</sup> 85% of ONE Market customers said food shopping was their main goal at market, while only 52% and 45% of customers at the BFM and SFVT Market, respectively, said the same. Prices at the farmers market were only judged to be "more expensive than shopping at the grocery store/other markets, but okay" at the BFM (52%), while prices at the other two markets were considered "Just Right" by a majority (ONE: 46%, SFVT: 50%). Customers considered the foods offered at all three markets to be "very high quality", defined in the survey through indicators of utility such as "very fresh, tastes good, and definitely worth its price" (BFM: 77%, ONE: 79%, SFVT: 72%). At all markets customers would "definitely" recommend to others shopping for food at their market of choice (BFM: 85%, ONE: 96%, SFVT: 86%), and customers at the BFM in particular felt the food offered there was "better" than the foods offered at other farmers markets in town (39%).

When asked to evaluate the statement, "This market offers foods that I would like to purchase and eat," a majority of responses at all three markets answered "Yes, and I can afford to buy and eat them" (BFM: 54%, ONE: 65%, SFVT: 71%). When interacting with vendors, customers generally felt "pleased and comfortable with what I am buying," (BFM: 91%, ONE: 95%, SFVT: 92%), and most people said their interactions with vendors were "good", the highest rating offered on the survey (BFM: 96%, ONE: 91%, SFVT: 85%). A "good" interaction was defined as one in which "the vendors are almost always pleasant, and/or they seem happy to be doing business with me". At the ONE Market, which had the highest percentage of responses indicating customers who use EBT at market, 93% said their experience using their benefits at

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<sup>8</sup> A table of all markets' survey results may be found in Appendix 3.



the farmers markets was “Excellent – It was easy to transfer my benefits, and/or I had no problems with either market staff or market vendors about making my purchases”. Of those customers who indicated they use EBT at the BFM, 74% said their experience was “Excellent”, 24% said it was “Good”, and 2% said it was “Okay”.

Despite the majority of survey participants who stated food shopping as their most important goal when going to the farmers market, the majority of feedback about the market received in person, as well as most of the written-in comments on the open ended sections of the survey, discussed customers’ concerns over aspects of the market that affected their social experience while there. Two of the most common requests at the BFM were for more seating in the park and louder music, and at the ONE Market people wanted to see changes to the park like a trashcan, water fountain, and consistent live music during market hours. For the SFVT market surveys, there were only two written-in comments for suggestions to the market, both of which commented on the beauty of the produce offered there. Other frequent requests from BFM surveys included:

- more trash receptacles
- getting rid of solicitors and panhandlers
- wider sidewalks
- nametags for market staff and managers
- cleaning the park grounds more thoroughly, and
- banning dogs.

Interestingly, very few of these changes are actually in the control of the farmers market staff, and most would rely on the city of Burlington to change the organization and management of City Hall Park, not of the market. For example, while the market supplies several extra trash

and recycling bins during market hours, the city provides the majority of waste disposal areas in the park, as well as being responsible for cleaning the park each morning. The market staff does an extra sweep of the park in the early morning to pick up as much trash and waste as possible, but there is only so much to be done about cigarette butts and micro trash often complained about by market customers. There is no rule against people walking through the market to get signatures for petitions or to advertise an event, as long as they are approved by the city and do not block a single vendor's tent during market hours. It would be nearly impossible to ban dogs during the market as it takes place in a public park with no set boundaries or entrances. Further, none of these changes directly impact food sales nor do they reflect the quality of food offered at the farmers market, representing customers' prioritization of non food-related values at market.

During the BFM and ONE Market, one of the most obvious events that took place each week at market was the simple act of socializing among visitors and between vendors and customers. On Saturdays in particular, there was always a woman in the morning who said she was in a hurry to get her market tokens with her debit card and to purchase her groceries, but who would then spend the next hour or so sitting in the middle of the park playing with her child while socializing with other adults and their families, presumably her friends. Many people who came to the BFM came just before 10:00am – when the musical act usually started playing each week – to get a spot on the grass in front of the music tent and to spread out their blankets and personal belongings. There were often street performers walking through the park to entertain children, ranging from jugglers to magicians in addition to the weekly face painter hired by the market to set up during the afternoon hours of the market. Families often gathered around the fountain in the middle of the park to watch their children and dogs play in the water. People could be seen for hours sitting on the same bench or on the same spot in the grass, and countless

large groups appeared to be meeting up at a planned time and walking around together or sitting down together, whether or not they had bought any food.

At the ONE Market, many people came with a clear intention to purchase groceries. Others, however, came to the park to socialize with the vendors, most of whom also lived in the Old North End. People would leave their bikes against the trees, sit down on the single bench available in Dewey Park, or sit in the grass to eat either the prepared food or the fresh produce they just purchased. Some weeks a father and his young daughter came to play the guitar and mandolin and to sing folk tunes during the market, and every week there was an open rehearsal for brass and other musicians in the neighborhood that met each week at the park's single bench. Weekly there was some kind of preschool or after-school care program that brought a small group of young children to the market to learn about the food there and to play in the park. At the end of the summer, the city of Burlington even passed a request to block off the end of one of the streets surrounding Dewey Park, creating a small yet community-friendly gathering space with large planters, benches, and art provided by Old North End community members. Many of the vendors and market customers felt the closure of this street to create a small pedestrian area would enhance the park's appeal and its safety, now being surrounded by only three instead of four main roads. As safety was a concern for some survey participants at the ONE Market, with one mentioning the lack of an obvious crosswalk to the park, this small addition to the park space was considered a general improvement by the Old North End community members present at the ONE Market.

While the SFVT Market was located on a busy sidewalk with many people passing by on their way home from work, it seemed the intention of the market to make connections with customers overcame customers' initial objective to quickly walk by the vendors without pausing

to ask about their food. The SFVT Market guaranteed vendors neither a dedicated customer base nor any sizeable predicted sales, but vendors were participating in the SFVT Market specifically to create deeper and more meaningful connections with consumers. As a result, the vendors seemed enthusiastic about trying to catch someone's attention for even a moment to engage them in a conversation, invite them over to their stand, and hopefully make a sale. As a crowd begets a crowd, one person engaged in conversation with a vendor usually meant two or three more would then approach the stand, and within a few minutes the vendor would have everyone engaged in conversation. Vendors would talk to visitors about where they were from, how they were enjoying Vermont if they were tourists, and the details about the their food's growing season or production processes.

While this might not clearly be classified as socializing as it was identified in other markets since it was not often the groups of customers that were interacting with one another, but instead the vendors engaging the customers, it was the length of their interactions that I believe deserves special attention. Once the market had been running for a few weeks, the conversations between customers and vendors would often turn to ask about the food the customer purchased the week prior, or about personal stories such as how someone's children or spouse was, how work was going, and if they had any special plans coming up in the summer. In this way, the vendors at the SFVT Market were able to create a certain level of socialization that did not seem to come naturally with their market due to its location and time as it did with the BFM and ONE Farmers Market.

Farmers market customers first express their primary concern for going to market as obtaining food, but observations and written-in responses on customer surveys reveal different motivations. Social values, rather than the desire to purchase food, consistently predominate

customers' motivations for coming to market. Customers participate in many exchanges at farmers markets, ranging from payments of money for food to socializing with vendors and earning a social status as a farmers market visitor. Customers frequently expressed desired changes concerning the farmers markets' general atmospheres, including changes that would be possible only with city-mandated changes to Burlington's public parks. While customers' values and priorities at market vary somewhat across markets, they are mainly concerned with the degree to which they can socialize and engage in the greater community.

### ***Managers: Overseeing Vendors, Helping the Market Succeed Financially***

Each manager I interviewed expressed shared interests in their role as general overseer for the vendors that came to market each week, but how each market assigns responsibilities to the manager greatly differs. Managers also had widely different opinions regarding their most pressing concern for the state of their market at the time I interviewed them. Because so much of the work required of the market managers at all three markets happens outside of market hours, I will limit my discussion to the scope of the managers' duties and concerns on their respective market days.

Both managers were present at their farmers market during market hours, but the ONE Manager could only come for a short amount of time at the beginning and end of each market. This was a result of the ONE Market having only enough funds allocated to compensate the manager during these times; there was not enough money budgeted annually to pay for her presence at the market during its entirety. Comparatively, as a salaried position the BFM manager was able to come to the park usually around 5:00am to begin cleaning the park, blocking off the road, and setting up, with the market staff's day not ending until about 3:30 or

4:00pm. At the SFVT Market, the manager arrived prior to market to help set up the market, but due to prior commitments he would not usually return to the market until the second half. All SFVT positions were volunteer, however, so any time any volunteer gave to the market, including the main manager and a student co-manager, was valued just as much as if it were a paid position.

While all markets greatly valued their managers' work, it seemed that the more lucrative the market was, the more vendors expressed their appreciation for their manager. Vendors most frequently expressed tensions regarding the management at the SFVT Market because they felt that the lack of sales and public knowledge about the market were connected with the management's lack of funding and ability to advertise for the vendors. Comparatively, although the ONE Market functions on a small budget, most vendors found financial success there and were openly appreciative of their manager's hard work. It was only BFM vendors, however, who endlessly contributed their personal business' success and the market's success as a whole to the dedication of the manager and market staff. At the BFM more than at other markets, vendors perceived a greater level of the manager's obligation to work towards general market success. At the ONE and SFVT markets, vendors understood their managers as actively participating in exchanges of the overall farmers market system, but they did not strongly associate the managers' work with the obligation to repay vendors' time and money for joining the market. Instead, in these two markets the vendors were not always clear on what the reciprocity within the vendor-manager system looked like.

The BFM manager understood his biggest concern at market to be talking with vendors and helping them to find financial success for their individual business while maintaining the

prosperity of the greater Burlington Farmers Market. Expressing his preference for focusing his time on vendors rather than customers, the manager explained:

“I would rather be out there having one-on-one conversations with vendors about how the day’s going, how the month is going, how the whole season is doing and things like that. I feel like they’re the ones that pay my salary, you know like once you become a vendor you’re the one who pays my salary. And I totally get it that I am there for the customers as well but I can’t be distracted by dumb questions from customers, I honestly can’t. If it was a smaller market and we didn’t have the staff that I have to manage and things like that, I would be all for being a part of those conversations and stuff like that, but on Saturday day, I can’t, I just don’t have time for it...I guess in my role as the market manager, I feel like I’m there to manage the market. I’m there to manage the vendors, all of the outside things that may be going on at the same time as the market, but I don’t know if my role is necessarily to manage the customers that are there. I don’t really seek out conversations with customers” (BFM Manager, Personal Interview July 20, 2014).

Further discussing the reasoning behind why he found vendor interactions and vendor success to be such a large part of his responsibility at market, the manager continued:

“I really want to see every vendor happy, I honestly do want to see every vendor happy even if I personally don’t get along with them because I know that it’s their business and at some point, maybe they don’t bring that passion to Saturday mornings, but at some point they were passionate about that business, so it’s just like how do we get that back? At some point they wanted to be a part of the

Burlington Farmers Market. Maybe they don't anymore and they're just caught up in this machine or whatever but it's just like how do we get that back?" (BFM Manager, Personal Interview July 20, 2014).

The BFM manager's interest in keeping vendors' business financially viable and maintaining an overall sense of enthusiasm for being in the market reflects the monetary-focused goal for the BFM previously mentioned. Unlike many customers who believe the market is somehow feeding its money directly into the city as a city-run operation, the BFM exists as a business, and as such vendors are there to make money and part of their money pays the manager's salary. It is no small leap, then, to understand why the manager is so dedicated to vendors' success at market, but this economic cycle at the farmers market improves the entire market for the better as vendors make more money, more vendors are pleased to be a part of the BFM, and the manager is excited to see so many enthusiastic and successful small businesses.

The ONE Farmers Market manager, while diligently managing the finances of the market at all times, expressed more community- and food access-oriented goals than purely monetary ones at market. The ONE manager explained that "I think having a sense of community and running a market that is accessible to more folks is my goal as a manager. And to make it fun!" (ONE Manager, Personal Interview July 28, 2014). Understanding as one vendor claimed that the ONE Farmers Market "has a real practical role of getting fresh food to people in the neighborhood", it can be better understood why the ONE manager was already focused on creating a market where Old North End community members not only wanted to visit, but one at which they were able to afford and wanted to purchase fresh, local foods (ONE Agricultural Vendor 02, Personal Interview August 1, 2014). There are two reasons why the ONE Manager may not be as focused on the particulars of vendors' financial success. The first is that space



fees<sup>9</sup> at the ONE Farmers Market are relatively low compared to many farmers markets, and especially compared to other markets in Burlington, Vermont. The ONE manager noted that:

“A couple of us make [space fees] back in one or two days. Usually the first market’s pretty abysmal because nobody knows it’s happening yet, people aren’t in the routine of coming. But some of the people...within two weeks definitely. Some of the people, three to four weeks, five weeks...I think everybody’s made it back [this year]” (ONE Manager, Personal Interview July 28, 2014).

Without a large overhead to begin each season, ONE Farmers Market vendors have an easier time recovering their fees, especially given the popularity of the market and consistency in sales once it begins each season. Knowing that all of the vendors at the ONE Farmers Market will cover the cost of their space fees fairly quickly, the ONE manager knows that the rest of the season will be mostly profit for the vendors, so not much attention is needed to ensure the profitability of each business at the market other than weekly check-ins. This allows the manager to have more time to focus on the customers and community in which the ONE Market occurs.

The second reason the ONE manager may focus on values that indirectly impact the vendors is that although there is an annual budget to pay the ONE manager’s hourly wage, the ONE manager is not salaried, and the income from the position amounts to the earnings of a small part-time job only. The manager would often say “It’s a part time job with part-time pay and full-time hours,” and she was not interested in making the position full-time. The manager

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<sup>9</sup> Space fees are one-time annual fees required of all vendors to participate in any farmers market; they can either be flat fees, or based on a tiered system where vendors pay based on how much space they wish to take up at market. Depending on the size and popularity of the market, fees can range from less than \$100 to around \$1,000 or more. These fees are spent on a variety of costs, including renting the space for the market’s location, advertising, paying the monthly fees for owning an EBT machine, paying for the market’s required insurance, and paying market staff.

was therefore not concerned beyond earning what was agreed upon for her wages each year. With only a small portion of her personal and household income deriving from her position as the ONE market manager, the manager felt she was in part responsible for helping vendors succeed, but also responsible for creating a market that the people of the Old North End neighborhood wanted to see. In this way, the ONE manager felt more responsible for her surrounding community and market customers than keeping her focus on the vendors alone.

The SFVT manager, despite being the same person as the BFM manager, had very different goals and responsibilities as the volunteer manager at market. When asked if being in the different farmers markets' atmospheres changed his personal views on what he should be worrying about and what the market should be achieving, the manager said "They 100% do... I mean depending on what hat I'm wearing, yeah, I definitely do" (SFVT Manager, Personal Interview July 20, 2014). Vendors and volunteers alike at the SFVT Market were concerned about making enough money at market to have participating "make sense for them financially as a business decision", but with an entirely volunteer market staff and little to no budget for advertising, the manager was mainly left to help make the market run as smoothly as possible on market day (SFVT Vendor 05, Personal Interview August 7, 2014). Before the market started he would lay out where each vendor would set up for the afternoon as well as arrange the Slow Food Vermont information table and tent. Once he arrived back at the market towards the end of the afternoon, the manager would help answer questions from market visitors about Slow Food Vermont, check in with the vendors to see how the day was going, and continue to brainstorm with vendors and volunteers about ways to help improve both the popularity and sales of their market.

For the farmers market managers, values such as facilitating financial success, working closely with vendors, and creating high quality, accessible markets for their communities predominated across each market's management. Managers demonstrated their obligation to repay vendors and customers for participating in the market through the manager's level of effort to help the market succeed. Regardless of the markets' abilities to compensate their managers, all managers dedicated themselves to helping the market run as smoothly as possible and wanted to make it financially rewarding for vendors. While all managers shared to some degree both economic and social values in their position, higher paid managers such as at the BFM demonstrated their obligation to repay vendors more than lower paid managers. This is possibly due to the farmers market system in which the vendors' space fees contribute to the manager's salary. In the ONE Market where the manager position was vital to the market but not a salaried position, the manager placed greater importance on community-based values such as accessibility and an attractive atmosphere for customers. With the managerial positions as with the vendors' experiences at market, where financial values are consistently met, farmers market agents are able to realize extra-economic values such as making social connections with customers and creating widely accessible farmers markets.

***What does a “successful” farmers market look like?***

As we have seen, farmers market vendors, managers, and customers have different priorities and motivations for participating in a farmers market, leading to variation in what people believe a successful farmers market looks like and what it accomplishes. As evidenced through their interviews, for managers a successful market is one that is economically viable for the vendors, generates enough income as a private entity to host the market annually, and

particularly in the Old North End, one that offers a fun and safe atmosphere with affordable food for the local community. Managers want to see both vendors and customers enjoying their time at the market, making connections when possible and in general providing foods that the community is interested in purchasing and that the producers are excited to create.

Vendors have the most similar concept of what a successful farmers market is compared to the manager's views, while customers deviate most from both vendors' and managers' thoughts on what it takes to create a successful farmers market. Vendors wish to establish a strong business at market while selling enough of their product to make it worth their while economically to participate in the market, and they want to provide an atmosphere where customers can feel comfortable and engaged with what they are purchasing. Customers, on the other hand, focus on food shopping to a degree but hold most of their concerns with the social aspects of farmers markets. Customers desire safe, fun, and entertaining atmospheres where they can meet friends, listen to music, sit outside, and enjoy their surrounding community whether it is the city of Burlington as a whole or just within their neighborhood.

Given the differences in opinion about what a successful farmers market looks like and accomplishes, any attempt to improve any given farmers market may result in tradeoffs among the goals of different farmers market actors. From the managers' or vendors' perspectives, increasing the size of the market to include more vendors in order to generate more income may make the most sense if sales and market popularity are the goal. For customers, however, a change in vendors may not impress them if no more seating options have been added to the market, or if there is no live music offered for entertainment. Removing dogs from the farmers market may increase the approval of a certain percentage of market customers, but for those customers that no longer attend due to their pets being banned, the market loses their business.

While this could be a positive change for the customers who wish to see dogs removed from farmers markets, the decision might be a negative one for the market staff and vendors who wish to see as many customers present as possible to increase vendor sales and improve overall market revenue.

Some of the changes or most highly prioritized aspects of the farmers market for customers, such as increased seating and louder and more consistent musical entertainment, may primarily create a successful farmers market according to visitors, but they may also indirectly create an improved and successful market in the managers' and vendors' opinions. Because more people present in attendance at a farmers market generally means more sales for vendors, creating a space where more people are inclined to spend time socializing may also lead to greater income for farmers market vendors. With increased seating, cleaner grounds, and consistent live entertainment, people might be more inclined to spend a longer amount of time at the market, perhaps becoming hungry in the process and contemplating more purchases than if they had passed through the market quickly. In this way, how a customer perceives a successful market could lead to a successful market as defined by farmers market managers and vendors as well. Therefore, not all opinions on a farmers market's success and improvement are at odds with one another.

The varied opinions on what makes a farmers market successful are in part products of individuals' values when they come to farmers markets, and these values are also a product of the nature of exchanges in which individuals participate while at market. For example, my data demonstrates that customers are mainly attending farmers markets to purchase food, socialize, and make connections with other customers and vendors. From the customers' perspective, they are mainly participating in exchange relationships where they are giving, either of money or

time, when at the market. Though customers will directly receive the food they purchase at the farmers market, they may not always recognize the market's act to repay the customers for their patronage. Thus enters customers' desires for changes that mainly affect the social aspects of market such as its atmosphere and environment. While customers are not paying the market staff directly for these changes, they might feel their contribution to vendors deserves a general thank-you from the market in the form of park benches or entertainment. Customers value their own willingness to pay for products at the farmers market, and perhaps they believe their support of the market deserves the market's obligation to repay their efforts in kind. Because customers perceive the majority of their exchanges to be ones in which they are giving, they are looking for someone else to validate their exchanges at the farmers market.

Vendors expressed a fairly even balance between the values of giving and receiving at the farmers markets. While vendors were all very proud of their products' quality, they were also in tune with the products they needed to sell in order to gain the most income, regardless of their personal enthusiasm for that product. Vendors in trading partnerships typically perceived what they received to have more value than the products they gave, perhaps suggesting that vendors assign greater value to the income their products generate than the products themselves. This would account for vendors' perception of farmers market success to mean increasing sales and forging connections with customers to help guarantee those sales in the future. To complete the full cycle of obligations, vendors would be able to repay customers with continued products if vendors were also able to continue making enough sales to facilitate an economically viable business.

Finally, managers tended to lean towards the desire to always give more of themselves to their respective markets, and understood the value of repayment as one of the main driving

forces of their position. Each manager understood the great commitment that vendors, and to a lesser degree customers, made to patronize their farmers markets each week. What managers sometimes questioned was their own ability to give back to their markets in terms of time, energy, advertising, and general management skills to help guarantee the financial success of vendors' individual businesses as well as the market as a whole. The managers' exchanges often possessed more discrete qualities than the exchanges between vendors and customers or among vendors. Consequently, managers' often mentioned their desire to provide face-to-face interactions with their vendors to help validate their efforts to give back to the market and to work together with vendors to achieve success at the farmers market.

### ***How do federal nutrition assistance programs impact farmers markets?***

At the BFM and ONE Farmers Market, 3SquaresVT benefits (previously discussed in the introduction of this paper and more commonly known as food stamps) were accepted through multiple avenues at market. These included:

- An EBT machine that enabled customers to take out EBT-specific \$1 wooden tokens, which could be used just like money at the market. No change could be given back to customers who used these tokens at vendors' stalls, and with the tokens customers could purchase only those foods that were intended for household consumption. These excluded hot prepared foods, alcoholic beverages, and non-edible plants. There was no transaction fee for customers to swipe their EBT card to receive these tokens.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> This is compared to customers who swiped a debit card through the same machine, for which they were charged a \$1 transaction fee and received \$5 market tokens. Debit tokens could be used at the market for any purchase, food, alcohol, and crafts included. Aside from being slightly larger and having the \$5 symbol printed on them, debit tokens appeared no different than EBT tokens.

- Farm to Family Coupons, a form of federal nutrition assistance that comes in booklets of \$30-worth of \$3 coupons. These hold the same purchasing limitations as EBT tokens.
- The Harvest Health coupon program, another coupon program similar to Farm to Family.

Because it is not officially registered with the state of Vermont as a farmers market, the SFVT Market was not eligible for any programs enabling it to accept benefits or to have a token system for EBT customers. Based on informal discussions with the market volunteers and vendors as well as the with the market manager, the ONE Market often seemed heavily focused on increasing customers' use of EBT at market. This is likely because the EBT tokens and coupon programs together contributed to a large portion of that farmers market's success.

Comparatively, while the BFM hosted a large number of EBT transactions each week, benefit and coupon use did not contribute to a majority of the market's gross income. As a result, informal conversations with the market staff revealed that they were only marginally interested in focusing their efforts on attracting customers who depend on EBT for farmers market purchases.

At the SFVT Market where no benefits could be accepted, several vendors lamented the lack of EBT program at their market and wished they could offer customers a way to accept their benefits in order to create a more accessible and convenient farmers market. As an individual project of Slow Food Vermont's Burlington chapter, however, the market as a whole was not set up with the intention of purchasing an EBT machine or accepting nutrition assistance program benefits. This decision was made based on not only the trial status of the SFVT Market, but also because of the monthly expenses for having an EBT machine. The latter reason will be discussed in more detail shortly. Despite many SFVT vendors expressing strong pride in Slow Food's values of "Good, Clean, and Fair", the market's lack of EBT machine and inability to accept



nutrition assistance presents a flaw in the Slow Food slogan (Slow Food International 2015). If not all people have an equal opportunity to at least consider making a purchase at the SFVT Market, I argue that it cannot fully realize Slow Food International's goal of having "a world in which all people can access and enjoy food that is good for them, good for those who grow it, and good for the planet" (Slow Food International 2015). Among interviews there was often opposition between SFVT vendors who saw the need to accept benefits as a pressing concern, while others thought that the SFVT Market was not attracting a sizeable number of customers who used EBT for it to substantiate a decision to begin accepting EBT tokens and coupons at market.

For those vendors that wanted to see a change towards accepting EBT at the SFVT Market, they were concerned about the statement the market was making by not accepting benefits.

"I've only had one or two people who have asked me about EBT, and it's, 'I'm here on Saturday anyway but I was just hoping, I'm here now, this is here now....I want it now, it's inconvenient'. It's not like they were angry at me personally, it's just inconvenient and it sort of points out to them that you can't do this here. And to me, that's putting them in a different category and I don't think that's right. I'm not comfortable having to say no to them because I think it singles them out as being different, not as good as whatever; whether that's our intention or not – and certainly it's not our intention – that's how it may be felt, and we have to own that" (SFVT Vendor 02, Personal Interview July 23, 2014).

This same vendor mentioned, "I do love the fact that on the Saturday markets we do EBT because we get a lot of customers" who use it (SFVT Vendor 02, Personal Interview July 23,

2014). When asked if she missed having the option to make EBT transactions at the Wednesday market, she answered, “I do. I do because I’ve had people ask me about it [on Wednesdays], and say oh never mind, forget it, I can’t” (SFVT Vendor 02, Personal Interview July 23, 2014). With some people relying on EBT as their only way to purchase local, fresh food at farmers markets, not even offering it at market created a clear statement that EBT-users would not be able to purchase the food offered at the SFVT Market.

With the exclusion of an EBT machine and nutrition assistance programs, the atmosphere of the SFVT Market was perceived to be slightly different than other farmers markets.

“I think the Slow Food Market is a little bit more explicit...in that our target audience isn’t necessarily the folks who are on EBT, who are using food stamps, but the foodies who are a lot more interested in artisanal breads and cheeses and food and organically grown stuff and who seek that out. So in that sense, it is a little bit more exclusive, and I...want to be sure that even though this might be a little bit more of an invitational farmers market, that it still maintain[s] that atmosphere of inclusivity for as many people as possible. We want people to be able to afford what we have to offer and we’re here to make connections and do it for everyone...I think by accepting the EBT tokens that it would make a really strong statement” (SFVT Vendor 02, Personal Interview July 23, 2014).

Another vendor expressed similar concerns about the accessibility of the SFVT Market, considering the lack of EBT a limitation to the market’s success.

“So at Wednesdays it’s only cash now, they don’t have EBT set up for the market and they don’t accept Farm to Family coupons or the tokens, so the market’s limited in that sense just because it’s so new...We should be accepting the Farm

to Family coupons, or we should have the EBT I think. I guess we just need to make the market accessible to everyone. That's really important to me, that's important to our [business], to have a product that everyone can afford and feel comfortable buying" (SFVT Vendor 05, Personal Interview August 7, 2014).

When asked if they thought the purpose or atmosphere of the SFVT Market would change were it to hypothetically accept EBT and nutrition assistance coupons, vendors identified no negative consequences: "I don't think [EBT] changes the purpose of the market. I think it helps make the market more accessible to different subsets of the population; I don't think it changes the feel of the market" (SFVT Vendor 05, Personal Interview August 7, 2014). Another vendor agreed, stating, "[EBT] doesn't make a difference to me really. I don't see any problems or any logistical frustrations with it as far as I'm concerned...I don't see that it changes the atmosphere, no" (SFVT Vendor 01, Personal Interview July 21, 2014). The former vendor in particular thought that adding a benefits acceptance program to the SFVT Market would enhance not only the accessibility of the farmers market, but it might also help to take away some of the intimidation involved in going to a farmers market for many people of low socioeconomic class.

"I think [nutrition assistance] is a really valuable program. And farmers markets are really intimidating for people of low income to go to...because they're a hip thing. I mean I'd be intimidated to go. It's sort of like a club; they're trendy right now and that can make it intimidating for people who don't necessarily have the same income to go to and feel like they can't afford everything even though it's cheaper than going and getting it at City Market. But it's not the same as buying a head of lettuce at Shaw's, so how can we make that more accessible?" (SFVT Vendor 05, Personal Interview August 7, 2014).

Not all who participated in the SFVT Market were certain of the importance of offering EBT programs at market, however, because either they personally did not receive many sales through benefit programs or because they did not perceive the SFVT Market to be attracting people dependent on EBT for farmers market purchases. These perceptions are contradicted, however, by the vendor who already mentioned that she had met several customers at the SFVT Market wanting to purchase food, but unable to because EBT was not accepted there. One vendor considered offering EBT to be “neutral - I think it’s a positive if anything...I don’t think it’s big, I mean I don’t know enough but I don’t perceive it as being a big deal at this point” (SFVT Vendor 03, Personal Interview July 28, 2014). There were also the financial constraints of the SFVT Market’s small operating budget:

“It’s not a goal to get the Wednesday market signed up through the Farm to Family coupon...program and things like that, not to get that market on the list because I don’t feel like that’s necessarily the crowd that we’re trying to get. And that sounds really uppity for me to say that, like I 100% agree...but this is not that market. This is honestly the market for people who have the income and who are willing to pay higher prices for quality food and to be able to talk to that farmer. This is not the market you come to to haggle... it’s honestly not. There are those markets and thank god there are those markets, and it’s great that those markets exist, but this is not that one... The Slow Food Market could never afford that machine, because Slow Food Vermont has no money. We have \$1,000 in the bank or something like that, we’re a non-profit, we don’t need money for anything. And for us to now all of a sudden start the \$45 a month and things like that, there’s enough banks I think right across from us that we can send tourists to

cross the street, we can send locals across the street” (SFVT Manager, Personal Interview July 20, 2014).

With opposing opinions on whether or not the SFVT Market should invest in an EBT machine or accept nutrition assistance programs, it remains unclear what types of currency the SFVT Market intends to accept in future seasons.

At the BFM, where EBT and nutrition assistance coupons are accepted throughout the market, it is still not a goal to focus on attracting EBT users as the majority of sales do not come from EBT transactions. Also, due to NOFA’s system that allots a certain number of coupon books for each farmers market that signs up for the program, the BFM would hand out all of their coupons for the season in one day and felt it was not fair to people who could not come to market the day the coupons were distributed.

“The biggest reason we don’t do the Harvest Health coupons is because we go through our allotment in one market, and NOFA can only give us so much...I would rather have everyone upset that no one got it than some people really pissed off because some people got it and some people didn’t...So I’d just rather have nobody get it...I mean it really is an even playing field now, the fact that we don’t do it at all...I think it’s beneficial for other smaller markets to get people, you know incentive to come to the Old North End Market or the New North End Market or Williston or something like that because we’ll match you dollar for dollar. I mean I feel like most people that come to the Burlington Market, they don’t need incentive to come” (BFM Manager, Personal Interview July 20, 2014).

It is critical to note that the shared intention of providing an equal experience among shoppers at the farmers markets is therefore realized through two opposing tactics. One the one hand, some

agents believe the lack of nutrition assistance programs creates “an even playing field,” while for others it is precisely the presence of the assistance programs that improves egalitarianism at market. Exemplifying the latter perspective, one vendor noted, “I think it’s important to accept EBT card tokens and the Farm to Family coupon things because I think those are kind of social equalizers” (BFM Agricultural Vendor 01, Personal Interview July 28, 2014).

This is not to say, however, that the BFM is actively avoiding or disapproving of people who shop there with EBT, but that it is not the primary social or financial purpose of the market.

“I think we’re hopefully reaching more lower income people. I know EBT sales and Farm to Family sales have progressively gotten better and better every year, so I mean hopefully we’re reaching more people. But at the same time, that’s not the driving force for the market. Talk to someone like the Old North End [Market] and they’re like how do we get more low-income people? We’re not focused on that at all, none of our advertising is focused on that, we’re not trying to reach out in the North Avenue News or something like that to reach people in the Old North End. One, because I don’t want to necessarily steal people away from the other smaller markets – like, ‘I don’t need to go to the Tuesday market...because I went on Saturday’...So trying to find that balance of telling these people that there is another option but not necessarily making it worth their while to come. Which is one of the reasons why we don’t match coupons...because we can only do it for one Saturday, and that’s not fair...So I don’t think the Saturday market is actively trying to reach out to anybody new” (BFM Manager, Personal Interview July 20, 2014).

There were few negative impacts associated with accepting EBT benefits at the BFM, and they were practical concerns with the format of the assistance programs and not their implementation or use at market. The first was frustration with the denominations of coupons, especially because change cannot be given to any customer paying with nutrition assistance benefits. Following the rules of the benefit coupons and tokens previously outlined, vendors were for the most part very good about creating amounts of food for sale in the whole number values of EBT tokens and coupons. The BFM Manager shared a discussion where one vendor even mentioned, “I go out of my way to make sure that they [people who use nutrition assistance coupons] get just as much service as someone who handed me a credit card or someone who handed me \$100 in cash” (BFM Manager, Personal Interview July 20, 2014). It is not always possible, however, to sell food in the coupons’ pre-determined amounts, such as \$3 or \$5.

Although interviewed for the SFVT Market, a vendor also in the BFM explained:

“So the biggest downfall is the Farm to Family coupons – they only come in increments of three, which means if you have a product that’s \$5, you can’t give people cash back. I know they can give you a \$3 coupon and \$2 [in cash], but I guess people want to use their coupons, and it’s hard to be like I’m sorry I can’t give you cash. The rule is you can’t give them cash back. So I wish those coupons would come in \$3 increments and \$1 increments” (SFVT Vendor 05, Personal Interview August 7, 2014).

The other difficulty of having the various EBT programs at market was achieving a certain level of understanding of which programs and which benefits could be used to purchase certain foods and not others. Any farmers market registered with the EBT program in Vermont has access to small printed informational cards explaining the rules of using EBT at farmers markets, but both

customers and vendors often made mistakes or became upset over a misunderstanding of how benefits could be used.

“More and more people are being able to use their benefits to buy local things and I mean the only downsides that I can think of are just a huge kind of educational, you know of what can be bought and what can’t. Not only for customers but for vendors” (BFM Manager, Personal Interview July 20, 2014).

This was a concern at both the BFM and the ONE Farmers Market, and much time was spent at the weekly markets explaining to customers and handing out the information cards about which food purchases were approved by the EBT program.

At the ONE Farmers Market, where EBT and nutrition assistance coupons contributed to a large portion of the market’s and individual vendors’ income, there was a greater focus on improving the EBT program than at the other two markets. As previously discussed, vendors at the ONE Farmers Market were generally pleased with their market’s ability to offer the EBT program and to accept coupons in order to better serve the community in which the market is situated. Despite the large proportion of EBT sales at market, however, one vendor was still surprised there were not more EBT transactions. Referring to the ONE Market having the EBT and coupon programs in place, she commented,

“It doesn’t seem to be working so well...I feel like sales are much lower than I expected them to be when we started...and I assume that’s just about promotion, advertising, getting the word out, but a lot of peoples’ money runs out and they only have it at the beginning of the month. And then it’s the timing of getting to the market when they have it. I imagine that’s really difficult to balance unless you’re super into the market, so my hope is that that just continues to grow



slowly, slowly...It definitely seems kind of insubstantial almost... And not that we should cancel it, but it's sort of like oh, surprised there's not more" (ONE Agricultural Vendor 02, Personal Interview August 1, 2014).

Number of sales aside, there is still an assumption at the ONE Farmers Market that accepting EBT at the market has a positive impact and is growing in popularity among the Old North End community.

"You kind of have to explain how [EBT] works, and it's cool because you know you're reaching people that haven't been there before or are doing it for the first time, and that's a really great feeling" (ONE Agricultural Vendor 02, Personal Interview August 1, 2014).

The ONE Farmers Market aims "to serve an economically and culturally diverse community and have it welcome to all kinds of people," and for this reason vendors at the ONE Farmers Market wish to see the benefit programs at market continue and expand (ONE Manager, Personal Interview July 28, 2014).

One vendor from the ONE Market thought the program "must have some kind of impact", assuming that people can use their EBT benefits "to purchase things that they might not otherwise buy", either in general or at the farmers market specifically (ONE Prepared Food Vendor 01, Personal Interview July 23, 2014). Further explaining the potential positive impact of offering EBT, the vendor explained:

"I can only think of good things to say about that because that's an incredibly helpful social service. I also was on food stamps when I was in college, and I couldn't have afforded to eat the way I did had I not had that, and so I imagine that there are plenty of people out there who are even in much more dire

situations where they're actually trying to feed children and not just buy organic produce for themselves! And then I think they might not otherwise purchase organic vegetables from the local farmers if they didn't have that option...It probably brings in people who wouldn't otherwise do this. Especially the Farm to Family coupons, I'm imagining that must make a huge difference because they can only use those at farmers markets and if they didn't get them, well, they wouldn't go to the farmers market. So it's helping them out but it's also helping the vendors, increasing their business, clientele. Win-win" (ONE Prepared Food Vendor 01, Personal Interview July 23, 2014).

The belief in the dual benefit of community members being able to purchase local and healthy food combined with increased sales for vendors was a common response among ONE Farmers Market vendors when asked what they thought of the EBT program at market. For these reasons, the ONE Farmers Market tends to not only enjoy the current impact their market has on the community's ability to access local foods, but it also constantly works to improve awareness of the EBT program at market and increase the number of Old North End community members who shop there weekly.

This reflects the main values of the ONE manager, who expressed concerns over making her market as accessible and welcoming to customers as possible. Both the vendors' and the manager's concerns over the EBT program at the ONE Market, however, as well as their desire to keep the nutrition assistance programs in place, could be a projection of their own values onto the farmers market customers. The vendors and manager believe these programs are an asset to the market and that it is a beneficial service to be able to offer it to their customers, but then the market is met with not as many predicted EBT transactions as they had hoped. Perhaps this

presents a gap between the market facilitators' values and the customers' values. Even if customers are highly interested in both food shopping and the social aspects of farmers markets as the ONE surveys indicated, customers may still be prioritizing social values over concerns with using their EBT benefits at market. Reflecting the vendors' and manager's values that the EBT program should be more widely accessible to Old North End community members, the ONE Farmers Market is consistently working to advertise the many assistance programs accepted at market. This is done in an effort to attract more customers and increase both business and food accessibility within the neighborhood. In this way, we see the vendors' and manager's goals (increased business) acting in a non-mutually exclusive manner with the customers' goals (a market atmosphere more conducive to socializing and purchasing food).

To attract more customers to market, one method of advertising for the ONE Farmers Market includes one day of putting up flyers on as many as 500-600 houses surrounding the park in which the market is held, but even this does not have as large an impact as the market desires. With several densely populated streets surrounding the market in the Old North End, this usually equates to reaching no more than a portion of about two individual streets. A constraint in improving advertising about EBT sales lies in the small budget for the manager's pay, as the number of hours she is allotted to work always seems to fall short of the amount of work that needs to be done. There are also limited funds for printing, leading to a restricted degree of outreach in the neighborhood each year. There are several fundraising events and organizations that donate to the ONE Market annually to help offset these costs, but it remains a small market with incomplete funding to reach a broader audience in its advertising. Realizing these constraints as well as the small scale of the Old North End neighborhood, the manager noted:

“It’s always going to be a small market. I mean we try to get more vendors... There are a couple vendors that do really well there, and other people that do okay, and then some people do really bad and they don’t come back. And it’s just the market” (ONE Manager, Personal Interview July 28, 2014).

The ONE Market takes its challenges in stride and continues each summer to offer fresh, local foods at lower prices to as many people in Burlington as possible. Its twenty-year and counting history in the neighborhood suggests it will find a way to continue long into the future, but not without dealing with at least some of the economic and advertising challenges it currently faces.

### *Synthesis*

Differing motivations and values held among farmers market participants alter their motivations and rationale for participating in the market. For vendors, special importance is often placed on the alternative aspects of the farmers market economy, which emphasizes the obligations to give, receive, and repay gifted and exchanged food among vendors and market staff. Self-interest is present to a degree in these exchanges, but vendors profess a strong desire to maintain the socioeconomic relationships with trade partners for the sake of having the connection more than the obtainment of another vendor’s goods. Exchanges of goods are counterbalanced, however, with vendors’ capitalistic rationale of earning an income by selling their commodities to non-vendor consumers each week. Farmers market managers wish to promote their communities’ economies through market activity as well as to provide a social space for consumers and producers to interact. While customers are looking to maximize utility in their purchases, they are also acutely focused on the social atmosphere of farmers markets and they desire a safe and fun place to interact with others in their community. These goals present

gaps in the beliefs of what a successful farmers market looks like and achieves, depending on different stakeholders' levels of participation and responsibilities within the market. Values placed on widespread community food access are varied across individuals and across markets, creating different market structures that either help or hinder the acceptance of federal nutrition assistance programs at different farmers markets. Even within the same small city, all farmers markets are therefore not completely unified in their intentions and goals in serving the greater community.

This thesis set out to explore the motivations and values of farmers market participants.

My research questions sought to understand:

- customers' main goal when coming to a farmers market
- whether vendors and market staff held the same priorities at market as the customers, and
- to what degree these groups shared values and exchange relationships at market.

I was particularly interested in understanding what values people placed on food shopping at a farmers market, and whether values regarding sociality outweighed values pertaining to food shopping. Finally, I wanted to better understand the extent of federal nutrition assistance programs' impact on farmers markets, and how different agents reacted to the programs' presence or absence at market.

To analyze different farmers market agents' concepts of value and how these beliefs affected their exchange relationships at market, I utilized frameworks from Mauss and Graeber to expand upon Bourdieu's concept of capital. Because Bourdieu's theory on capital is dependent on and constrained by class, altering this definition to include the theory of value allows a more nuanced interpretation of the motivations and goals of farmers market customers, vendors, and managers. According to their values, individuals then participate in a range of exchanges at

market, many of which depend on the cycle of obligations to give, receive, and repay. Exchange partners experience the exchange differently depending on their place in the market and what values they hold in their own ability to maintain the exchange relationship. Because different stakeholders prioritize different sets of values, farmers markets are able to persist in a way that each participant is often able to realize their greatest priority, sometimes allowing them to encompass additional values such as social justice or food access into their farmers market experience.

Farmers markets reach beyond the scope of individual values, however, in their construction and modification of cultural values in the societies in which they operate. Through the multiple aspects of informal and non-capitalist economic practices, farmers markets shape values of exchange, trading relationships, and group dynamics in an otherwise individual-oriented marketplace. While this is not to say that American culture does not already hold some of these values, farmers markets help to emphasize what in typical American society may be only remotely valued or visible. For example, while our culture is typically classified as very individualistic and self-centered, farmers markets bring people of many walks of life together in a central geographic location while also encouraging community engagement through conversations, socializing, and sales among the participants. At a farmers market, vendors often tell customers how their purchase is not only about the food or product the customer takes home; rather, it is about the people involved in that product's creation, the community's local economy benefiting from the circulation of local dollars, and the promotion of an engaged and friendly neighborhood atmosphere. By participating in a farmers market, people could therefore expand their cultural predilections to include more group-based and social experiences.

While it can be easy to assume that non-capitalist economies are more perfect or more freeing than the capitalist economy of America, it is essential to understand that the gift exchanges of farmers markets can be just as binding as the sale of commodity objects in any given market. Should an exchange partner at the market forget to or choose not to trade products with a particular vendor for several weeks or even months in a row, other vendors may start to either pressure the non-giving member or they may terminate their exchange relationship. The longer a vendor waits to repay another vendor's gifted product, the greater the anticipation and expectancy of the next gift to be great in either quantity or value. Maintaining awareness that aspects of non-capitalist markets can be just as or more stressful than commodity capitalist markets is key to analyzing the complex exchange relationships and exchange events that occur within farmers markets.

Finally, this paper endeavored to understand the broader associations made with the act of purchasing, eating, and surrounding oneself with food within a farmers market setting. While the definition of farmers markets can vary, the inclusion of farmers selling their agricultural products is essential to the creation and longevity of any given farmers market. It makes sense, then, why most people self-report coming to farmers markets to purchase food, but people's concerns and actions at the markets indicate other reasons for participating in the markets as well. Customers' interests in the social atmosphere and entertainment offered at markets, as well as vendors' interests in making connections with other vendors as well as with customers, imply that more is being associated with farmers markets than food alone. For people to be drawn to participate in a cultural event that provides food as well as a venue for socializing and participating in the community, we see food as a medium through which people gather to talk, learn, eat, socialize, and purchase goods. Food is more than nutrients put into the body. It is

nourishment to the wellbeing of society, which changes its values and cultural practices throughout its lifelong period of digestion.



## Conclusion

When I began designing this project in the spring of 2014, I wanted to investigate the ways in which Burlington's diverse community members navigated the many farmers markets offered throughout the summer months. I began this project with questions on the importance of class and race in food security and food sovereignty, and I imagined a much more price-focused data set. Then, I met the markets' managers, and realized they were not particularly focused on their markets' food prices. Each manager thought their market offered high quality foods, and there was never any open mentioning of negative comparisons among the different farmers markets in town. When I started attending the markets, however, there were vast differences in how each was run and to a lesser degree, in who was coming to each market. Understanding that perhaps more than prices were affecting the interest in these markets, I began to shift my research questions.

Closely working with the market managers in the early stages of this project allowed me a window into their concerns and priorities for their respective markets. Months later when I was in the final stages of coding, I realized that although much of the data I collected was on the price of food at farmers markets and on the interactions between vendors and customers, price alone could not offer a nuanced analysis of farmers market exchanges. Food prices would not be able to explain why weekly EBT users shopped exclusively at the BFM, or why a farmer might refuse a sale to a customer ready to pay full price for a specific food item. Once I began to widen my perspective to include the concept of value and of the social embeddedness in these market interactions, I was better able to understand the motivations and rationale behind farmers market agents. Priorities such as building social relationships, participating in one's community, and

maintaining business partnerships revealed how farmers market vendors, customers, and managers understood their own places within the farmers market sphere.

This project aimed to investigate the following questions:

1. What are the main priorities and values of farmers market vendors and customers, and are there differences between these groups' goals at market?
2. Is purchasing food the main goal for a majority of farmers market visitors, or do they come to the markets primarily to fulfill other values?
3. What strategies, if any, have the Burlington Farmers Market, Old North End Farmers Market, and the Slow Food Vermont Agricultural Market adopted to attract and accommodate socioeconomically diverse residents? How do federal nutrition assistance programs impact the farmers markets?

The vendor interviews and customer surveys mainly served to answer the first question, though in retrospect my customer surveys could have been more focused on customers' values rather than on their perceptions of prices at the different farmers markets. Likewise, while the customer survey directly asked customers to choose their most important goal when coming to market, many responses ranked multiple answers together or selected more than one answer. This sometimes made it unclear as to which goals customers prioritized over others. That being said, in creating and passing on the final summaries for each market managers concerning all data associated with their market, the managers were grateful to have quantitative data concerning any of their customers' and vendors' thoughts. Finally, discussing the different impacts and interactions with the nutrition assistance programs at the three farmers markets often led to passionate and very personal conversations about interviewees' opinions on the subject. In order to maintain a respectful position as the interviewer, I could not always ask further details about

why individuals held certain attitudes regarding the nutrition assistance programs. For this reason, future studies investigating the perceptions and motivations of these programs' impacts may find the potential for improved data collection through non-face to face research methods such as anonymous surveys or phone interviews.

At the most basic level, this project sought to understand the motivations and values that drive some people to acquire one of the most basic human provisions – food – from farmers markets. While they are growing in number every year (Low et al. 2015:2), farmers markets are arguably inconvenient and intimidating places to shop for food in the United States. Farmers markets require a certain level of consumer effort and interactions with food producers that other food retailers cannot always provide. Further, farmers markets' atmospheres with well-dressed high-class individuals and expensive specialty food and craft products often portray a sense of elitism to the general public. Burlington provided an ideal location to study these motivations due to the diverse range of social and economic classes evident within the city and among participants at the different farmers markets. Burlington holds a unique position as Vermont's most densely populated "city", while remaining small enough that it may be deemed only a town in other more populous parts of the country. With this scale in mind, this paper hopes to shed light on the broader goals and values of farmers market agents in other socioeconomically diverse regions that already or hope to host successful farmers markets in their communities.

When evaluating the motivations and priorities of farmers market participants, agents' class predicts some of their actions, but not all. Values, rather than social or economic class standing, serve to direct individuals' priorities when participating in farmers market exchanges. There are many variations of exchange relationships that occur within farmers markets, and exchanges can be made across all three major participant groups (vendors, customers, and

managers/staff). Several aspects of these exchanges relate to the obligations to give, receive, and repay as observed in gift economies (Mauss 1967), but the markets are able to remain in business due to vendors' and manager's capitalist, econo-centric rationale to sell products and earn an income. The economic practices at farmers markets cannot be estranged from the cultural and social values at market, as economic practices are shaped by and contribute to one's culture. A particularly rich sociocultural exchange at the market occurs when individuals dress up in expensive clothing or display their wealth through both extensive social relations and copious amount of food purchased from the farmers market.

The priorities of farmers market agents vary depending on individuals' levels of participation and standing in the market. Vendors primarily seek to earn a living and make connections with their customers and other vendors. Customers cite food shopping as their highest concern at market, but close observation reveals customers' prioritization of social values, such as the farmers market's atmosphere, over values surrounding food shopping alone. Managers are greatly invested in facilitating the success of vendors' individual businesses as well as the financial vitality of the farmers market as a unified entity. Depending on managers' involvement with the vendors and level of pay received from the market, values such as community engagement and food access become more or less important.

There is not a singular vision for what a successful farmers market accomplishes, but common ideals include robust weekly business for vendors and areas providing safe and fun atmospheres conducive to socializing and community engagement. While vendors and managers are more likely to favor the former while customers value the latter, changes to the market to adapt to customers' desires for improved social spaces could potentially lead to increased sales and higher market attendance, thereby indirectly satisfying vendors' and manager's goals as well.

While there are conflicting opinions about the importance and degree of necessity of federal nutrition assistance programs at farmers markets, those markets that host the programs do not find any major downfalls. If anything, the income generated by the EBT program is an added bonus to the farmers markets and vendors' businesses that would not have gained the money if the programs had not been in place.

This study contributes a new set of both qualitative and quantitative data regarding farmers markets to the field of food systems research, and anthropological treatments of food. By understanding the differences in motivations and values of farmers market participants, steps can be taken to improve farmers markets to be "successful" in the eyes of most, if not all, agents. As the United States begins to reevaluate the potential impacts of alternative and community-based food systems, understanding both the capitalist and gift economy dimensions of farmers markets can help to better understand the benefits and limitations of farmers market food systems. To expand upon the current discussion on the anthropology of food and of farmers markets, future studies might pinpoint exact objectives of particular customer groups or of different kinds of farmers market vendors (meat, dairy, vegetable farmer, etcetera). This could aid in helping communities to design farmers markets that best suit the needs and desires of both food producers and consumers. Though farmers markets represent only a small percentage of food sales nationwide, the need to evaluate their successes and limitations within the local food movement is essential if the American food system is to continue to evolve and support alternative food movements.

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## Appendix 1: Codebook

Code Name	Sub-codes	Description
<b>Accessibility</b>		How farmers markets or individual vendors have adapted prices, advertising, or prices to accommodate customers on a broad socioeconomic spectrum
<b>Buying Food</b>	Affordability	Purchasing, bartering, trading, or gifting food at market; perceptions of food prices at market
<b>Convenience</b>		Ease of accessing the market and reasons for purchasing certain foods
<b>Defining Local/Farmers Markets</b>		Definitions and opinions surround what it means for food to be local and what constitutes a farmers market
<b>Making Connections</b>	Cross-Cultural Interactions Vendor-Vendor Interactions Vendor-Customer Interactions	Interactions and relationships among customers, vendors, and managers, and across cultures
<b>Making Money</b>		Earning a living, deciding prices, making a profit
<b>Market Atmosphere</b>		Perceptions of market size, busyness, and what it feels like to experience the market
<b>Market Impact</b>		Relationships among the markets with the city, local businesses, and community in which it operates
<b>Market Purpose</b>		Purpose, intentions, and goals of the farmers market
<b>Market Quality</b>		Quality of vendors, location, products sold, and overall experience

## Appendix 2A: Market Customer Survey

- 1) What is your main goal or intention when you come to this farmers market?
  - a. Food Shopping
  - b. Socialization
  - c. Purchasing non-food items (flowers, jewelry, candles, etc.)
  - d. Just walking through
- 2) How frequently do you come to this farmers market?
  - a. Every week
  - b. 1-2 times a month
  - c. Only a few times throughout the summer or less (June-August)
- 3) Food prices at this market are:
  - a. Very expensive
  - b. More expensive than shopping at the grocery store/other markets, but they're okay
  - c. Just right
  - d. Lower than expected
  - e. Very cheap
  - f. Not sure
- 4) Please evaluate the following statement: "This market offers foods that I would like to purchase and eat."
  - a. Yes, and I can afford to buy and eat them.
  - b. Yes, but I cannot afford to buy as much food from this market as I would like to.
  - c. No, this market does not offer foods that I like to buy and eat.

**Please write in any suggestions for foods you would like to see at this market:**

- 5) The food I buy from this market is:
  - a. Very high quality (very fresh, tastes good, definitely worth its price)
  - b. Good (fresh, tastes good, somewhat worth its price)
  - c. Very low quality (not fresh, tastes okay, or not worth its price)
  - d. I do not buy food from this market.
- 6) Food from this market compared to other farmers markets in town is:
  - a. Better

- b. Just as good
  - c. Worse
  - d. Not sure
- 7) What types of currency do you use to make purchases at this market? **Please select all that apply.**
- a. Cash/check
  - b. Market tokens using my debit card
  - c. Market tokens using my EBT card (3SquaresVT and/or WIC, formerly known as Food Stamps)
  - d. Bartering/Trading
  - e. I have never bought something from this market.
- 8) If you have ever used EBT, 3SquaresVT, WIC, or food stamps at this market, how would you describe your experience?
- a. Excellent – It was easy to transfer my benefits, and/or I had no problems with either market staff or market vendors about making my purchases.
  - b. Good – It was fairly easy to transfer my benefits, and/or I had few problems with either market staff or market vendors about making my purchases.
  - c. Okay - It was slightly difficult to transfer my benefits, and/or I had multiple problems with either market staff or market vendors about making my purchases.
  - d. Poor - It was difficult to transfer my benefits, and/or I had countless problems with either market staff or market vendors about making my purchases.
  - e. I have never used EBT, 3SquaresVT, WIC, or food stamps at this market.
- 9) Based on your response to the previous question, how would you rate your overall experience with the vendors at this market?
- a. Good – the vendors are almost always pleasant in my interactions with them, and/or they seem happy to be doing business with me.
  - b. Fair – sometimes the vendors are pleasant in my interactions with them; sometimes they seem happy, and sometimes they seem uninterested or displeased that I am doing business with them.
  - c. Poor – the vendors are almost never pleasant in my interactions with them, and they almost never seem pleased that I am doing business with them.

10) Based on your response to the previous question, please describe how you feel when making a purchase at this market:

- a. Pleased and comfortable with what I am buying
- b. Neutral
- c. Embarrassed and/or harassed about the type of currency used (all change, EBT, WIC, etc.)

11) Does your currency impact what/how much food you buy at this market?

- a. Yes – I am able to purchase enough food because of the currency I use.
- b. Yes – I buy less food than what I would want because of the currency I use.
- c. No – I am able to buy what/how much food I want regardless of the currency I use.

12) Would you recommend shopping for food at this market to other people?

- a. Definitely yes
- b. Probably yes
- c. Probably not
- d. Definitely not

13) What do you think of the market's location?

- a. It's great – don't move it!
- b. Neutral: I like it, but if it moved that would be okay too.
- c. It would be better if it were held somewhere else.
- d. It has no place being here – move this market ASAP!

14) If this market changed locations, would you still seek it out in the future?

- a. Definitely yes
- b. Probably yes
- c. Probably not
- d. Definitely not

15) How would you describe this market's overall atmosphere? **Please circle either Yes (Y)**

**or No (N) for each:**

- |  | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |
|--|------------|-----------|
| a. Comfortable                               | Y          | N         |
| b. Meets my expectations of a farmers market | Y          | N         |
| c. Easy-going                                | Y          | N         |

d. Friendly	Y	N
e. Safe	Y	N
f. Fun	Y	N
g. Carnival-like, but I like it/I'm neutral	Y	N
h. Carnival-like, and I don't like it	Y	N
i. Family-friendly	Y	N
j. Pet-friendly	Y	N
k. Crowded but okay	Y	N
l. Too crowded	Y	N
m. Too big	Y	N
n. A good size	Y	N
o. Too small	Y	N
p. Loud	Y	N
q. Confusing to navigate/find what I need	Y	N

**If you have any suggestions regarding this survey or the market, please write them here:**

## **Appendix 2B: Interview Questions – Market Vendors**

- 1) How did you first get involved with this farmers market?
- 2) Describe what you do at the farmers market. What do you sell? What does your display look like?
- 3) What do you think are the most important qualities of a good farmers market vendor?
- 4) Do you have any other positions within the market besides “vendor”?
- 5) Do you hold any other job to obtain income in addition to selling your products at the market?
- 6) How long have you been a vendor at this market? What is your vendor status?
- 7) Describe a typical day at the market for you. How has this changed since you first entered the market?
- 8) How do you perceive the quality of your product? Do you think its price matches the quality, or is there a gap in either direction between your prices and products?
- 9) How do you perceive the quality of this market as opposed to other farmers markets in Burlington?
- 10) Describe what you perceive to be the purpose of this farmers market. Do you think different markets serve different purposes or hold different places within the community?  
How do you perceive this market’s impact on the community?
- 11) Describe your market’s atmosphere. What is it like to be a vendor in this market?
- 12) Who do you perceive your customer population to be? Has that changed over the years?  
Is that the customer base you are aiming to serve?
- 13) Describe your relationships and interactions with your customers.
- 14) Do you seem to have a returning group of customers each week, or does it change with



each market?

15) What kinds of currency do you accept at your stand? (cash, credit/debit, EBT, WIC, etc.)

Do you prefer one to another?

16) Electronic Benefit Transfer, or EBT, is the process by which customers at farmers markets can exchange their food benefits, such as 3SquaresVT (formerly Food Stamps) and WIC, for money usable only for food at the markets. What do you think are the benefits of the market accepting EBT? Do you have any problems or find any downfalls with the program, or with accepting EBT at your stand?

17) Do you think the use of EBT changes the atmosphere or purpose of the market? How so?

18) Describe a typical interaction between yourself and a customer at market. How do you perceive the overall tone of these interactions? The purpose?

19) Do you think customers feel the same way about your products and attitude as you do?

20) Which product do you think brings you the most profit at market? Has this changed throughout the years?

21) Do you obtain food from other vendors at the market? If so, what type of currency do you use? (Cash, check, EBT, bartering/trading, market tokens from your debit card, etc.) Are these usual purchases for you, or only once in a while?

22) What do you think of the market's current location? If it moved, would you still want to sell your product there?

23) On market day, do you spend time in Burlington after the market? What do you do? Where do you go?

24) What do you think have been some of the market's greatest achievements? What are some areas that you would still like to see improved?

## Appendix 2C: Interview Questions – Market Managers

- 1) How did you first get involved with the market you are currently the manager for?
- 2) Do you hold other positions within the market besides “market manager”?
- 3) What do you think are the most important qualities of a good market manager?
- 4) Do you hold any other job to obtain income in addition to managing the market?
- 5) Describe what you do for the market. What are your responsibilities?
- 6) Describe a typical day at the market for you. How has this changed since you first entered the market?
- 7) What other people and resources do you use to help run the market?
- 8) Is there an executive committee that you meet with to make decisions for the market?  
Who is on it, and how were they selected?
- 9) What are your personal goals for this market and your position in it?
- 10) How would you describe the purpose and goals of the market? How is this market unique from other farmers markets in Burlington?
- 11) How do you perceive your market’s impact on the community?
- 12) Who seems to be the customer population at your market? Is this who the market aims to serve? Has this changed over the years?
- 13) What strategies have your market adopted to attract and accommodate Burlington’s socioeconomically diverse residents?
- 14) Do you seem to have a returning group of customers each week, or does it change with each market?
- 15) How do you perceive overall customer attitudes and interactions with vendors at the market? Do you personally interact with customers?

- 16) How do you perceive the quality of this market as opposed to other farmers markets in Burlington and surrounding towns? Do you think different markets serve different purposes or hold different places within the community?
- 17) Describe your market's atmosphere. What is it like to experience your market as a manager? As a customer?
- 18) Do you think customers feel the same way about your markets' products and atmosphere as you do?
- 19) Describe your relationship and interactions with your market's vendors.
- 20) What kinds of currency do you accept at your market? (cash, credit/debit, EBT, WIC, etc.) Does the market prefer one to another?
- 21) Electronic Benefit Transfer, or EBT, is the process by which customers at farmers markets can exchange their food benefits, such as 3SquaresVT (formerly Food Stamps) and WIC, for money usable only for food at the markets. What do you think are the benefits of the market accepting EBT? Do you have any problems or find any downfalls with the EBT program?
- 22) What is the process like when working with EBT? Describe the steps from market transfer of EBT to tokens to the vendors actually getting paid for EBT purchases.
- 23) Do you think the use of EBT changes the atmosphere or purpose of the market? How so?
- 24) Do you obtain food from your own market? If so, what type of currency do you use? (Cash, check, EBT, bartering/trading, market tokens from your debit card, etc.) Are these usual purchases for you, or only once in a while?
- 25) What do you think of the market's current location? If it moved, would you still want to be the market manager?

26) How do you think the market would be impacted by a change in location?

27) On market day, do you spend time in Burlington after the market? What do you do?

Where do you go?

28) What do you think have been some of your market's greatest achievements? What are some areas that you would still like to improve upon?

### Appendix 3: Survey Results (%)

The table below represents simple statistics for the answers to each question of the anonymous customer survey at each of the three markets. Question numbers correspond to questions listed on the survey, found in Appendix 2A. Answers are listed as the percentage of total responses for that individual question, as response rates varied per question.

Question #	BFM	ONE	SFVT
1A	52	85	45
B	20	12	15
C	5	0	5
D	23	3	35
2A	27	46	23
B	33	37	31
C	40	17	46
3A	6	0	0
B	52	33	29
C	31	46	50
D	2	21	14
E	<1	0	7
F	9	0	0
4A	54	65	71
B	45	35	29
C	<1	0	0

5A	77	79	72
B	20	21	21
C	<1	0	0
D	3	0	7
6A	39	8	36
B	26	84	57
C	0	4	0
D	35	4	7
7A	84	46	87
B	8	16	6
C	4	33	0
D	2	5	0
E	2	0	7
8A	7	64	0
B	2	4	0
C	<1	0	0
D	0	0	0

E	91	32	100
9A	96	91	85
B	4	9	15
C	<1	0	0
10A	91	95	92
B	9	5	8
C	<1	0	0
11A	44	44	33
B	18	17	25
C	38	39	42
12A	85	96	86
B	14	4	14
C	1	0	0
D	0	0	0
13A	91	73	93
B	8	23	7
C	1	4	0
D	0	0	0
14A	32	41	25
B	56	59	75

C	11	0	0
D	1	0	0
15A: Y, N	99, 1	96, 4	100, 0
B: Y, N	99, 1	96, 4	100, 0
C: Y, N	99, 1	100, 0	100, 0
D: Y, N	99, 1	96, 4	100, 0
E: Y, N	100, 0	87, 13	100, 0
F: Y, N	99, 1	91, 9	92, 8
G: Y, N	61, 39	35, 65	21, 79
H: Y, N	10, 90	15, 85	8, 92
I: Y, N	99, 1	100, 0	100, 0
J: Y, N	98, 2	95, 5	100, 0
K: Y, N	81, 19	13, 87	50, 50
L: Y, N	17, 83	0, 100	8, 92
M: Y, N	5, 95	0, 100	8, 92
N: Y, N	96, 4	52, 48	85, 15
O: Y, N	7, 93	70, 30	42, 58
P: Y, N	14, 86	0, 100	0, 100
Q: Y, N	13, 87	0, 100	0, 100