



# Producing Melbourne's Farmers' Markets

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Local Food, Farming and 'Feel-Good' Shopping

Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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**June 2015**

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I declare that the following document meets all the necessary criteria to be assessed as a PhD Thesis undertaken in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne.

This is to certify that:

- i) The thesis comprises only my original work towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.
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- iii) The thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of the table of contents and figures, footnotes and references.

.....  ..... Date: 09/07/2015

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Associate Professor Tamara Kohn, for her support, advice and guidance. I would also like to thank my Advisory Committee, Dr. Paul Green and Chairperson Associate Professor Monica Minnegal, for providing advice when it was needed. I am also grateful for the support of my PhD colleagues for their support and friendship.

I would like to thank my participants for their generosity of time and their openness in our discussions. Many invited me into their homes, lives and businesses and for that I am eternally grateful. I would also like to thank the Victorian Farmers' Market Association and other Farmers' Market organisations for their cooperation.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband Stephen Neylon, and all my family and friends, for their patience and support.



## Abstract

Situated in the cosmopolitan city of Melbourne, the ‘foodie’ capital of post-industrial Australia, this thesis builds upon anthropological theories of production and consumption through ethnographic research. Through participant-observation research at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets and on the farms and in the kitchens of stallholders, it examines how small-scale producers sold farming, good food and a ‘feel-good’ shopping experience to their urban customers.

Farmers’ Markets claim to offer people a chance to source local food straight from the producer, with an emphasis on primary producers, namely farmers. Inherent in this assumption is that, through direct contact, individuals can ‘really know’ what they are consuming; and in return, producers can educate customers on the realities of food production. Interaction between producers and customers is reiterated in Farmers’ Market promotions as the cornerstone of the Farmers’ Market experience (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:287). At these markets, ‘local food’ is idealised as not only good for the local economy, but also better for the environment and better quality, with the markets providing ‘authentic’ consumption experiences (Pratt, 2007:286). An Accreditation Program for Farmers’ Markets, to ensure that the markets were only home to ‘real’ food and ‘real’ farmers and thus ensure an ‘authentic’ food experience, commenced in Victoria in late 2009 (VFMA, 2010:1).

Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets were spaces where meanings were contested and negotiated. They were places where relationships between the city and the country, and dilemmas surrounding good food choices were played out. These meanings were negotiated through stories told both by producers and consumers, which were strengthened through reciprocal relationships developed through market experiences, with loyalty and trust emphasised by participants. ‘Good’ and ‘bad’ co-existed at the markets as meanings were negotiated by participants.

This thesis posits that through such storytelling, participants at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets were not only selling and purchasing local food, but also a way of life, or an ideal of a way of life, namely ‘the good life’. This ‘good life’ embodied characteristics of a rural idyll that included not only honesty and simplicity, but also hard work and just reward. However, while this construction of ‘the good life’ was situated in the present and aspired towards a better, more ‘authentic’ future, it was limited through both the temporary nature of the markets and a focus on individual choice and market exchange as the only way to improve both the farmers’ and the customers wellbeing. In this way, understanding how members of Melbourne’s Farmers’ Market community interacted contributes to anthropological understandings of post-industrial production and consumption, and the consequences of late modernity and a globalised food system.

## Introduction

“This is food for your soul ... That other stuff is just fuel. Empty, hollow fuel. Empty calories. This food here [at the market] really *fills you up*. It’s for your soul, not just your belly.”

(Sophie, Farmers’ Market customer, Melbourne 2010)

Where does the food we consume come from? Since World War II, a global agro-industrial system has come to dominate food production (Pratt, 2007:286). Large-scale farming and global food chains have separated consumers from the production of food. At the same time, consumption spaces have shifted to supermarkets, which combine “the scale of the market with the convenience of the shop” (Fernandez-Armesto, 2001:222). Food supply chains have grown in complexity and distance, as products from many different countries are able to be used in a single supermarket product (Pratt, 2007:286). Processed foods, fast food and global branding have shaped the global consumption landscape (Foster, 2007:709).

However, in post-industrial countries such as Australia, the question of how our food comes to our plate has gained popular interest (Chalmers et al, 2009:323). A focus on locality, quality and the social, ethical and environmental impacts of food production has been raised globally (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005:360). This has been noted in both production practices, such as an emphasis on sustainable agriculture and organic farming, and consumption practices, such as Slow Food and local food movements (Lockie et al, 2000:316; Morris & Young, 2000:103). These food movements reflect both the concerns of small populations of producers (Heller, 2013:1; Peace, 2008:31-39) and ‘alternative’ urban consumers (Ilbery & Kneafsey, 2000:217; Hinrichs, 2000:296; Alkon, 2008:489). This thesis examines this global trend in the particular urban Australian setting of Melbourne, a city in an agriculturally productive state (Budge & Slade, 2009:21) known for its multiculturalism (Marotta, 2007:44) and cosmopolitan ‘foodie’ culture (De Solier, 2013:9).

“Farmers’ Markets” aim to reconnect such consumers with local produce through direct producer-to-consumer transactions. At these markets, ‘local food’ is idealised as not only good for the local economy, but also better for the environment and better quality, with the markets providing ‘authentic’ consumption experiences (Pratt, 2007:286). Recently, market organisers have sought to ensure ‘authenticity’ at the markets through certification in the United Kingdom (FARMA, 2010:6), New Zealand (FMNZ, 2009:1-8) and in some areas of the United States (CFCFM, 2009:1; Hinrichs et al, 2004:40) and Canada (FMO, 2009:1). An Accreditation Program for Farmers’ Markets commenced in Victoria in late 2009 (VFMA, 2010:1).

Farmers’ Markets claim to offer people a chance to source local food straight from the producer, with an emphasis on primary producers, namely farmers. Inherent in this assumption is that, through direct contact, individuals can ‘really know’ what they are consuming; and in return, producers can educate customers on the realities of food production. Interaction between producers and customers is reiterated in Farmers’ Market promotions as the cornerstone of the Farmers’ Market experience (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:287).

By focusing on local food direct from the producer, Farmers’ Markets promote an exclusive shopping experience, where customers are informed that they can not only ‘know’ that the foods

they eat correspond to their food values; but they can also 'feel-good', knowing that the money they spend at the market supports local food production. Inherent in this assertion are many assumptions that need to be questioned. Why is local food more desirable than food from elsewhere? Who and what is local, and what counts as local food? Who are the farmers or producers that sell at the market, and what makes them acceptable in these spaces where others are not? And why do producers need the support of shoppers in the city? Why does it matter if the person behind the stall is directly involved in the production of foods sold? What is it that makes the markets a place of 'real' food, and a 'feel-good', good food shopping experience?

This thesis examines how participants negotiated understandings of local food, farming and good food at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets, through ethnographic research both at Melbourne's markets and on the farms and in the kitchens of market stallholders. Particularly, I focus on how stallholders, for whom participation at the markets was necessary for the survival of their farms and businesses, sold 'good food' values and a 'feel-good' shopping experience to their urban customers.

## **Why Local Food?**

### **Food and Anthropology**

Food has been part of anthropological research since the beginning of the discipline (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002:99). Far beyond the practical need to eat for survival, researchers over the history of the discipline have demonstrated how the foods we consume are imbued with social and cultural meaning. As Mintz and Du Bois noted:

"Food studies [in anthropology] have illuminated broad societal processes such as political-economic value-creation, symbolic value-creation, and the social construction of memory. Such studies have also proved an important arena for debating the relative merits of cultural and historical materialism vs. structuralist or symbolic explanations for human behaviour, and for refining our understanding of variation in informants' responses to ethnographic questions." (2002:99)

Anthropologists have carried out structural analyses of everyday meals (Levi-Strauss, 2008:36-43; Douglas, 2008:44-53), examined single commodities to examine broader social and political processes (Mintz, 2008:91-103), and undertaken in-depth studies of food systems to examine symbolic value creation as well as the role of food in ritual (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002:101-109). Beyond these traditional ethnographies, food has featured prominently in studies concerning identity, particularly in relation to gender, class and ethnicity (Caplan, 1997:1-31). Acting as an everyday marker of difference (Fischler, 1988:277-279), food has been examined in relation to constructing memory (Sutton, 2001:1-18), as well as in the maintenance, integration or exclusion of ethnic minorities in multicultural settings (Harbottle, 1997:87-110; Belasco, 1987:1-30).

Anthropologists have also examined the consequences of and reactions to the globalisation of food production and consumption, for example through ethnographies of the Slow Food movement in Italy (Lietch, 2000:103-118) or self-proclaimed peasant farmers in France who resisted the

introduction of genetically modified crops (Heller, 2013). In recent years, Farmers' Markets have been analysed internationally with a similar focus (Andreatta & Wickliffe, 2002:167), though the phenomena has not yet been explored in Australia.

Extending beyond the anthropology of food is the anthropology of value, and it is here that economic anthropology, concerned with the ways in which goods are valued and exchanged (Graeber, 2001:1-22), coincides with food studies. Market exchanges and the question of value have been a prominent focus of traditional and current anthropological analyses (Otto & Willerslev, 2013:9-15; Applbaum, 2012:275-285). Farmers' Markets, a particularly modern phenomenon, attempt to place non-capitalist values, such as ethical or environmental considerations, above economic value to elicit social change; however, this occurs within an entirely capitalist market setting (Pratt, 2007: 286). This thesis brings together and builds upon anthropological understandings of food and value, by situating Melbourne's Farmers' markets within the context of late modernity, both as part of and a reaction to a globalised food system.

## **Food and Morality**

The food consumption landscape in post-industrial societies such as Australia is characterised by an abundance of choice. According to Lupton, this abundance of food choices leads people to construct a moral framework surrounding these choices (Lupton, 1996: 18, 27, 74, 87-93). This framework denotes 'good' or 'real' food, such as foods found at Farmers' Markets, from 'bad', 'fake' food found elsewhere (see Lupton, 1996:87-88; Weiss, 2012:623-624). As Lupton argued:

“...the continual opposition of 'processed/artificial' and 'natural' foods is a response to uncertainty. If we can believe that a food is 'natural', then we feel better about eating it. In the context of a climate of risk and uncertainty, being able to hold on to such binary oppositions and their moral associations makes it easier to live one's everyday life.” (Lupton, 1996:92)

Such a moral framework epitomises sentiments that social theorists have attributed to late modernity. In late modernity, it is argued, individuals can no longer rely on tradition to define who they are, and so individuals are required to create their own identity and meaning in life (De Solier, 2013:1). Further, in a neoliberal paradigm, choice has become a moral imperative, for as Giddens stated we have “no choice but to choose” (Giddens, 1991:81), and what we choose is taken to indicate not only who we are but also our relative success or failure as members of modern society (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 22-29). As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim argued, in an increasingly differentiated, detraditionalised and globalised society individuals must become “stage managers of their own biographies” (2002: 23) as they negotiate the uncertainties of the modern world. Such a life requires “active management” (ibid, 24) and reflexivity, as individuals negotiate a plethora of often contradictory values, desires and limitations to create “a life of one's own” (ibid, 22).

Daniel Miller argued that consumption “has become the main arena in which and through which people have to struggle towards over the definition of themselves and their values” (Miller, 2001:277). Consumption choices allow individuals to display “good” taste to their peers and thus establish their social position (Bourdieu, 1984:169-175). Food, more than any other material object

of consumption, provides everyday life giving sustenance, and as such is “central to our subjectivity, or sense of self” (Lupton, 1996:1). Farmers’ Markets and local food movements, based on ‘knowing where your food comes from’ (Hinrichs, 2003:34), aim to bring a sense of meaning, history, place and belonging to food consumption choices.

As food is consumed every day, controlling the food we eat symbolises not only “control over our own bodies” (Lupton, 1996:1) but also self-control over our own lives (Caplan, 1997:15). Furthermore, food choices are not only taken to reflect what is good or bad for the individual, but what is good or bad for society as a whole. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim argued, in late modernity “neoliberal market ideology enforces atomization with all its political will” (2002: 24), depoliticising social crises into the realm of individual responsibility while positing the solution to such social crises with individuals as consumers. Individual choices, therefore, are not only taken as markers of individual identity but also as the only mechanism through which social change can occur. Therefore, commitment to such a morality around food delineates moral strength or weakness in both the making of the self (De Solier, 2013:101) and the making of the society that participants want to live in (Lupton, 1996:87).

This need to create a “life of one’s own” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 22) situates Farmers’ Markets as a particularly late modern phenomena. Farmers’ Market advocates promote the markets as places of good taste, where individuals can choose to support traditional farming while engaging in a cosmopolitan multicultural world, promoting the belief that such choices have the power to ‘make a difference’. As examined in Chapter One, Farmers’ Markets emerged after decades of neoliberal market reform that eroded state support for small-scale producers, a disembedding of food production from the social that Farmers’ Markets advocates seek to remedy through the market-based solution of individual consumption. As this thesis demonstrates, such individualising places the current Farmers’ Market movement specifically within late modernity.

## **Local Food as Good Food**

So what makes food found at Farmers’ Markets ‘good food’, the morally superior choice amongst an abundance of food choices? Beck argued that the processes of industrial modernisation have led to a “risk society”, as individuals are increasingly uncertain of the processes that create the products we consume (Beck, 2000:213). He argued that this has led to a process he labelled “reflexive modernization” (Beck, 2000:226). For those ‘alternative’ consumers that seek out Farmers’ Markets, the ‘risks’ inherent in modernisation derive from what is unseen and unknowable, namely the global food chains and processes of industrial food production that separate consumers from the foods they consume (Goodman & DuPuis, 2002:6-23). In this framework, good food is constructed as food that is known, ‘real’ food from ‘real’ places, grown or made by ‘real’ people with which one has a ‘real life’ connection (Alkon, 2008a:274). In this context, local food becomes ‘good food’ for these consumers (Connell et al, 2008:169).

## **The Rural Idyll**

However, the appeal of Farmers' Markets, and the association between good food and local food, delves into other desires that social theorists have linked to late modernity. According to Mike Featherstone, increasing global connection has resulted in less certainty of identity and sense of place and 'belonging' (Featherstone, 1995:91). Such uncertainty has been linked to a "sense of loss" and nostalgia over an imagined, simpler past (Augé, 1995:114). This romanticisation of tradition, however, is one that is free from the confines of a particular place or history, and rather involves a remaking of tradition that is globalised, voluntary, hybrid, and often contradictory (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:26). Local food movement advocates suggest that such uncertainties can be mitigated through acts of 'careful consumption' in alternative consumption spaces such as Farmers' Markets (Marsden, 1998:285).

Such desires evoke imaginings of a rural idyll. The rural idyll has a long history in Western nations, particularly in Europe (Williams, 1973:46). It refers to the construction of rurality as oppositional to the perceived 'other' of the urban, where values such as tradition, honesty, community, simplicity and authenticity are attributed to rural life (Short, 2006:133). Such constructions, created and maintained by urban elites (DuPuis, 2006:126-127), create a broader picture of 'the good life', often deemed a more 'authentic' way of living, which could be sold along with the good foods available at the markets.

## **Farmers' Market Research**

Internationally, anthropologists and other social scientists have studied Farmers' Markets from various perspectives. Farmers' Markets are broadly defined as "specialist markets trading in "locally produced" products, focussing largely on food . . . which is either locally grown or incorporates locally grown ingredients" (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:286). While farmers' selling their produce directly to consumers is nothing new in itself, the particular branding of "Farmers' Markets" is a relatively new phenomenon. (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:286) Originating in the United States in the 1970s, this 'brand' of market is now popular in many countries, particularly in post-industrial nations including the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and Australia (Lawson et al, 2008:22). While these branded markets share a focus on local food and local food producers (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:287), there is no global 'movement' that promotes the Farmers' Market brand (Chalmers et al, 2009:320). Rather, the term has been adopted and localised by groups with similar concerns and values in these various countries (Smithers & Joseph, 2009:1).

Chalmers, Joseph and Smithers, in their study of New Zealand's Farmers' Markets, argued that the markets emerged as "an intriguing symptom of growing diversity within a landscape still dominated by traditional productivist values" (Chalmers et al, 2009:320). They have been seen as "grass roots" movements, led by small-scale or organic producers, councils or community groups. In the United States, Farmers' Markets were seen as a means to support and sustain small communities, as small-scale producers were "pushed out" by large-scale producers (Guthman, 2004:511). Some motivations for setting up Farmers' Markets were also seen as political as they were explicitly associated with particular social and environmental movements, promoting 'alternative' lifestyle

choices and reflecting dissatisfaction with large-scale agribusiness practices (Goodman & DuPuis, 2002:7).

At Farmers' Markets, researchers have noted that customers focus on the origin and quality of produce, rather than cost alone (Zepeda, 2009:250), with participation linked to 'ethical', 'green' or 'political' ideals, such as concern for the environmental consequences of mainstream production methods (Chalmers et al, 2009:323). Environmental motivations were identified at UK, US, Canadian and Scandinavian Farmers' Markets (Zukin, 2008:724; Youngs, 2008:499; Prigent-Simonin & Héroult-Fournier, 2005:1). Political campaigns resisting 'burdensome' health regulations, food security and social justice campaigns have been found at Farmers' Markets in USA and UK (Alkon, 2008:489; Youngs, 2008:499), and ethical motivations were found to influence consumption at Canadian and US markets (Feagan & Morris, 2009:235; Alkon, 2008a:284). Tiemann argued that such Farmers' Markets constituted third spaces, outside of the everyday (2008:476), and Zukin argued that markets allowed participants a "safe place" to demonstrate their acceptance of others through the consumption of ethnically diverse foods (Zukin, 2008:735). In their ethnographic study of the Bloomington Farmers' Market in Indiana, USA, Robinson and Hartenfeld argued that the market allowed vendors and customers to work together towards a common goal, namely, an alternative food future to modern agribusiness (2007:218). Their analysis places Farmers' Markets not in a nostalgic past but a progressive future.

However, progressive values were not the only values found at international Farmers' Markets, for example as Holloway and Kneafsey found in their studies of Farmers' Markets in the UK, a focus on local food could also reflect "a conservative celebration of the local as the supposed repository of specific values and meanings" (2000:294), noting that the locality of producers was often given prominence over other environmental or ethical considerations (2000:287). In her research at the Minneapolis Farmers' Market in the USA, Slocum argued that such exclusivity created elite 'white' spaces (Slocum, 2008:849; Slocum, 2007:520). Moreover, a focus on 'only local' products could lead to a "defensive posture", which has the "intent of promoting the local but (presumably unintended) effect of enforcing elitism and exclusion" (Chalmers et al, 2009: 324). Therefore, while Farmers' Market branding emphasises local foods, assumptions and values inherent within definitions of local, as well as other values associated with the brand, could vary greatly.

These 'new generation' Farmers Markets were also seen as distinct from other types of produce or food markets (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:287). Farmers Market organisations often claimed to emulate traditional 'authentic' produce markets, particularly citing Italian and French markets as prime examples (Smithers & Joseph, 2009:4). However, Black, in her ethnography of the Porta Palazzo market in Italy, argued that such 'traditional' markets are characterised by idiosyncratic nuances that include resellers, bric-a-brac, and other characteristics explicitly excluded from the Farmers Market brand (Black, 2005:1). In this way, it is what is *excluded* by Farmers' Market organisers that differentiated 'new generation' Farmers Markets from other food or produce markets (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:287; Slocum, 2008:849).

## Melbourne: Australia's 'Foodie' Destination

This thesis situates the global trend of 'knowing where your food comes from' in a particularly Australian context, where Farmers' Markets are a relatively recent phenomenon, with the first Australian "Farmers' Market" established in the late 1990s (AFMA, 2010:1). Since then, hundreds have been established in Australia, with majority in Victoria (VFMA, 2012:1). The dramatic rise of Farmers' Markets has not yet been researched in Australia.

To understand Melbourne's Farmers' Markets, it is first important to understand Melbourne. Melbourne is Australia's second largest city, with a population of approximately 4.35 million people, 76% of Victoria's total population (ABS, 2014:1). While a rapid rise in population has been concentrated in the inner city in recent years, Melbourne's sprawling suburbs have continued to grow exponentially, extending from the edges of Port Phillip Bay to stretch into the hills and plains of former farmland in all directions from the central business district (ABS, 2014:1). Consistently ranked as one of the world's most liveable cities (EIU, 2014:1), Melbourne also ranks as one of the most expensive cities to live in (De Solier, 2013:9).

Melbourne is also often considered the most 'European' of Australia's capital cities, with a vibrant café culture, cobblestone laneways and Parisian-style boulevards, iconic city trams and a relatively cool climate (De Solier, 2013:9). Tourism campaigns promote Melbourne not only as Australia's "culinary capital", but often evoke the "cosmopolitanism" and "sophistication" of European cities such as Paris, highlighting high culture attributes that include a diverse and vibrant restaurant scene (De Solier, 2013:9).<sup>1</sup> Melbourne hosts Australia's largest annual food festival, The Melbourne Food and Wine Festival,<sup>2</sup> and food-related events are held throughout the year, particularly in the inner-city but also in Melbourne's diverse outer suburbs.<sup>3</sup> Melbourne is also known as "multicultural Melbourne" (Marotta, 2007:44), and is celebrated for its diversity, particularly for the abundance of different 'ethnic' food choices available. All of these attributes contribute to Melbourne being considered a premiere 'foodie' location (De Solier, 2013:10).

In addition to an association with the sub-culture of 'foodies' (De Solier, 2013:10), inner-city Melbourne has also colloquially been associated with the rise of another global phenomenon, that of the urban 'hipster' (Hegarty, 2012:6-7). The image of the 'hipster' consumer, elites concerned with 'old-fashioned' styles and extreme individualism, urban renewal and gentrified activism (Cowen, 2006:23), has been linked with local food movements that include inner-city market gardens,<sup>4</sup> ethical and environmental food campaigns<sup>5</sup> and inner city Farmers' Markets.<sup>6</sup> This highly individualised approach to activism and self-improvement reflects a neoliberal paradigm (Cowen, 2006:22) indicative of late modernity, as described above.

However, as this thesis is primarily concerned with the producers that sell at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets, rather than just those that shop at the markets, it should not be taken as an in-depth

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<sup>1</sup> See also <http://www.visitvictoria.com/>, <http://www.visitmelbourne.com/>

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.melbournefoodandwine.com.au/>

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.visitvictoria.com/Regions/Melbourne/Events/Food-and-wine>

<sup>4</sup> For example, see <http://streets.mn/2013/11/01/the-attack-of-the-hipster-tomatoes-getting-real-with-local-foods/>

<sup>5</sup> For example, see <https://www.greenpeace.org.au/blog/local-produce/>

<sup>6</sup> For example, see <http://www.valuesandcapitalism.com/local-and-organic-a-hipster-thing-or-a-free-market-thing/>



exploration into these sub-cultures. While others have written about such trends from the perspective of their participants (see De Solier, 2013), this thesis is primarily concerned with how such urban consumers were imagined by stallholders, and how their ideals were promoted and negotiated through the interactions between producers and consumers in the space of Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.

Nevertheless, these trends are essential to understanding of the rise of Farmers' Markets in Melbourne. An increased interest in the origin of foods consumed and a focus on authenticity are hallmarks of 'foodie' movements worldwide (Baumann & Johnston, 2009:69-96) and in Melbourne specifically (De Solier, 2013:95-114). However, as I observed during my fieldwork, such ideals were also appropriated by mainstream institutions such as supermarkets<sup>7</sup> and multinational food companies.<sup>8</sup> This appropriation was reviled by my Farmers' Market participants. Nevertheless, Farmers' Market customers remained a small minority of Melbourne's urban population, and so their importance, and the desirability of the market experience, should not be overstated. Similarly, questions of class and ethnicity must also be considered in this research, for while Melbourne may be a multicultural and diverse city, the appeal of Farmers' Markets particularly in affluent suburbs and amongst a particularly 'white' elite clientele is also raised throughout this thesis.

## **The Urban and the Rural: Australian Farmers and Urban Consumers**

Another aspect of Melbourne's Farmers' Markets that set apart these markets from others in post-industrial nations is the social, historical and political construction of the Australian farmer, which I explore in this thesis. The relatively cool climate of Victoria has meant that historically since the early days of colonisation, the state was seen as Australia's "food bowl", a title that is still held today (Budge & Slade, 2009:21). Small-scale family based farms covered and still cover a diverse range of growing districts (OSISDC, 2010:17-33; Larsen et al, 2008:9; Campbell, 2008:89; Gray & Lawrence, 2001:56), from dairies in Gippsland to citrus in the north east, wine and berries in the high country to sheep and wheat in the state's west, to the market gardens surrounding Melbourne itself.

The geographic and historical isolation of Australia has meant that, despite embracing free trade ideals, Australian farms still produce approximately 93% of the nation's total daily domestic food supply (PMSEIC, 2010:15). This fact, combined with the role of the 'Aussie' farmer and the importance of agriculture in Australia's national identity (Davison, 2005:39), differentiates local food movements in Australia from international movements. This all contributes to the unique construction of Farmers' Markets in Australia, setting them apart from markets in other post-industrial nations such as the UK, USA and Canada.

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<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.theage.com.au/news/business/farmers-give-coles-food-for-thought/2005/07/18/1121538918898.html>, <http://ausfoodnews.com.au/2013/09/23/woolworths-considers-%E2%80%99local%E2%80%99-branding.html>.

<sup>8</sup> For example, a desire for 'permeate free' milk, deemed more 'natural', by consumers in places such as Farmers' Markets was followed by many supermarket milk products being labelled as 'permeate free'. See <https://www.choice.com.au/food-and-drink/dairy/milk/buying-guides/milk>.

## **Melbourne's Farmers' Markets**

The Australian Farmers Market Association (AFMA) defines a Farmers Market as:

“A Farmers Market is a predominantly fresh food market that operates regularly within a community, at a focal public location that provides a suitable environment for farmers and food producers to sell farm-origin and associated value-added processed food products directly to customers.” (AFMA, 2010:1)

Australia's Farmers Market organisers sought to differentiate their markets from other types of markets, through emphasising either local food or direct producer-to-consumer transactions. In Victoria, the development of Farmers Markets differed to other states in Australia. Significantly more markets opened in Victoria than anywhere else (AFMA, 2010a:1). In 2011, there were approximately 90 Farmers Markets in Victoria, with around 40 in and around Greater Melbourne (OSISDC, 2010: vii). However, this number is approximate, because new markets opened consistently, while others closed (VFMA, 2010:2). In 2011, all regular markets were held monthly, on weekends, mostly on Saturday mornings (VFMA, 2011a:1-3). The majority of Melbourne's Farmers' Markets were owned and operated by one of three organisations. These organisations and smaller operators had vastly different ideas of what should and should not be at a Farmers' Market, which are explored in this thesis.

A monthly market schedule required stallholders to attend a variety of markets to maintain a steady weekly income (Campbell, 2008:93). Many stallholders attended different markets each weekend of the month, and doing so they interacted with a variety of market managers, customers and other stallholders from different regions. Stallholders frequently faced the dilemma of leaving a market that was not financially successful if it was possible to attend another on the same day (OSISDC, 2010:33). This movement of stallholders between different markets was significant, for it shaped the Victorian Farmers Market community in a way that differed from interstate or overseas Farmers' Markets.

## **Authenticating Melbourne's Farmers' Markets**

The Victorian Farmers Market Association (VFMA), the Peak Body for Farmers' Markets in Victoria, was set up in 2002 by a small group of market managers and interested stallholders (VFMA, 2010:1). In 2009, the Victorian Farmers Market Association (VFMA) launched Australia's first “Accreditation Program” for Farmers Markets. The VFMA Accreditation Program required all producers to have grown, reared or made all goods sold; to only allow the producer, family member or a person involved in production to sell at the markets; and to prioritise the use of local ingredients in any made, or ‘value-add’, goods sold (VFMA, 2009:2).

In the Accreditation Program guidelines, The VFMA used strong language to emphasise the importance of these principles, stating that “anyone who is working outside of these principles is deceiving the public” (VFMA, 2009:2). Stallholders were informed in no uncertain terms what is required to be considered part of a Farmers' Market and what does not belong. An emphasis on local food was accentuated through the need to use local ingredients in value-added food, which

were requested in terms of percentages on the forms. Overall, the trust of the customer was viewed as paramount to the success of the markets, and so any re-selling was seen as 'deception' and damaging to all Farmers Markets in Victoria.

The roll-out of the VFMA Accreditation Program framed this research. The topic of Accreditation was unavoidable, as stallholders, market managers and some customers wanted their views on Accreditation heard. This could have been considered a strength or weakness in this research. As I explain in Chapter Two, I chose to embrace the presence of the Accreditation program, as it brought to the surface debates on what did or did not belong at the markets, and in doing so, revealed many assumptions held by participants. The necessity to be seen as legitimate, for the markets to be seen as the home of 'real' farmers' that sell 'real' food to urban consumers, was the starting point for the themes explored in this thesis.

### **Feel-Good Shopping at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets**

As I demonstrate in this thesis, constructing the markets as places of 'real', local, 'good' food, purchased directly from producers that needed the support of urban customers, allowed the markets to operate as places of 'feel-good' shopping. The markets created an idyllic temporary space outside of the everyday where foods sold could be seen to have inherent 'good' values. As consumption theorists have noted, the meanings that consumers attach to commodities are the primary objects of consumption (Lash & Urry, 1994:3; Miller, 1995:277; Lindholm, 2008:54). Therefore, stories told about the produce, the producers, and the land they came from were also consumed by participants.

Reciprocal relationships between some customers and stallholders at the markets, developed over time, allowed stories to be implied, told and shared about the markets, the producers and the foods bought and consumed, giving them meaning. Producers sought to educate their customers on the 'reality' of 'life on the land', connecting them with the production of their food. However, this was a selective imagining of farming, one that encompasses both farming as hardship and a rural idyll. This construction placed the markets, and their customers, as the saviour not only of 'honest' food production, but also of a way of life that was under threat from elements of the modern world.

I argue that through such 'feel-good' shopping, participants at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets were not only selling and purchasing local food, but also an ideal way of life, namely 'the good life'. Furthermore, by consuming goods from the market, transformed through the productive act of creating home-made meals (De Solier, 2013:131-132), customers could participate in their own ideal way of life through their consumption choices. This 'good life' embodied characteristics of a rural idyll that included not only honesty and simplicity, but also hard work and just reward. In this way, the phenomena of 'feel-good' shopping, although associated with altruistic aspirations towards a better, alternative future, was indicative of the highly individualistic neoliberal paradigm that, as described above, has been linked to late modernity.

However, 'feel-good' shopping had its limits, for both 'good' and 'bad' could coexist at the markets. Melbourne's Farmers' Markets were spaces where meanings were contested and negotiated, as

participants weighed values against value, and stallholders competed both with other stallholders and other places where good food could be found. They were places where relationships between the city and the country and dilemmas surrounding good food choices were played out. The necessity of being seen as legitimate, the home of 'real' farmers selling 'real' food, was therefore seen as paramount by producers, wary of losing their urban customers to other food trends.

According to Kneafsey et al in their study of Alternative Food Networks in the UK, alternative producers seek to "produce newly knowledgeable customers", so that they are able to appreciate what the producer has to offer (Kneafsey et al, 2008: 103). Through their interactions with customers, producers were producing "not simply food, but subjectivities, connections and relationships" (Kneafsey et al, 2008: 103). I argue that, at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets, this was not a one way process. Rather, the stories themselves illuminated both customer expectations of producers and producer's expectations of their customers. Stallholders responded to and incorporated customer expectations as customers were 'educated' by producers. Through this, such interactions produced not only the 'right' kind of customers, but also the 'right' kind of producers for Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.

## **Synopsis of Thesis**

This thesis begins with a broad overview that looks at the historical, political and theoretical framing of Melbourne's Farmers' Markets, situating them within an international and national context in Chapter One. From this broad overview, the field is then introduced in Chapter Two, along with key gatekeepers in Melbourne's Farmers' Market community. Chapter Three then begins to explore, through detailed ethnographic description and thematic analysis, the ways in which the markets were experienced by participants. Chapters Four, Five and Six focus on the ways in which stallholders constructed the markets, shifting to a focus on the interactions between stallholders and customers. Chapter Seven discusses the markets from the perspective of some of their regular customers. Finally, Chapter Eight brings the focus back to the interactions between customers and stallholders, highlighting, in light of the previous chapters, how contrasting views and values on both sides of the stall do not necessary diminish the 'feel-good' values attributed to shopping at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.

Starting with a broad, top-down analysis and then introducing the markets from the perspective of different actors allows assumptions regarding Farmers' Markets to be raised, and then allows these assumptions to be unpacked and questioned through detailed ethnographic analysis. While situating Melbourne's Farmers' Markets within broader social trends and theories that are intricately linked to late modernity, this thesis will reveal a field that uniquely reflects an Australian, and particularly Victorian, context. Rather than provide a stand-alone literature review, relevant literature is reviewed throughout all Chapters.

## Chapter One: Situating Melbourne's Farmers' Markets

Chapter One examines the political and historical context of Victoria's Farmers' Markets by situating Farmers' Markets in the context of global agribusiness. This chapter reviews ideologies that influenced agricultural policies in Australia both historically and to the present day, drawing on analyses by historians, political scientists and social geographers. From here, the regulatory framework that preceded the introduction of Farmers' Markets to Australia, and to Victoria specifically, can be reviewed, as can the influence of such policies on the ways that farming and food production were conceptualised by participants. Furthermore, assumptions inherent in such top-down analyses can be drawn out and brought into question through engagement with ethnographic data in the following Chapters.

This overview is then used to situate the rise of Farmers' Markets in Victoria in a global and local context. The history of Farmers' Markets in Victoria was relayed differently by different participants at the markets, and these conflicts hint at themes that are discussed in the following Chapters. Altogether, Chapter One situates this ethnographic research within the political and historical policy environment that preceded Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.

## Chapter Two: Researching the Markets

Chapter Two provides a reflexive account of the field, field participants and fieldwork methodology, situated in the broader historical and political context detailed in Chapter One. This Chapter provides necessary background to the forthcoming Chapters. It identifies the key gatekeepers and organisations involved in Melbourne's Farmers' Market movement. This overview reveals how the VFMA Accreditation Program shaped and divided the field, with different understandings of what made a market a 'Farmers' Market' brought to the surface through the implementation of this program.

This Chapter outlines not only how I situated myself in the field as a researcher, but also how participants situated me and my research, particularly within the overarching context of the VFMA Accreditation Program. Relationships within the highly mobile market community were revealed through these interactions, highlighting implicit and explicit hierarchies of legitimacy among market participants, which are analysed in Chapter Four.

## Chapter Three: How Local is Local?

Chapter Three explores the assumptions inherent in international Farmers' Market branding and local food movement literature by comparing different constructions of local food by Melbourne's Farmers' Market stallholder and market organiser participants. Long ethnographic descriptions from the three primary field site markets are provided to highlight the different ways in which the markets were experienced by participants on both sides of the stall, demonstrating how local food experiences were constructed by different participants at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets. Locality as a 'feel-good' consumption value reflects the desire for simplicity and authenticity described in

theories of late modernity, and this chapter highlights how such ‘feel-good’ values are complex and may mean different things to different actors within local food movements, particularly in the context of Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets.

#### Chapter Four: Who belongs at a Farmers’ Market?

The valuing of authenticity was most evident in debates surrounding the VFMA Accreditation Program, which dominated Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets during this research. Chapter Four utilises debates surrounding the Accreditation Program to explore the concept of legitimacy at the markets. The VFMA Accreditation Program appeared to set out, in no uncertain terms, what is and isn’t allowed at a Farmers’ Market. However, through detailed ethnographic descriptions of both an Accreditation workshop held at the VFMA office in August 2010 and from markets throughout Victoria, this Chapter demonstrates that such concepts were contested within the Farmers’ Market community. Participants created hierarchies of legitimacy among producers, where others were deemed more or less legitimate, based on not only what they produced but also who they were and how their businesses were assumed to operate. I utilise the term ‘hierarchies of legitimacy’ because authenticity was not viewed as binary by participants. Rather, stallholder legitimacy was viewed in terms of ‘more’ or ‘less’, as is explored in this chapter.

#### Chapter Five: The Hard Work of Farming

The previous Chapter revealed that a belief in supporting farmers was central to the branding of Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets, particularly in inner-city locales. This shaped the VFMA Accreditation program, as well as debates surrounding whom and what belonged at a ‘real’ Farmers’ Market. In the next two Chapters, I examine how farming participants sold ideas of farming, the country and the farming ‘way of life’ to their city customers.

Stories spoke to particularly Australian constructions of rural and urban living, and painted a picture of farming as both tough, hard work and as an idyllic way of life. Rather than being contradictory, I argue that the juxtaposition of these narratives of farming, as both hardship and idyllic, served not only to connect their participants with the countryside, but also to promote the view that the farming way of life was essential and needed to be protected and supported by their city customers. These narratives sat alongside understandings of farming as a business, reflecting the neoliberal policy context of modern Australian farming. Such farming discourses allowed producers to sell ‘the good life’ to their customers and allowed their customers to engage in ‘feel-good’ shopping at the markets by ‘doing the right thing’ and supporting local farmers.

#### Chapter Six: The Rural Idyll and the Good Life

Themes of hard work and just reward, constantly emphasised by farming participants as explored in Chapter Five, can be seen as a consequence of late modernity, where individuals seek out ‘the simple life’, a life of hard work and just reward, of authenticity and simplicity. This is explored in Chapter Six, where I examine how ‘the good life’, through an imagining that evokes a particularly

European rural idyll, was constructed and consumed by participants at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.

In this Chapter, I argue that the rural idyll in the context of the markets was more about the present than the past and more about the city than the country itself. Further, I argue that this construction is performed, both by customers and stallholders, and as such, is not taken as an absolute 'truth' by either group of participants. Nevertheless, the temporary nature of the markets allowed the illusion of the good life, constructed around a rural idyll, to be consumed and shared by participants at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.

### Chapter Seven: (The Limits of) Feel Good Shopping

In previous Chapters, I demonstrated how understandings of local food, farmers, and the countryside were presented and negotiated by stallholders and customers at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets. In international Farmers' Market research, markets are often portrayed as homogenous, 'feel good' experiences where customers seek out good food choices that correspond to their values (Zukin, 2008:724). Chapter Seven questions this assumption by highlighting how, rather than seeing the markets as homogenous, customers and stallholders viewed the markets as places where good and bad co-existed. Through the interplay between market interactions, values, ambivalence and financial considerations, trust could be gained or lost, loyalty confirmed or questioned, and markets could fall in and out of favour as a shopping destination.

Through focussing on the market experience from the view of select customers, this chapter highlights how reciprocal relationships between customers and stallholders, developed over time, allowed stories to be told about the goods sold at the markets, giving them meaning. Shared experiences allowed customers to become 'insiders' at their market, supporting and advocating for 'their' stallholders.

Finally, this Chapter brings all of the themes discussed above together through an analysis of the failure of the Showgrounds Farmers' Market, the key ethnographic field site for this research project, which highlighted the limits of 'feel-good' shopping in the context of an urban landscape dominated by an abundance of consumption choices.

### Chapter Eight: Values and Value

Chapter Eight focuses on interactions between stallholders and customers to demonstrate how 'feel-good' values held as vital to the Farmers' Market brand (Chalmers et al, 2009:323), such as ethical or environmental considerations, actually meant different things to different participants. Nevertheless, the markets were still able to function as feel-good shopping experiences for regular customers, as meanings were contested and negotiated by participants. Through an exploration of such values, bringing together themes discussed in previous chapters, this chapter highlights the limitations of 'feel-good' shopping in the search for authenticity and simplicity, adding depth to the construction of alternative consumption in theories of late modernity.

## Conclusion

This thesis examines how Melbourne's Farmers' Markets were understood by stallholder, market manager and customer participants, through ethnographic research undertaken both at the markets and on the farms and in the kitchens of stallholders. Participants sought to differentiate the Farmers' Market experience from other consumption experiences. In doing so, interactions at the market revealed particular constructions of good food, farming, fairness, modern urban life and rurality that were constantly reinterpreted, manipulated and negotiated.

As producers, no longer supported by the modern food system, sought to accommodate their urban clientele, customers sought out 'real' food and 'authentic' food experiences. As I will demonstrate, these interactions constructed an image of a 'good life' that was not associated with a nostalgia for the past but an imagined, better, present and future, one that could be enjoyed and consumed through market purchases. However, the temporary nature of the markets allowed such meanings to be held simultaneously and unproblematically alongside other food experiences, while still allowing the markets to provide a 'feel-good' consumption experience.

Rather than being seen as a comprehensive analysis of urban consumers or small-scale farmers, this research is situated in the space in-between the two populations. It is framed within the context of late modernity and a neoliberal paradigm, where individual choice is promoted as the only way to enact social change. This thesis should be viewed, then, as a glimpse into one small part of the modern production and consumption landscape, building upon the picture of late modernity in the context of Melbourne, Australia.



## Chapter One: Situating Melbourne's Farmers' Markets

This chapter examines the broader historical and political context of the Melbourne's Farmers' Market movement. It begins with a look at the global agricultural sector, citing international research that posits Farmers' Markets as a form of local resistance to global agribusiness. Alongside this worldwide trend, the rise of a neoliberal ideology in Australian agriculture, which saw a shift from protectionist to free trade policies, is examined, highlighting a historical shift in the political construction of farming in Australia from being the essential lifeblood of the nation, to shifting to the periphery and being seen as another commodity to be traded on the world market.

These broad, generalising trends paint a particular picture of the food production landscape, that is, the one seen through examining official government policies and a top-down analysis of historical trends. As Shore and Wright argued, policies are both constructions of, and effect other, social phenomena, and so the assumptions inherent in these constructions can have implications for how farms operate and how farmers view themselves and their work (Shore & Wright, 1997:7). In this way, they provide insight into the context from which farming stallholders sought alternatives to mainstream wholesale markets by selling to a niche group of urban consumers at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.

However, constructions in such top-down analyses are only partial, and are based on particular assumptions of what farming is and how farmers view their work. Ethnographic research can look beyond such simplistic constructions, providing a lens through which such taken-for-granted assumptions can be critiqued (Shore & Wright, 1997:7). Therefore, while this chapter situates Melbourne's Farmers' Markets within a historical and political context, it also reveals particular assumptions inherent in official constructions of farming that will be critiqued when compared to everyday constructions of farming by farmers themselves in the following chapters.

### The Global Context

Internationally, Farmers' Markets have risen out of a food production system dominated by large-scale agriculture and "traditional productivist values" (Chalmers et al, 2009:320), where quantity is prioritised as a means to maximise profitability (Chalmers et al, 2009:321). Since the end of the Second World War, a global agro-industrial system has come to dominate the food production landscape throughout the industrialised and developing world (Pratt, 2007:286). Production chains have extended, as mechanised, large-scale farming produces raw materials for processing (Zukin, 2008:735). While small local stores and wholesale produce markets once provided access to local goods (Symons, 2007:78-82), the consumption landscape is now dominated by supermarkets, fast food outlets, and produce wholesalers (Fernandez-Armesto, 2001:222) that allow access to seasonal produce all year round (Zukin, 2008:735). This has led to the separation of consumers from the production of food.

Farmers' Markets have developed as an alternative to mainstream food production and consumption methods, focussing on seasonal, local produce (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:286). They are seen as new "alternative" consumption spaces, which are both reactionary, nostalgic spaces of exclusion and progressive spaces for environmental and social change at the "marginal sites of modernity" (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:287-299). Though limited in scale and appealing to a select group of consumers, Farmers' Markets can be viewed as a response to the globalisation of food production.

## **Globalisation and Food Production**

To understand the phenomenon of Farmers' Markets, it is important to examine the broader social, political and historical context from which they have emerged. Globalisation, the increased interconnectedness of nation-states into global systems (Edelman & Haugérud, 2005:22), has brought forward the current global agro-industrial system in which modern Farmers' Markets are situated. While it is contentious whether globalisation is an ongoing historical process or a modern phenomenon (Thompson, 2000:88-91), it is clear that the movement of technology, ideas, and cultural items between different parts of the world is easier and more prolific today than was previously possible (Harvey, 2000:102). As Kellner described, "the flows of information, knowledge, money, commodities, peoples and images have intensified to the extent that the sense of spatial distance which separated and insulated people...has become eroded" (Kellner, 2006:299).

Globalisation is clearly evident in the agro-industrial system, which has come to dominate the food production landscape throughout the industrialised and developing world (Pratt, 2007:286). Global trade in the production and distribution of food has existed throughout recorded history (Nuetzenadel & Trentmann, 2008:1). However, since the Second World War, food production has become increasingly industrialised and globalised, as post-war policies aimed to maximise volumes of production (Lassen & Korzen, 2009:1). Improvements in technology, the widespread use of fertilisers and pesticides, specification and monoculture farming redefined the way that food was produced and distributed on a global scale (Lapping, 2004:142). As Pratt explained, "This highly mechanized, energy-intensive, large-scale farming produces the raw materials for the food industry, often broken down into components – sugars, starch, oils, protein – and then reconstituted" (Pratt, 2007:286).

The global agribusiness system is based on neoliberal economics and the meta-narrative of modernism, which presupposes a 'progress' in history towards a 'western', capitalist system of industrialisation, urbanism, commoditisation and individualism (Featherstone, 1995:88). In this context, neoliberalism "comprises a series of pro-market values, ideas and policy settings that are designed to improve national and international competitiveness via a reorientation of the roles of government and private enterprise" (Lawrence, 2013:31), which involves the expansion of 'the market' into new social domains, and the reduction of traditionally non-economic fields into economic values (Larner, 2005: 9-10). Neoliberal economics reduces business to economic terms, as determined by consumer demand, prioritising efficiency, value-for-money and productivity (Pechlaner & Otero, 2010:79-96; Lawrence et al, 2010:1-26). In the food sector, this has led to an

agribusiness system largely focussed on mass production and mass consumption, operating at a global scale (Barnett et al, 2008:624-653, Tiemann, 2008: 477).

The global marketplace has allowed countries to export and import en masse fresh and processed food products, driven, as Lapping argued, by the search for areas of low-cost production, often in developing countries (Lapping, 2004:142). Globalisation and modernisation of the food industry has led to consolidation, that is, the reduction of the number of agribusinesses controlling production (Lapping, 2004:142), and the rise of transnational corporations at all stages of the food chain (Pratt, 2007:286). Agribusiness policies in countries such as Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom combine neoliberal free trade with protectionist values, complicating further the global agro-industrial food system (Bjørkhaug & Richards, 2008:99; Barnett et al, 2008:624-653).

The consequences of the global agro-industrial food system have been varied (Pratt, 2007:285). While the mechanisms of productivist agriculture led to an abundance of affordable food produce, its distribution is uneven, and market forces frequently result in over-production in some sectors and shortages in others (Bjørkhaug & Richards, 2008:99). Furthermore, the widespread use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers to increase production (King, 2008:113), large scale specialisation and monoculture farming practices have led to environmental degradation (Pratt, 2007:286). The number of small-scale farms has reduced due to competition with larger agribusinesses (King, 2008:113). The modern agribusiness system also changed the types of food that are produced and available for purchase, as durable produce is required to travel long distances, thereby reducing the varieties of fruits and vegetables deemed commercially viable (Kloppenburg et al, 1996:35). This, combined with the proliferation of processed, convenience foods and the advent of supermarkets, has changed consumption practices dramatically over the last 60 years (Pratt, 2007:286).

## **Grassroots Globalisation**

Modernisation, however, has not led to global homogenisation of the agriculture sector. Alternative agricultural systems and food networks that focus on environmental sustainability and community resilience are growing in popularity in many Western countries, including Australia (Chalmers et al, 2009:321; King, 2008:111). As Vittersø argued:

“The recent emergence of new food products (such as organic and local food) and distribution modes (such as farmers’ markets and box schemes), may be viewed as a reaction to the dominant standardisation of food distribution.” (Vittersø et al, 2005:1)

According to Appadurai, globalisation is not the sole reign of state and capitalist interests (Appadurai, 1999:18). Rather, “actors in different regions now have elaborate interests and capabilities in constructing world pictures whose interaction affects global processes” (Appadurai, 1999:13). Fair Trade campaigns, the Slow Food Movement, Community Supported Agriculture movements (CSAs), and environmental and animal rights lobby groups are all examples of global actors that partake in international discourse on food matters (Graeber, 2005: 341-351; Pratt, 2007:288). Such international movements represent a “grassroots globalisation” whereby the

dominant discourses of capitalism and modernisation are questioned and contested on a global scale (Appadurai, 1999:15). However, it is important to note that these alternative agricultural practices are still a part of the global capitalist system, and have arisen out of the context of commercial activity, state regulations and international trade agreements (Pratt, 2007:291).

Farmers' Markets could be viewed as a response to the globalisation of food production. Reasons for the re-emergence of Farmers' Markets identified in international literature include nostalgia; increasing demand for fresh, local produce; distrust of supermarket power; concern over industrialised food production; desire to help local small-scale producers; and to facilitate the revival of rural towns (Chalmers et al, 2009:320; Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:287). While there is no formal international organisation for Farmers' Markets, an increase in global communication has allowed the brand to spread throughout the Western world. In this sense, proliferation of Farmers' Markets can be seen as a form of "grassroots globalisation". However, Farmers' Markets remain a niche in the consumption landscape, appealing to small populations within particular urban and rural locales. Furthermore, the presence of Farmers' Markets does not preclude other forms of consumption, nor may selling at markets be enough for farmers to reject the wholesale system completely, as they still operate within the same global capitalist system (Pratt, 2007:291). As such, the role of Farmers' Markets as resistance to global agribusiness can be questioned, as I demonstrate in Chapter Seven and Eight, where the limits of 'feel good' shopping through the markets are called into question. As I argue, while Farmers' Markets evoke a 'good life', and alternative version of the future of food where quality, 'real food' that is ethical or environmentally friendly, and connections to the country are valued, such values are attributed to goods ambivalently, and in practice mean different things to different market participants.

### **The Modern Global Food System**

Alternative and mainstream agricultural practices are often portrayed as a dichotomy in social science research on food systems. However, Pratt argues that this dichotomy oversimplifies the current situation (Pratt, 2007:285). Many producers have been found to operate between both mainstream and alternative systems (Andreatta & Wickliffe, 2002:172-175). Furthermore, agricultural systems labelled as alternative do not always fit this categorisation. As Pratt argued:

"The alternative movements attempt to re-establish practical and discursive links between production and consumption...However, the totalizing character of this discourse hides the fact that the different qualities evoked for alternative foods do not in fact entail each other, and may pull in different directions...The labels 'organic', 'fair trade' or 'local' do not in themselves reveal a great deal about the extent to which their producers have resisted or been absorbed by the corporate interests in the food industry, nor much about whether the values they embody are part of a radical or conservative political agenda." (Pratt, 2007:285)

While globalisation of the food sector has resulted in the dominance of an agribusiness model based on the principles of modernisation, neoliberal economics and mass production, it has also led to the rise of alternative agricultural models on a global scale. These two aspects of the agro-industrial sector are not simply divided, and are localised, contested and redefined by local, national and international actors. Furthermore, sustainable agricultural movements are not one homogenous

group. Internationally, the Farmers' Market brand has arisen out of this context. This thesis seeks to situate Farmers' Markets in Australia within this context. While part of the same international movement, I argue that the way in which Farmers' Markets were established and operate in Melbourne is not only unique within this global context, but also within Australia itself, as I demonstrate below and in the following chapters.

## **Modern Consumers**

While Farmers' Market research has situated Farmers' Markets within an increasing interest in locality and authenticity in food, recent social science research has noted a shift of such niche consumption desires into the mainstream (Johnston & Baumann, 2014:19-23). While the origins of such phenomena are beyond the scope of this thesis, it would not be possible to review the rise of Farmers' Markets, both internationally and in Melbourne, without acknowledging this broader trend.

The valuing of history, simplicity and authenticity can be situated within broader theories of consumption and modernity. According to Bourdieu, consumption choices allow individuals to display "good" taste to their peers and thus establish their social position (Bourdieu, 1984:169-175). Farmers' Markets are often seen as a part of "foodie culture" (Guthrie et al, 2006:567) that caters to the "food elite" (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:287), who can afford the 'luxury' of ethical consumption (Hinrichs, 2003:44). Lindholm describes this group as "Bohemian bourgeoisie", who are "elites raised to be opposed to elites", and are a key part of the modern capitalist consumer landscape (Lindholm, 2008: 64). This can be seen through a focus on simplicity over the 'gourmet' in the kind of 'foodie' culture seen at Farmers' Markets, a phenomena that Johnston and Baumann referred to as "the democratisation of taste" (2014:43).

The consumption choices made by this group are situated within a modern food landscape that is dominated by a plethora of choices, where consumers have "no choice but to choose" (Giddens, 1991:81). Beck argued that such choice has led to a "risk society", as individuals are increasingly uncertain of the origins of the products they consume (Beck, 2000:213), leading to a process he labelled "reflexive modernization" (Beck, 2000:226). In this context, creating a moral framework around food choices, based on notions of 'good' or 'real' and 'bad' foods, allows individuals to mitigate the abundance of food choices available (Lupton, 1996:27), as well as to distinguish themselves from others that do not make the same consumption choices (see Bourdieu, 1984:169-175). An appeal to authenticity then, according to Lindholm, can provide a sense of belonging among the anonymity and anxiety of the modern world:

"Authenticity gathers people together in collectives that are felt to be real, essential, and vital, providing participants with meaning, unity and a surpassing sense of belonging."  
(Lindholm, 2008:1)

As I describe in Chapter Six, a search for 'real food' within a modern post-industrial agricultural landscape (Heller, 2013:12-13) constructs an image of 'the simple life', based upon a particularly European rural idyll, that is created and maintained by urban elites (Short, 2006:133; DuPuis,

2006:126-127; Little & Austin, 1996:103). While I argue that this construction is unique in the Australian context, and involved both a reactionary rejection of the present (see Short, 1991:34) and a progressive embrace of a 'feel-good' alternative future (see Goodman, DuPuis & Goodman, 2012:105-128), it must be situated within such broader, global social trends.

## **The Australian Context**

Before looking at Melbourne's Farmers' Market movement, it is important to establish the broader historical and political constructions of farming and farmers in Australia. This is not only to place the markets into context, but will allow the assumptions inherent in the policies and political constructions of farmers to be critiqued through ethnographic research in the following chapters.

Agricultural policies are significant to the study of Farmers' Markets, as they influence the lives and livelihoods of farming stallholders. Anthropology is concerned with implicit and explicit meaning in social phenomena (Geertz, 1975:7). Policies are both constructions of, and effect other, social phenomena, as Shore and Wright argued, for "they have important economic, legal, cultural and moral implications and can create whole new sets of relationships between individuals, groups and objects" (1997:7). Wedel and Feldman argued that anthropology can see policy as "a fluid state of political contestation", of competing interests and ideologies (2005:2). Therefore, the analysis of such policies can provide some critical context for understanding ethnographic observations, particularly when participants, such as farmers, livelihoods are governed in part by the regulatory framework of such policies.

## **Food Production in Australia**

Traditionally, farms in Australia have been family-run, and this continued to be the case, with over 99.6% remaining family owned in 2001 (Gray & Lawrence, 2001:56), with inheritance the main reason for engagement in farming, although records indicate that corporate farming is on the rise, with the number of small and medium farms falling annually (Barr, 2005:15-32). The majority of food produced by these farmers was sold unprocessed via wholesale markets, with approximately 60% heading for export in 2012 (Lawrence et al, 2013:30-33; DAFF, 2012:1-12; DAFF, 2012a: 4-7, 59, 90).

Agriculture in Australia has been influenced by the rise of neoliberalism, globalisation and the productivist ideology of global agribusiness (Gray & Lawrence, 2001:56). Social geographers Andree, Harris, Dibdin and Cocklin have argued that this has created a political-economic environment of "competitive productionism", where an export-orientated economy and neoliberal political agenda strongly encouraged the expansion of farms to compete in a global marketplace (Andrée et al, 2010: 307-322).

Much research has been carried out into the uneven processes of neoliberalism worldwide, which has had varied and irreversible effects on agricultural practices throughout the world (see Chalmers et al, 2009:320; Featherstone, 1995:88; Pechlaner & Otero, 2010:79-96; Lawrence et al, 2010:1-26). In Australia, the rise of a neoliberal ideology in agricultural policies reflected a highly political

process, whereby this ideological standpoint gradually gained dominance in the public debate, to the point where it was near-impossible to view the system outside of this ideology (Harris et al, 2012:377; Pritchard, 2005:1-3; Dibden et al, 2009:300; Higgins & Lockie, 2001:178-190; Halpin & Martin, 1996:9-24).

Nevertheless, the rise of neoliberal rhetoric in Australian agricultural policies was not a one-way, top-down, passive process, nor is it 'complete'. As Peck and Tickell argued, one should be wary of "overgeneralised accounts of a monolithic and omnipresent neoliberalism" (Peck & Tickell, 2002:381), for while the "new religion" of neoliberalism seems like a one-way, monolithic enterprise, its roll out, in practice, involved "hybrid or composite structures", the effects of which "are necessarily variegated and uneven" (Peck & Tickell, 2002:383). As Dibden et al noted, in Australia "competitive productivism ... in practice ... has socially and environmentally protectionist (or 'welfarist') and neoliberal moments of expression" (Dibden et al, 2009:300). The analysis of such policies must therefore look beyond a top-down approach that views the neoliberal ideal as absolute. Ethnographic research looks beyond a simplistic one-way construction of the consequences of such policies, therefore providing necessary depth and complexity (Shore & Wright, 1997:7). Therefore, an analysis of the policy context of Australian agriculture facilitates the analysis of ethnographic research, while simultaneously ethnographic research can provide a lens through which the assumptions of such policies can be critiqued.

### The Rise of Neoliberalism in Australian Agricultural Policies

To understand current institutional political constructions of farming in Australia, it is important to review how such constructions came to dominate the policy landscape. Historically, agricultural policies in Australia since colonisation have been export-orientated; though they indicate a gradual shift away from farm subsidisation as a neoliberal market ideology gained political dominance (Andrée et al, 2010: 307). Since the 1970s, Australia has advocated for neoliberal reforms in regard to agriculture on a global platform, specifically through advocacy at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and through trade negotiations and development aid agreements with other countries (Pritchard, 2005; Pritchard, 2005a; DFAT, 2013:1) and relatively low levels of agriculture subsidisation (OECD, 2013:80). Understanding the processes that led to this position at a national level can facilitate a better understanding of the socio-political context in which farmers, and their customers, are situated at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.

Historically, as a member of the Commonwealth, Australia enjoyed a privileged export relationship with the United Kingdom and with other Commonwealth countries since Federation in 1901. At a policy level, direct market interventions allowed the protection of farming through supply management processes that aimed to stabilise prices and production volumes (Pritchard, 2005:8), which were also considered necessary to protect and sustain rural populations (Davison, 2005:39). Similar policies, influenced by a Keynesian economics philosophy, continued following the Great Depression and World War II (Lawrence, 2005:104-120; Davison, 2005:46-54), when more intensive forms of production were embraced through broad acre land clearing and increased use of agricultural inputs such as fertilisers, leading to an increase in average farm size (Bjørkhaug & Richards, 2008:102).

In the early 1970s, the United Kingdom gained entry into the European Economic Community (forerunner to the European Union), and Australia lost its protected export status, allowing space for interest groups espousing a 'free market' philosophy to gain influence over government policies (Pritchard, 2005:2-10). Increased industrialisation of Australian agriculture in the 1970s added impetus to this ideological change, as the values of agricultural liberalisation corresponded to the productivist ideals of industrial agriculture, particularly through increased globalisation of the sector as Australia sought to gain new export markets (Burch & Rickson, 2001: 165-177; Bjørkhaug & Richards, 2008:98-103; Lawrence, 2005:104-120; Higgins & Lockie, 2002:419-422; Lockie & Goodman, 2006:95-117). Increasing cost of farm inputs and labour provided further impetus to such changes (Lawrence, 2005:104-120). Furthermore, according to Davison, the rural landscape in Australia significantly changed during this time, with the population that relied on agriculture or related industries decreasing, increasing unemployment as the overall contribution of agriculture to national wealth "dramatically shrunk" (Davison, 2005:40).

The rise of a neoliberal ideology in Australian agricultural policies in the 1970s corresponded to broader global trends, with a rise in global agribusinesses, and a focus on free trade more generally. As Bourdieu noted:

"[Neoliberalism] has, now more than ever, the means of *making itself* true ... For neoliberal discourse is not like others ... it is a "strong discourse" which is so strong and so hard to fight because it has behind it all the powers of a world of power relations which it helps to make as it is, in particular by orienting the economic choices of those who dominate economic relations and so adding its own – specifically symbolic – force to those power relations." (Bourdieu, 1995:98 *in* Peck & Tickell, 2002:382)

Since then, agricultural policies of consecutive Australian Governments have indicated "a process of 'agricultural liberalisation' which sought to construct a mode of 'neo-liberal agriculture' " (Pritchard, 2005:2), as emphasis shifted from protection to competition (Pritchard, 2005:2). The shift to a neoliberal agriculture policy framework was finalised through the establishment of the National Competition Policy (NCP) in the mid-1990s (Morgan, 2003:24). Significantly, the NCP and other similar policies fundamentally changed the way in which farmers were able to operate:

"These policies often have been described in terms of 'deregulating' agriculture, but more correctly are described as instituting a regime of 'market regulation'. Under the new arrangements farmers were still required to comply with an array of rules and procedures when selling their produce, but the key difference was that they were prevented from acting collectively towards these ends." (Pritchard, 2005:8)

Australia has been a vocal advocate of complete trade liberalisation in global trade negotiations, specifically in reference to agriculture (Alston 2004:38; DFAT, 2013:1; Pritchard, 2005a: 2-12, Lockie & Goodman, 2006:95-117). As a founding member of the Cairns Group of exporter countries in 1986, Australian representatives championed free trade first through the Uruguay Round (1986-1994), and then the Doha Round (2001-present), of the World Trade Organisation (formerly the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) trade negotiations (DFAT, 2013:1; Pritchard, 2005:1-12). Decisions



to liberalise agricultural trade at this time were based on an assumption that other countries would soon 'follow Australia's lead' (Morgan, 2003:24-32; Coleman & Skogstad, 1995:253-256).

However, as Dibden et al commented, "neoliberalism does not appear as an immutable and irresistible ideology at WTO level – it is a negotiable discourse." (Dibden et al, 2009:299-308). Other western 'developed' economies have not followed Australia's example in regards to agriculture (Dibden et al, 2009:299-308). The European Union continued their 'protectionist' policies to protect local agriculture (Richards et al, 2013:235-245) for "social, political, and even aesthetic reasons", despite "insisting upon free trade in everything else" (Harvey, 2005:71). Similarly, the United States has maintained a program of significant farm subsidies (Alston 2004:38).

While the 'successes' of neoliberal policies in Australian domestic agriculture are often held up by political advocates of neoliberalism as an example for other countries to follow (Pritchard, 2005a:8-9), the measurement of such supposed 'successes' have been brought into question (see: Richards et al, 2013; Higgins et al, 2012; Higgins et al, 2008; Lockie & Higgins, 2007; Pritchard, 2006; Lockie & Goodman, 2006; Alston 2004; Coleman & Skogstad, 1995). While Australia has shown net increases in agricultural production in recent years (DAFF, 2012:1), the gap between a small number of large successful producers and smaller producers has grown significantly, with the majority of farms requiring non-farm income to ensure financial survival (Alston 2004:41), a trend that was reiterated constantly by Farmers' Market participants in my ethnographic research. Other research has noted a myriad of socioeconomic issues effecting farmers and rural communities as a consequence of the liberalisation of agricultural industries (see: Alston, 2004, 37-46; Lockie & Goodman, 2006:95-117; Alston 2004:41; Bourke & Lockie, 2001:1-14; Coleman & Skogstad, 1995:246), with Herbert-Cheshire commenting that there have been so many crises in rural life and farming that they are becoming the norm, rather than the exception, in public understandings of rural life in Australia (Herbert-Cheshire, 2003:454-473). These issues were often written-out of economic analyses of Australian agricultural policies (Pritchard, 2005a:12), yet were of primary concern to participants in my field research. This gap between the experiences of farmers and the policies of agriculture is explored in Chapter Five of this Thesis, as I unpack how farmers situated themselves within the context of a policy environment focussed on export that viewed farming as a business like any other business, in contrast to the 'reality' of 'life on the land'.

This homogenising, top-down representation of agriculture in Australian agricultural policies reveals not only a bias towards neoliberal ideology, but also a particularly neoliberal construction of farming and farmers. As Shore and Wright argued, the historical and political assumptions inherent in policy rhetoric can have many implications (1997:7). In particular, such rhetoric can influence both how farms operate and how farmers view themselves and their work, as I further explore in Chapter Five. However, the construction of farming found in government policies is not the only way in which farmers understand farming or food production. Therefore, while it is important to understand various interpretations of the historical and political context of Australian agriculture, an exploration of everyday understandings of farming through ethnographic research as described in this Thesis can allow these assumptions to be critiqued.

## Alternative Discourses in Australian Agriculture

Although the ideological policy debate for neoliberalism in agriculture was arguably 'won' in the 1980s (Pritchard, 2005:6), the incorporation of federal neoliberal policies in Australian agriculture has been an uneven process. The resulting policy environment is more complex, as Dibden et al noted, "competitive productivism ... in practice ... has socially and environmentally protectionist (or 'welfarist') and neoliberal moments of expression" (Dibden et al, 2009:300). This is consistent with the roll out of neoliberal policies elsewhere, highlighting, as Otto and Willerslev argued, how "... in practice, the market is not fully commoditized: free market exchange is a value rather than a fully realized practice" (Otto & Willerslev, 2013: 15).

Agricultural policies since the 1970s have not always corresponded purely to a neoliberal free trade ideal, and have included both "socially and environmentally protectionist (or 'welfarist') and neoliberal moments of expression" (Dibden et al, 2009:300). While Australia championed neoliberal policies on the global stage, consecutive governments offered support packages to specific industries, draught assistance, and other farming policies to alleviate political, environmental and economic crises that have often only "technically" adhered to the WTO's Free Trade framework, despite Australia's record on criticising other countries for similar "protectionist" policies (Pritchard, 2005a:10-12; Coleman & Skogstad, 1995:242-256). Nevertheless, Andrée et al argued that such government financial aid, and other support mechanisms available to farmers, tended to be geared towards support for export industries, further emphasising a culture of 'competitive productionism' where conventional supply chains are "the most – if not the only – legitimate way of improving farm viability", contributing to the neoliberal political ideology dominant in Australian agriculture (Andrée et al, 2010:316-317).

Several scholars have utilised Polanyi's notion of the "double movement" of capitalism to explain the uneven and contested roll out of neoliberal policies worldwide, specifically in relation to agriculture (see: Dibden et al, 2009:299-308; Lockie and Higgins, 2007: 2; Barthélemy & Nieddu, 2007:519-527; Guthman, 2007:456-475). Polanyi's thesis posits that, as neoliberal ideologies attempt to dis-embed 'the market' from the social, other forces will resist and serve to re-embed such movements back into social and cultural realms (Barthélemy & Nieddu, 2007:522). In agriculture, this has meant that "the immersion of all things into the marketplace [is] countered by predictable calls for regulation and restraint" (McCarthy, 2004:335). This can be seen, for example, in moves by producers to embrace organic farming and other sustainable agriculture mechanisms to protect the environment (Higgins et al, 2012:377-386). However, such movements may not necessarily indicate a rejection of neoliberal policies:

"In relation to agriculture, apparently oppositional projects such as organics, value-based labels and fair-trade initiatives are seen by some scholars as part of a Polanyian double movement – a means of protecting producers and the environment from the intensification and exploitation resulting from exposure to the global market ... However ... Polanyi's notion of a countermovement is not just about the protection of vulnerable groups or environments but may also be about defending the market itself. This argument accords with other research which holds that resistance to the neoliberal political project often results in measures that actually make neoliberalism 'workable' (Dibden et al, 2009:299-308).

Therefore, it is important to remember that, while a neoliberal ideology has dominated Australian agricultural policies in recent years, such policies are not omnipresent. Resistance can be found both in calls for continued government support for farmers, particularly in times of hardship such as drought, as well as in social and political movements that call for restraint, or actively resist neoliberal reforms. Farmers' Markets can be viewed as one of the ways in which participants have sought to re-embed food production back into the social realm, advocated for farming as both essential and under threat from cold global market forces. This ethnography explores how farmers, farming and food production are given meaning by participants at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets. In particular, the tension between an over-arching neoliberal ideology and a view that farming, and food, is different and should not be treated as any other commodity is central to constructions of farming and farmers at the markets is analysed in Chapter Five.

Through understanding the policy environment of Australian agriculture, the Melbourne's Farmers' Market movement can be placed into historical and political context. Furthermore, these policies highlight the dominant narratives of farming throughout this time, that is, the official understandings of farming in Australia. However, this top-down narrative is not the only understanding of farming in Australia. These assumptions are critiqued in Chapter Five and Six, which examine everyday understandings of farming, the country and food production at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets. I argue that the rise of neoliberalism in Australian agriculture was highly influential and does impact the way that my farmer participants view themselves, as they described their businesses and the successes and failures of their contemporaries. However, this was far from complete, for protectionist sentiments were at the heart of their discussions of farming, particularly that the government and urban customers *should* support and protect farming for the good of all Australians. I argue that this protectionism, despite decades of neoliberal policies, remains central to Australian constructions of farming, particularly at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.

## **The Agricultural Sector in Victoria**

The current state of agriculture in Victoria reflects the complex political framework that includes both a dominant neoliberal ideology and sporadic protectionist support mechanisms, particularly for export-orientated industries. Victoria is commonly referred to as Australia's 'food bowl', with high quality soil, climate conditions and regular rainfall providing a basis for a successful food industry (Budge & Slade, 2009:21). Overall, Australian farms produce approximately 93% of the nation's total daily domestic food supply (PMSEIC, 2010:15). However, Australia's food imports have increased dramatically over the last few decades, particularly packaged foods including processed fruits and vegetables, meats and bakery products, increasing at an average rate of 6 per cent per year between 1990 and 2008 (PMSEIC, 2010:34). This has had irreversible effects on Victorian farmers, for example farmers in the traditional fruit-growing area of the Goulburn Valley report that they have recently been forced to pull up their trees, or leave their land, due to decreasing demand of their products from local cannery SPC Ardmona, as their business struggled to compete with cheaper imported supermarket home-brand labels (Dixon & Isaacs, 2013:283-286).

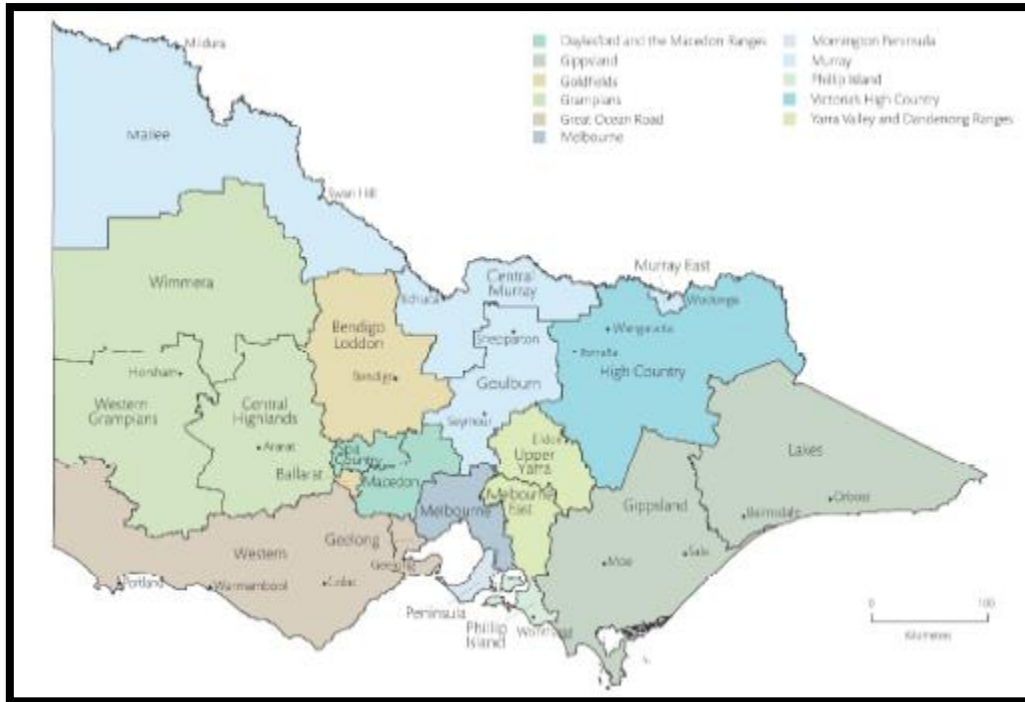


Figure 1: Regions of Victoria.<sup>9</sup>

In Victoria, global trade liberalisation and modernisation in the agriculture sector has led to increased farm size, intensification and specialisation. A report by the Victorian Eco-Innovation Lab (VEIL), University of Melbourne, noted that “terms of trade have been steadily declining for many Australian farmers since the 1960s, and only farms already returning high incomes are able to continue producing” (Larsen et al, 2008:12). According to the Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI), 10% of Australian farms with the highest net income produce over 50% of agricultural production, while the 50% earning the least produce only 10% (Barr, 2005:5). Through global trade and free trade agreements, Victoria’s primary production industry is exposed to international market conditions (Taylor, 2008:23) and competition from imported produce, which can often be sold cheaper or at the same price as local produce (Mamen et al, 2004:5).

The decline in small farms has also contributed to the dominance of a few wholesalers in Australia, which reduces the price farmers can get for their produce through economies of scale (Campbell, 2008:122; Richards et al, 2013:237). From 2005-2007, the price of fruit and vegetables rose by 43% and 33% respectively (Quiggin, 2007:3), yet farmers were paid 19% less for this produce (Guthrie et al, 2006:566). This move towards larger farms has been accelerated by the expansion of corporate agribusiness in Victoria (Larsen et al, 2008:12).

<sup>9</sup> This map illustrates regions of Victoria as identified by Tourism Victoria for regional advertising campaigns (Tourism Victoria, 2012). This map is provided as Farmers’ Market Producers utilised these regional terms to locate their farms for their urban customers. Regional identifiers were utilised as markers of distinction, frequently appearing in stall names (such as “Peninsula Fresh Organics”) and on stall signage. Source: <http://www.tourism.vic.gov.au/research/domestic-and-regional-research/regional-map.html>

## Neoliberal Policies, Deregulation and Melbourne's Farmers' Markets

Deregulation of previously protected industries had a significant impact on Victorian producers, specifically dairy producers, which in turn influenced the rise of Melbourne's Farmers' Markets. Dairy producers or ex-dairy producers constituted a significant proportion of Farmers' Market stallholders in Melbourne, as I discovered through my field research. The dairy industry is one of Australia's biggest rural industries, producing approximately 9.5 billion litres of milk annually (ADIC, 2012:2). Victoria produces 90% of Australia's milk, with over half of this volume exported, mainly as value-added dairy products such as cheeses, protein whey and milk powder (Hogan et al, 2005:5; ACCC, 2001:27; Lawrence et al, 2013:32).

Australia's dairy industry was deregulated in 2000, and since that time Victorian dairy producers have struggled, with the number of dairy farms in Victoria falling from over 12,000 to approximately 6,700 in the last decade (Hogan et al, 2005:29-30; Whitehead, 2013:1). Government assistance was provided in the early 2000s, however many chose to utilise the government's "Dairy Structural Adjustment Program" to pay off debts and 'walk off the land' (Dibdin & Cocklin, 2010: 418-420; Whitehead, 2013:1). Several stallholders at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets came to the markets following the deregulation of the dairy industry. While some had ceased dairy production altogether, others chose to continue dairy production but "added value" by diversifying, for example through rearing free range pigs, or by starting their own dairy related businesses, for example building an on-farm cheese factory to sell their own label cheeses at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.

As deregulation removed price controls, and initially disallowed dairy producers from collective bargaining, the balance of negotiating power shifted significantly to retailers (Campbell, 2008:122), and farmers saw the price they received per litre fall significantly (Hogan et al, 2005:6; Dibdin & Cocklin, 2010:416). This was particularly significant for suppliers to Australian retail brands, due to the concentration of retail power in a supermarket 'duopoly', which controlled approximately 70% of the grocery retail sector (ACCC, 2008:xii-xxv). Following deregulation, "milk wars" drove down prices for dairy farmers, particularly after the introduction of the supermarket's own "private label" home brand milks that were sold to customers for as little as \$1 per litre (Cullen, 2013:1; Woolrich, 2013:1; Dibdin & Cocklin, 2010: 416; Richards et al, 2013:239-240). Deregulation of the dairy industry, the 'price wars' and perceptions of a farming industry under threat from 'big business' emerged as significant themes throughout my ethnographic research, as will be seen in the following chapters.

The Australian Farmers' Market movement rose at a time when primary producers faced uncertainty with a wholesale market dominated by a supermarket duopoly (Coster & Kennon, 2005:9-13). The ongoing draught also placed pressure on producers at this time (Campbell, 2008:1-31). However, this movement also corresponded with changes in the consumption landscape in Victoria, as developing environmental concerns, the rise of the organic and GM free movements, interest in 'knowing' where food comes from, and a growing 'foodie' culture also influenced this rise (Campbell, 2008:1-31; OSISDC, 2010:viii; Coster & Kennon, 2005:9-13; King, 2005:1-5), factors which are also analysed in more detail in the following chapters.

## The History of Melbourne's Farmers' Markets

While Farmers' Markets first arose in the United States and parts of Europe in the 1970s (Lawson et al, 2008:22), their rise in Australia has been a far more recent phenomenon. With the majority of food eaten by Australians still produced in Australia (PMSEIC, 2010:15), it can be argued that the impetus for a Farmers' Market movement was not as strong as in other countries with more globalised food systems, where 'food miles' became a concern for some consumers (Hinrichs, 2003:33). The political and historical circumstances described above provide some context into why Farmers' Markets developed in Australia in the late 1990s (Coster & Kennon, 2005:9-13). However, this overview does not provide any indication of how Australia's Farmers' Markets were first established. My research indicated that this history, rather than being straight-forward, was contested by different members of Melbourne's Farmers' Market community.

Throughout my research, I discussed the origin of Melbourne's Farmers Market movement with market managers, farmers, value-added producers, and members of the Australian Farmers' Market Association (AFMA). I sought to find out how the first market managers convinced farmers to attend the markets, and if and how farmers at that time were seeking an alternative place to sell their produce, to understand why Farmers Markets became a part of the food landscape in Australia at this point in time.

According to the VFMA, the first Victorian Farmers Market opened in 1998 (VFMA, 2010a:1). However, the question of which market was the 'first' was contested, and different histories were presented by different Farmers' Market organisations. These stories represented incomplete pictures of the history of Farmers' Markets in Victoria, selected narratives that were deemed important to particular participants, which reflected internal politics and divisions within the movement, particularly concerning VFMA Accreditation.

For those positively associated with the VFMA, Jane Adams, from Sydney, was credited with bringing Farmers Markets to Australia (AFMA, 2010: 1).<sup>10</sup> A management consultant for the wine industry with a background in Economics and Politics, she had travelled to the United States of America in 1997 as a recipient of the Geoffrey Roberts Award, a UK based award for food research (Adams, 2008:1-2), to explore Farmers' Markets in the US and determine their viability in Australia (Geoffrey Roberts Trust, 2010:1). Interviewing Jane Adams over the phone, she stated that her inspiration came from visiting "traditional" food markets in other countries during her travels, identifying something that was missing in Australian cities:

"What drew me to apply for the fellowship [to learn about Farmers' Markets] ... It was largely because I'd lived in Europe, I'd travelled in Asia, you know, we as Australians - recently but even back then - were interested in good food and where it comes from, we didn't have, here in NSW particularly ... municipal [food] markets in Sydney ... We didn't have food markets."

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<sup>10</sup> In this section, I utilise the real names of key figures in Melbourne's Farmers' Markets. All excerpts in this section come from formal interviews with the market managers in question. In other chapters, pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of participants. However, their roles as market managers render them identifiable as public figures in the context of this chapter. All consented to being identified in this research.

Following her trip to the US, she began conducting Farmers' Market information sessions in 1999 with community groups throughout Australia. In 2002, the Australian Farmers Market Association (AFMA) was formed and held the inaugural national Farmers Market Conference, where Jane Adams was named chairperson (AFMA, 2003:1).

However, in 1999, the first Victorian Farmers' Markets were already underway as community and producer groups in country towns began to set up the first markets specifically branded as Farmers' Markets (Campbell, 2008:93). For example, the Yarra Valley Regional Food Group, founded in 1998, set up a Farmers' Market at Yering Station, Yarra Valley, to showcase their members' products in the same year (Yarra Valley Regional Food Group, 2009:1). As Fred and Loraine, market managers and stallholders at this market, explained:

“Our business has been part of the market since its inception, that’s 12 years ... It’s our 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary ... we believe it was the first *true* Farmers' Market in Victoria, if not Australia ... and it was set up by a group of interested food related businesses. We have guidelines to being a member. You must be a member of the [region based] food group before you can attend the market ... So you’re a member of the food group then you have the right to attend the market.”

In South Gippsland, the Koonawarra Farmers' Market began in 1999 after a visit by Jane Adams (RFM, 2011:1). Other country and outer-urban Farmers' Markets started around this time, and in October 2002, the first inner-city Farmers' Market started at the Collingwood Children's Farm in Abbotsford, based on the banks of the Yarra River (VFMA, 2010:1). The Farm committee engaged two individuals to set up and manage the market on their behalf; Miranda Sharp, an instigator of the market, and Peter Arnold, who had helped set up the Koonawarra Farmers' Market. Now fierce competitors, these two market managers were still central characters in Melbourne's Farmers' Market scene during my research. The pair entered into a similar agreement with the Booroondara Council soon afterwards, and while the two parted company both continued to open other markets. The Collingwood Children's Farm Farmers' Market started as part of a broader community campaign to save the Farm from development. As Miranda Sharp commented:

“So I was very aware of the market scene but just realised that we didn’t have any Farmers' Markets. And that Victoria – Melbourne particularly – you know, bangs on about its food culture and it was giving less and less credit to where the food was coming from. So I thought, ‘right’ [sat up, gestured, voice changed to a mock authoritative tone], need to do something about this [laughing]. So I had lots to do with the Collingwood Children's Farm and I knew how pretty desperate their situation was, with huge residential development that was coming up there – and thought that this might actually work [smiling]. So I approached Collingwood and [comical voice] ‘the rest is history’ [laughing].”

During interviews, market managers described difficulties the earliest markets had attracting producers to attend their markets. During my fieldwork, the same markets had waiting lists of producers wanting to attend, indicative of the rise in popularity of Farmers Markets over the last ten years. Peter Arnold, who operated markets the Regional Farmers' Markets group of markets, described how he experienced the changing Farmers' Market scene:

“When we first started these Farmers’ Markets, we as the market organisers... first of all there was the Collingwood Children’s Farm and Booroondara, and all the ones...when we first started, we had to talk people [stallholders] into coming. It was like ‘would you like to come to a Farmers’ Market?’ ‘What’s a Farmers’ Market?’, ‘well you come and sell your produce’, ‘well, am I going to sell anything?’ And we really had to cajole people into it. Because we were the first off the rank, and no one really knew what Farmers’ Markets were.

And so we - the market managers - were the be-all-and-end-all. We could pick and choose. ... And that took place over the first three years when there were only about eight, ten markets around here ... And in the intervening years, the power shift has changed, for two reasons. It’s changed ... because there are more stallholders. And they know what they want and they’re starting to get a voice; but they’re a long way from getting a voice ... The laws of supply and demand changed from us to them. And they could say ‘no we don’t want to come to your market because we can go to that one over there’. And so, we then had to alter our philosophy about how we dealt with stallholders. We had to realise that ... no one has the power; and it is a cooperative partnership. And a lot of people haven’t got it yet.”

In Melbourne, the development of Farmers Market’s differed to other states in Australia. Significantly more markets opened in Victoria than anywhere else (AFMA, 2010b:1). This has been attributed to the abundance and variety of food produced in Victoria, a relatively large proportion of small to medium food producers, and a wide variety of distinct growing districts, a city ‘food culture’ in Melbourne, and a large sprawling urban population (VFMA, 2010:1; OSISDC, 2010:17-33; Coster & Kennon, 2005:1-11; Larsen et al, 2008:9; Campbell, 2008:89).

Farmers Markets in Victoria were set up as monthly, rather than weekly, occurrences. Participants involved in the earliest markets cited concerns that customers would not travel far to attend weekly markets, and that stallholders needed to reach “as many customers as possible” to make the markets “worth their while”. However it developed, this monthly schedule lead to large numbers of markets opening throughout urban and regional Victoria, far more than any other state in Australia (AFMA, 2010b:1). In 2011, there were approximately 90 Farmers Markets in Victoria, with around 40 in and around Greater Melbourne (OSISDC, 2010: vii). However, this number is approximate, because new markets opened consistently, while others closed (VFMA, 2010:2).<sup>11</sup> Most markets were held on Saturday mornings (VFMA, 2011a:1-3), with only two Sunday markets (Mulgrave, opened 2009 and Melbourne Showgrounds, opened late 2010) operating weekly and two regional markets (Ballarat and Hume Murray) operating fortnightly in 2011, along with a small number of seasonal markets (OSISDC, 2010:22; VFMA, 2011a:1-3). This differed from other states such as South Australia, Queensland and Tasmania, where markets were held weekly in key central locations (ASFM, 2011:1; CRFM, 2011:1; AFMA, 2010b:1). New South Wales and Western Australia had a mixture of weekly, fortnightly and monthly markets (AFMA, 2010b:1). Overseas, in New Zealand and the United Kingdom, Farmers Markets are almost exclusively weekly, and were often held on weekdays in the UK (FMNZ, 2011:1, FARMA, 2011:1).

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<sup>11</sup> For example, new markets opened in 2011 included: Ashwood, Ballarat Town Hall Plaza (since moved to Bridge Mall), Bayside (Sandringham), Bendigo, Coal Creek, Fairfield, Heathmont, Montmorency, Mt Eliza, North Essendon, Pakenham, Park Orchards, Preston, Spotswood, Sunbury, Melbourne Showgrounds (Ascot Vale), University Hill, and Westerfolds Park (VFMA, 2011a:1-3). University Hill, Park Orchards Fairfield and Westerfolds Park closed in 2012, and the Melbourne Showgrounds Farmers’ Market struggled until it changed locales in late 2012 to become the, now successful, Flemington Farmers’ Market. Numerous markets have opened and closed since then.



The development of a monthly market schedule, as opposed to weekly, meant that stallholders had to attend a variety of markets to maintain a steady weekly income (Campbell, 2008:93). Many stallholders attended different markets each weekend of the month. For example, the dairy-based stallholder Boosey Creek Cheese attended 16 Farmers Markets a month in 2010, with extended family members attending different markets throughout the city and country (BCC, 2011:1). Through their monthly travels, stallholders interacted with a variety of market managers and stallholders from different regions. Stallholders frequently faced the dilemma of leaving a market that was not financially successful if it was possible to attend another on the same day (OSISDC, 2010:33). This movement of stallholders between different markets was significant, for it shaped the Victorian Farmers Market community in a way that differed from interstate or overseas Farmers' Markets, as discussed in Chapter Four and Five.

### **The Victorian Farmers Market Association**

The Victorian Farmers Market Association (VFMA) was set up in 2002, following the first Farmers Market Conference run by the Australian Farmers Market Association (AFMA) in the same year. The association was formed by market managers and a small group of interested stallholders (VFMA, 2010:1). In 2011, the VFMA had six part-time staff, a committee, and a voluntary Accreditation Panel made up of stallholders and market managers (VFMA, 2011d: 1). However; since then organisation has grown substantially, moving to a new office, creating new roles, and employing full time staff.

The VFMA are a not-for-profit, non-government Peak Body for Farmers Markets, whose stated role is to advocate on behalf of managers and stallholders (VFMA, 2010:1). For example, a successful campaign carried out prior to the commencement of fieldwork advocated for councils to consolidate local council fees for stallholders. Up to 2010, stallholders were required to hold Health Permits from each council region in which they operated (Food Safety and Regulatory Activities Unit, 2011:1). As many stallholders travelled great distances to cover many markets, they paid numerous council fees. From July 2011, each stallholder was then only required to register with their local council and pay one fee (VFMA, 2011b:1). While VFMA claimed this as a significant victory, stallholders I spoke to were often unaware of the VFMA's role in advocating this outcome with the councils, and some questioned the importance of the VFMA in this decision, particularly at non-VFMA associated markets.

In 2010, the VFMA decided to set up a weekly market, the Melbourne Showgrounds Farmers Market (MFM, 2011:1), the primary field site for this research. The stated purpose of this market was to showcase Accreditation, and to allow new stallholders access to an inner-suburb market. However, it was also explicitly set up to collect revenue for the organisation, due to concerns that a state government funding agreement scheduled to expire in 2011 and may not be renewed (MFM, 2011:1). Opening this market angered some other market managers as it placed their industry Peak Body in direct competition with their own businesses. However, the move that caused the most tension amongst other Farmers' Market participants, and framed this research, was the establishment of the VFMA Accreditation Program.

## VFMA Accreditation Program

In 2009, the Victorian Farmers Market Association (VFMA) launched Australia's first "Accreditation Program" for Farmers Markets. The VFMA Accreditation Program guidelines outlined specific criteria for Farmers Markets participants. The main principles were that:

- "The producer has: grown, reared, baked, brewed, fermented, caught, smoked, pickled or preserved the product he/she is selling,
- Each stall should be staffed by at least one family member or person(s) who has intimate knowledge of, and direct involvement with, the production process of any items for sale.
- Priority is given to producers from the local area. In order to increase diversification, vendors may be accepted from further afield; however they should not be in direct competition with a local vendor." (VFMA, 2009:2)

In the Accreditation Program guidelines, The VFMA used strong language to emphasise the importance of these principles, stating that "anyone who is working outside of these principles is deceiving the public" (VFMA, 2009:2). The Accreditation Program, it argued, would "ensure recognition and promotion of true Producers and Farmers Markets" (VFMA, 2009:2). The VFMA also explicitly stated what is to be excluded from their markets:

"The following are not allowed at a Farmers Market which is endorsed as such by the VFMA: Re-sellers of fruit, vegetables or any other farm based product; Re-packagers of any food or drink; Art and Craft stalls; Bric-a-brac stalls." (VFMA, 2009:3)

The Accreditation program ran through annual self-assessment forms, market inspections, and periodic inspections of "production premises" (VFMA, 2009:3). The guidelines stated that this would "deter any vendors or markets seeking to work outside the VFMA's best practice guidelines, such as using wholesale produce, or if they do, it will be at an uncredited market" (VFMA, 2009:2).

For a stallholder to be accredited, they must comply with the conditions set out in one of four categories: Fruit & Vegetable, Meat & Dairy, Shared Farm Stall, and Value-Added Artisan Food. Throughout the accreditation forms, there are strong suggestions that if a stall does not match these criteria, they should not conduct business at Farmers Markets (VFMA, 2009:6). Accreditation criteria included a complicated level of detail for value-add stallholders. Every ingredient for each individual item sold by the stallholder was assessed via a 100-point system, with maximum points for ingredients from other stallholders, slightly less for Victoria, less again for elsewhere in Australia and zero points for imported products, which were then worked out as a percentage of the final product to give an overall score (VFMA, 2009a:4). An average score of over 100 for all products was required for a value-add stall to receive accreditation (VFMA, 2009a:4). An Accreditation Panel of volunteer stallholders, market managers and VFMA staff assessed applications for Accreditation, and occasionally carried out site visits to stallholders that applied for Accreditation.

Markets received accreditation when 90% of stallholders achieved accreditation for metropolitan markets, or 75% for rural markets. Those that did not fit into the accreditation model, such as coffee

or “food-to-go” stalls, were required to also agree not to re-sell any food products (VFMA, 2009:2). External certification was also required to substantiate stallholder claims of organic or free range status, for example: “you may not use the word organic, verbally or in writing, unless you are certified to do so” (VFMA, 2009:4). All stallholders were also required to sign an agreement not to “re-sell”, that is, to sell any item not made or grown by the producer, under any circumstances.

On the VFMA Accreditation Program forms, stallholders were informed in no uncertain terms what is required to be a Farmers’ Market stallholder and what does not belong. An emphasis on local food was accentuated through the need to use local ingredients in value-added food, which were requested in terms of percentages on the forms. Overall, the VFMA viewed the trust of the customer as paramount to the success of the markets, and so any re-selling was seen as ‘deception’ and damaging to all Farmers Markets in Victoria.

In 2011, 16 Farmers Markets had received Accreditation, with 15 listed as seeking accreditation (VFMA, 2011a:1). There were a total of 30 accredited markets by mid-2013, the majority of which were new markets, opened in 2012 or 2013 following the implementation of the Accreditation Program (VFMA, 2013:1). From 2011, only accredited markets were actively promoted by the VFMA, and only accredited stallholders were listed on their website or appeared in media promotions organised by the VFMA, such as radio show appearances and newspaper articles (VFMA, 2011d: 1).

The roll-out of the VFMA Accreditation Program did not correspond to the ideals set out in the program guidelines. The program itself was modified many times, due to pressure from stallholders, customers and market managers. An example of this was seen at the popular Kingston Farmers Market in Melbourne’s south-eastern suburbs. In 2010, the market appointed a new market manager who also became a member of the VFMA Accreditation Panel. Through pursuing Accreditation for the market, he dismissed a stallholder that made dog food and other treats for pets as he considered them ‘non-food products’. This stallholder then launched a campaign through her customers to be reinstated at the market. She gave her customers the market manager’s and the VFMA Accreditation Officer’s email addresses, asking them to petition these men to allow her back into the market. The result of this campaign was that the VFMA’s Accreditation Officer modified the program rules to allow non-human food stalls, including the dog treat stall, into the Accreditation Program (VFMA, 2011a:1). This was one of many modifications to the VFMA Accreditation Program witnessed through my field research, as explored in the following chapters.

## Farmers Market Funding

The VFMA and the VFMA Accreditation Program was supported through State Government funding, through Regional Development Victoria, which administered a \$2 million dollar Farmers Market Program. This program was introduced in 2007, to conclude on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2011. In addition to funding allocated to the VFMA, the program included three main funding streams:

- *“Market Plan:* grants of up to \$10,000 for development of a professional market plan, including a feasibility study for a new or existing Farmers Market covering community consultation, economic sustainability and a produce audit.
- *Start-up Markets:* grants of up to \$20,000 to assist new markets to get underway. Recipient markets must show evidence of a comprehensive market plan. Funds can be used for training/skills development for market managers and stallholders, publicity and marketing campaigns, sourcing of stallholders and small-scale infrastructure.
- *Expanding Markets:* grants of up to \$20,000 to assist existing markets to expand. Applicants must show the economic benefits of the proposed expansion and demonstrate how it will become economically sustainable. Funding may go towards activities including training/skills development, publicity, small-scale infrastructure, sourcing of stallholders, compliance with VFMA accreditation and a VFMA ‘market check.’” (OSISDC, 2010:25)

The Farmers Market funding program was a particular point of discussion for VFMA staff and volunteer participants, but conspicuously absent from discussions with private operators and customers. To prepare for the cessation of funding, the VFMA implemented changes to their membership model in 2010, switching from an annual fee to an ongoing fee collected from every stall at each market held, collecting \$5, \$2, or \$3 from each stall per market depending on the markets locale, paid via their market manager (VFMA, 2011c: 1). The Melbourne Showgrounds Farmers Market was established as another funding stream, to allow the VFMA to become self-funded after the conclusion of government funding. On May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011, the State Government announced that a Farmers Market funding program would continue, with \$2 million allocated over four years (VFMA, 2011: 1).

This funding was also indirectly mentioned by some stallholders that saw the ‘greed’ of private operators as a primary reason for setting up markets in outer suburbs in quick succession. Some went further, suggesting that new markets arguably were ‘neglected’ once these funds were received and “allowed to fail”, at the expense of the stallholders. Other participants were unaware of any government funding for Farmers Markets. Eighteen Farmers Markets opened between April 2010 and July 2011, prior to the scheduled conclusion of this program (VFMA, 2011a: 1-3). Such comments reflected ongoing debates within the markets between commercial Farmers’ Market organisations and those run by or for community groups, stallholder collectives or charitable organisations. These debates are analysed in Chapter Three and Four.

## **The Impact of Victoria's Farmers' Markets**

According to the VFMA, Farmers' Markets now make a considerable contribution to Melbourne's consumption landscape. In early 2010, a Market Research study conducted through telephone surveys for the VFMA estimated that approximately 35,000 people shopped at Victorian Farmers Markets every week, contributing \$2 million dollars weekly into the local economy (VFMA, 2010:1; VFMA, 2011:1). 24% of surveyed Victorian households shopped at Farmers' Markets at least once a month (VFMA, 2010:3; VFMA, 2011:1). The report concluded that the markets contributed approximately \$100 million in income to Victorian food producers every year (VFMA, 2010:5; VFMA, 2011a:1). However, while these numbers appear impressive, it is important to note that in a state with a population of approximately 5.84 million people (ABS, 2014:1) Farmers' Market customers remain a small minority. Therefore, while the impact of Farmers' Markets has been significant for many of the participants in this research, it is important to note their impact on farming or consumption generally should not be overstated.

## **Conclusion**

This Chapter has provided a broad overview of the politically contested history of Australian agricultural policies, situating Melbourne's Farmers' Markets within this context. It has also outlined the history of Farmers' Markets in Melbourne, as told by key market participants. These narratives highlight not only official constructions of farming and farmers in Victoria, but also revealed how such constructions continued to be contested despite the dominance of neoliberal ideology in Australian agricultural policies. The broader global context of modernity, agricultural industrialisation and a post-industrial consumer landscape where locality and authenticity are desired commodities further provided context to the rise of Melbourne's Farmers' Markets. Nevertheless, it is important to note that these Farmers' Markets still only represent a small proportion of food consumption in Melbourne, and so their importance should not be overstated.

However, everyday understandings of farming and farmers are conspicuously absent from such analyses. While this chapter presented the historical, political and policy landscape in which farming participants operated, and in which Melbourne's Farmers' Markets were situated, the following chapters will bring everyday constructions of farming and farmers into the picture. The next chapter describes how I approached my research into Melbourne's Farmers' Markets, and in doing so will begin to demonstrate how Melbourne's Farmers' Markets were unique in the context of the global Farmers' Market movement, while still being a part of the global trends identified at the start of this chapter, as I argue in the following chapters.

## Chapter Two: Researching Melbourne's Farmers' Markets

Attending my primary field site, the Showgrounds Farmers' Market, as a researcher for the first time, I introduced myself to Sarah.<sup>12</sup> I had seen her working at her organic vegetable stall at other markets and had chatted as a customer on previous occasions. When I started to explain my plans to research the market, she quickly exclaimed:

“Do you want to know my theory on the whole Accreditation thing? I reckon it's been paid for by the government, right, to make sure people can't dodge tax [laughing]. I mean, I can't understand why they would they let that lot [a different vegetable stallholder] through. That's a really big stall, that's a lot of produce for a veg shop owner. Their stall looks like a shop, don't you think? You know they have a café and everything [at their shop]. A bit dodgy, right? So not fair.”

Sarah's reaction to my research plan was to voice her opinion on the VFMA Accreditation Program, without prompting, and in doing so she reacted like many other stallholders in our initial interactions. The VFMA Accreditation Program was inescapable, shaping this research from the very start. However, by immediately questioning another stallholder's legitimacy, this encounter also hinted at the local politics of the market, as played out through Accreditation Program discussions. There seemed to be a suspicion of regulation and a sense that 'real' farmers were 'hard done by', in this case, cheated by a vegetable wholesaler who had 'no right' to be at the market. The term "veg shop owner" seemed to be a terrible insult. Interestingly, I was not only told this information, but I was encouraged to agree with the stallholder's sentiments. It seemed important for me to understand just *how* unfair it was that the other stall was allowed to be at the market at all. Was this something that would be hinted to any customer, or just to me, as a researcher? To better understand this interaction, I would need to take the time to gain the trust of stallholders, and observe interactions between different participants at the market, and to discuss such issues outside the market space, away from market managers and paying customers.

This Chapter outlines not only how I situated myself in the field as a researcher, but also how participants situated me and my research, particularly within the overarching context of the VFMA Accreditation Program. Participants often sought to use my position as an outsider to demonstrate their legitimacy to others. Stallholders would tell others of my visits to their properties, using these visits to validate themselves as growers or makers. Similarly, they would use our interactions to demonstrate what they considered to be proper and improper stallholder behaviour, and who should and should not be allowed at the markets. Market managers, VFMA staff and stallholders urged me to agree with their position on Accreditation through persuasion, justification and demonstration. Relationships within the highly mobile market community were revealed through these interactions, highlighting implicit and explicit hierarchies of legitimacy among market participants.

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<sup>12</sup> Pseudonyms have been utilised to deidentify participants from this Chapter onwards. Although consent was given by participants to be identified in this research, the choice to utilise pseudonyms was taken to protect participants whose businesses relied on Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.

## Situating the Researcher

Anthropology is concerned with implicit and explicit meaning in social phenomena (Geertz, 1975:7). Through the use of ethnographic research, anthropology can ground its theoretical debates in social practices (Hastrup & Hervik, 1994:1-11). Ethnographers investigate cultural phenomenon through participation and observation in 'the field' or cultural setting over a length of time, and through this, the researcher aims to gain an in-depth understanding, not only of explicit aspects of culture, but also what is unspoken and taken-for-granted by participants (Dewalt et al, 1998:260).

Traditionally, ethnographers have distinguished between the "field", where research is conducted, and "home", where research is written and analysed (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997: 12). However, in an increasingly interconnected world, anthropologists have argued against the traditional assumption of bounded, separate fields (Marcus, 1995: 96). Ethnographies 'at home', that is, in a cultural setting the same or similar to the researchers own, have become a major part of anthropological research (Amit, 2000:15).

As I am Australian and lived in the state of Victoria for the duration of this research, this can be defined as an ethnography 'at home'. Anthropologists have identified advantages and disadvantages to ethnography 'at home' (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997:12; Caputo, 2000:27). Sharing the same language and some cultural understanding with participants can be seen to ease the experience of field research. However, this approach also requires self-reflection on one's own 'taken-for-granted' assumptions. Furthermore, ethnography 'at home' can cause boundaries between 'work', 'home', and 'the field' to become blurred (Caputo, 2000:27).

Anthropological analysis is carried out through the researcher, the "primary tool" of research (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999:1-9). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the impact that an individual's own experiences may have on their field, and on the analysis of their observations (Oakley, 1992:16). Reflexivity is the acknowledgement that "social researchers are part of the social world they study" (Punch, 2005:171), which ensures rigour in qualitative research (Rossman & Rallis, 2003:35-36). Reflexivity is an important part of this ethnographic process, as who I am as a researcher and decisions made and limitations faced during fieldwork influenced the findings of this research. Therefore, my background influenced how I approached the field and how the research was carried out, and therefore need to be considered as part of the research process.

While being an Australian, I was not from the state of Victoria and so did not have the same understandings of Victorian growing regions, suburban stereotypes, local histories or state politics. I grew up in the Barossa Valley, regional South Australia, home to a successful Farmers' Market, a prestigious wine industry and distinctive food culture, though I had lived in the capital city Adelaide for many years prior to moving to Melbourne. While being 'from the country' was taken by many participants as a sign that I knew 'what it was like on the land', prior to this research I had little practical experience in farming or commercial food production. Furthermore, my previous work experience was in the health sector, and I had no experience operating a small business like my stallholder and market manager participants. Therefore, the assumptions I carried into the field regarding food production, small business, and country and city life did not necessarily correspond to those of my participants. Furthermore, as a female postdoctoral candidate in my late twenties,

my level of education, political views, family background and other life experiences differed from many of my participants. Setting out as a researcher, while I did attempt to distance my own views from my research, I was aware that participants would want to know who I was and why I was there. Reciprocity is needed to develop a rapport with participants and to develop trust and build relationships (Rossman & Rallis, 2003:159). Therefore, my background influenced this research, and just as my presence had an impact on my field, the field had an impact on me.

For example, not being a 'local' Victorian influenced fieldwork. Superficially, rivalries between South Australia and Victoria were frequently mentioned by my participants, particularly during Australian Rules Football (AFL) season, when small talk between customers and stallholders often revolved around the weekend's matches. Similarly, some wine stallholders were quick to point out that while the Barossa Valley, where I grew up, was a fine wine growing region, there were varieties that fared much better in Victoria, and some participants believed that Barossa wine growers had an unfair market advantage. However, beyond these superficial differences, coming from another state into Victoria provided a unique position in the field. Because I was someone who knew little about the regions of Victoria, I could be taught and trained to appreciate the value of their unique places, problems and issues (see Madison, 2005:32). Many participants were keen to teach me about their home towns, family histories, family farm or family business, providing valuable ethnographic data.

As I began to establish myself at the markets, I used my background to situate myself in the field, though this was not my initial intention. Rather, questions were asked by participants to work out where I belonged. As I was asking them questions about their businesses, some stallholders were initially concerned that I would reveal their 'secrets' or use them for my own enterprise. In initial fieldwork interactions, I was frequently asked 'what type of stall' I would be opening. Others assumed that by cooperating with my research, they would be able to gain some positive publicity for their business. I therefore had to make it quite clear that I was not a journalist or a government official, and that the intention of my research was not to promote the markets, or write a promotional book, or newspaper articles, or promote their products to others I visit, nor was I there to 'make sure they paid their taxes'. To combat such assumptions, I needed to be an 'open book'.

Some participants assumed that, growing up in the country, I could understand 'what it was like' living in the country. Though I made it clear I did not know what it was like to live 'off the land', being from the country still gave legitimacy to my position. Unfortunately, this also meant that some taken-for-granted cultural understandings of life on the land were assumed by participants, without explanation or clarification. When establishing a rapport with participants, we often shared experiences such as growing up collecting milk directly from a local dairy, though I found over time that my initial recollections proved rather naïve, and so participants could 'educate' me on what country life was 'really like', thus providing more invaluable ethnographic experiences (Madison, 2005:31-36). Why customers appealed to the country as a place of legitimacy, and how stallholders would state my connection to the country to others as a mark of legitimacy, is discussed in Chapter Six.

Growing up in the Barossa Valley also facilitated connections with participants who knew of the region as a prime 'foodie' destination. We could discuss the importance of 'good, real food', and the importance of regional cultural heritage. As an area with German heritage and a focus on Slow Food,



my knowledge of the region facilitated discussions with those involved in the Victorian Slow Food movement at the Slow Food Farmers' Market, and with others that were familiar with the Barossa through celebrity cook Maggie Beer and liked her 'simple' food philosophies. I spoke to a large number of customers who were also keen to share their 'connection to the country' with stallholders and other customers at the markets, and I could engage in these conversations through my own experiences. The importance of stating ones connection to the country, or their credentials as a 'country' person was a reoccurring theme for customers, stallholders and managers alike, as discussed in Chapter Six.

My family history was also discussed in the field. As a grand-daughter of Italian, Dutch and Polish migrants, I was able to find common ground with stallholders that had similar migrant family histories. A number of participants, stallholders and customers alike, proclaimed a 'European' heritage or were from migrant families. In particular, a high proportion of participants at Farmers Markets, including vegetable growers, pasta makers and other value-add specialty producers, had Italian backgrounds. I displayed an eagerness to learn about the food traditions of different regions of Italy, which was well received, and many discussions revolved around the different regional food traditions that families had brought with them to Australia. Sharing familiar experiences particularly around food and family allowed me to build a rapport with many producers and customers with similar backgrounds.

On the other hand, being seen as 'an Aussie', specifically a 'country Aussie', facilitated connections with other participants. Some farmers were the fourth or fifth generation farmers on their land, or were part of families that had been farming in a particular region since 'the early days' of colonisation. A few were not hesitant mentioning their 'issues' with what they termed "others", that is, migrants or those of different heritage, for example citing particular "Asian" (referring to Vietnamese) or Italian vegetable producers that they accused of reselling or engaging in 'dodgy' practices, or Chinese "businesses" buying "our land". Some participants initially edited their comments on others at first, but were more relaxed and outspoken as my time in the field progressed. Perceived fears of others, particularly vegetable grown in China or stories of foreigners buying viable farming land in Australia is discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

In reflection, I did not set out specifically to use my background to establish a rapport with participants. However, participants asked about my background frequently. They wanted to know who I was, why I was there and what had led me to do the research I was doing. Telling participants about my background also helped to dispel their assumptions regarding the objectives of my research (see Amit, 2000:15).

## Defining the Field

According to Daniel Miller, ethnographies in modern cities have shifted from a focus on societies to a focus on individuals and households, making immersive fieldwork problematic (Miller, 2008: 296). While this research focussed on Melbourne's Farmers' Markets, stallholders that attended the markets came from all around Victoria. Therefore, the 'field', rather than being contained to the market spaces themselves, was scattered throughout the state of Victoria, with locations up to 550km from Melbourne itself. According to George Marcus, multi-sited ethnographies include "multiple sites of observation and participation that cut across dichotomies such as the "local" and the "global", the "lifeworld" and the "system" (Marcus, 1995:95). Multi-sited ethnographies take into account political and social connections that situate the sites in a broader context (Marcus, 1995:96). Multi-sited ethnographies are constructed by following the "people", "thing", "metaphor", "conflict", "biography", or the "story" in the field, or are situated at a key site of social interaction (Marcus, 1995:105-112). To understand the "thing", Farmers' Markets, as a key site of social interaction, this ethnography needed to look beyond the markets themselves, to encompass the flow of goods from production to consumption, in order to understand the lives of the "people" involved in these processes (Marcus, 1995:107). Therefore, point-of-production visits were essential. However, it is important to note that this research is not a study simply of the market as an object in itself (Foster, 2007:713). Rather, the object of this study is the people, relationships and cultural nuances that were formed around the markets as a social setting.

As an ethnographer, intensive exploration of any topic is only possible through a limited scope and maximum time spent at each location of study (Dewalt et al, 1998:259-299). With over 70 Farmers' Markets in Victoria, rising to over 90 throughout the course of my research, the Farmers' Market scene included hundreds of stallholders from around Victoria, thousands of customers and dozens of market managers, committees and market organisations. To spend quality time at all of these sites, with all of these participants, would be impossible as an individual researcher with a limited time frame to complete my research.

Similarly, focusing on only one market in such a context would severely limit the research. Almost all markets were held monthly, rather than weekly, and so an individual market could only be visited a dozen times per year. Furthermore, rather than a group of markets united by a similar value, that is, a preference for local foods sold directly by food producers, Melbourne's market scene turned out instead to be highly divided and contested. Three large organisations dominated Melbourne's markets, with smaller organisations running individual or groups of smaller markets in particular regions. All of these groups demonstrated different understandings of what is, and is not, a 'Farmers' Market'. Melbourne is also a large and dispersed city, with different markets catering to different demographics, though some customers travelled to different markets every week. As the majority of stallholders attended multiple markets to maintain a weekly income, they interacted with various stallholders, customers and market managers throughout the month. Therefore, as mobility was a key feature of Melbourne's Farmers' Markets, I too needed to be mobile in order to understand how the markets were experienced by various participants.

The establishment of a new weekly market in 2010 provided an opportunity to research a market from the very beginning, and mitigated the limitations of a monthly market schedule. However, this

weekly market was set up primarily to showcase the VFMA Accreditation Program, and selected only reasonably new, accredited stallholders, and so would be inadequate as the only place of study. The Accreditation Program itself, in its infancy at the start of this research, was already evidently a contentious issue. Accreditation could potentially divide the state's Farmers' Markets into two categories, accredited and non-accredited markets. My initial observations indicated that stallholders seemed divided in terms of who had access to affluent, inner-city accredited markets, and who did not. In such a contested and political scene, I realised from the beginning that any decisions regarding which markets I visited could have significant ramifications for the study.

## **Researching Melbourne's Farmers' Markets**

Before attending any Farmers' Market, I contacted the Market Manager and sought their approval, either via email or phone, to attend the market as a researcher. I would greet the Market Manager at the start of the market, explain my research and ask if I could take notes and photos and interview stallholders and customers. This ensured that my intentions to study were clear to participants (Amit, 2000:15). Market managers were interviewed when their markets were visited, though some key market managers agreed to meet outside of the market times and were interviewed at a location of their choosing.

I formed a working relationship with the market managers that I saw frequently through my research. Some commercial operators proved difficult to approach, one citing concern that their commercial property could be compromised by my study as a reason not to allow their market to be a primary fieldsite for this study, though they did not elaborate on how or why they came to this conclusion. Disagreements and dissatisfaction between stallholders and market managers often made my position volatile, as some stallholders were keen to place me on their side of conflicts. These tensions framed many interactions in the field, and I was required to negotiate relationships carefully, particularly near the end of my fieldwork when tensions at my primary field site reached their peak, as I discuss in detail in Chapter Seven.

While visiting markets, I arrived early and offered to help set up and stayed until the last stallholders had packed up, assisting stallholders and market managers with various tasks including cooking breakfast barbeques, unpacking vans, setting up tables and tents, and eventually serving customers. I would introduce myself to stallholders I had not met before, so they were aware that I was a researcher. Stating my role clearly was important, as I observed one day at an accredited country market I visited following a stay at a nearby stallholder's farm. During this visit, I noticed a young couple asking stallholders questions and noting their responses. Immediately, stallholders began to talk to each other to 'work out' who they were. While I chatted to the market manager, we could see the woman writing notes and taking photographs. The market manager called a friend over to go and talk to the woman and find out what she was up to. This led to a covert series of spying and reporting to the market manager that revealed the woman was a food blog writer. She had found out about the VFMA Accreditation and made her opinion known to stallholders that she was not a fan. After she left, stallholders discussed with me and each other the view that this blog writer was "rude", and "had already made up her mind". They were concerned that she would report "lies"

about the market or describe their businesses in a negative light. Because she did not explain herself and voiced her opinion strongly, stallholders were suspicious of her motivations.

A few stallholders relayed experiences where interested 'customers' had asked them many questions only to 'steal their ideas' and set up their own similar businesses. For example, one stallholder, a maker of traditional English pork pies, described how a keen customer asked questions over many months at a market, only to then set up his own pork pie stall at another Farmers' Market soon afterwards. Instances such as this made many stallholders cautious of attention when they did not know an individual's motivations.

At Farmers' Markets, I observed and participated as a customer and assisted stallholders, interviewed customers, and chatted to stallholders and market organisers. Helping out at the markets gave my position legitimacy and allowed me to gain the trust of my participants, even if at first it simply allowed me to appear 'useful' (see Dewalt et al, 1998:260). Furthermore, I used these opportunities to observe customer and producer interactions, noting how producers 'sold' their produce, often through origin story-telling of how it was grown or found, providing cooking tips or recipes, or explaining the history of the product or its ingredients. I chatted to stallholders in-between customers without interrupting the selling of their wares, and observed interactions between different stallholders as the markets progressed (see Alkon, 2008:487). The experience of being 'behind the stall' was illuminating in itself. Through describing the products or my field visits to customers, I helped stallholders 'sell' their wares to customers, and was therefore useful to the stallholders, many of whom asked me questions in front of customers in order to substantiate, or lend authenticity to, their claims of freshness, healthiness, taste or origin. By 'helping out' at the markets, I became part of the markets, building trust (see Dewalt et al, 1998:259-299) with many stallholder and market manager participants.

Furthermore, unable to promote their businesses, I also needed to provide some benefit for stallholder participation in this research. Through by helping out and 'being useful', showing that I was able to 'work hard' as they did, reciprocal relationships could be formed that were of mutual benefit to participants and to me, as a researcher (see Rossman & Rallis, 2003:159). However, reciprocity was sought in other ways by stallholder participants, as they used my visits as a way to validate their businesses, both for VFMA Accreditation and to silence stallholders that questioned their legitimacy at the markets. This need to be seen as a legitimate, hard-working producer is discussed in Chapters Four, Five and Six.

Trust built through reciprocal relationships was beneficial over time. For example, some participants waited months until, sure that I was not a "VFMA spy", they felt comfortable telling me what they "really thought" of the VFMA Accreditation Program, or to admit that they engaged in some "re-selling". To get to this stage, I had to clearly state who I was, what Anthropology is and the purpose of my research several times in the field, often multiple times to the same participants, to define my own role in the field (see Amit, 2000:15). Therefore, explaining my own background, and the purpose of my research, was vital to gaining the trust of my participants, an important element of ethnographic study (Caputo, 2000:27).

## Selecting Fieldsites

Three urban markets were selected as the primary focus of this study. The primary field site was the new, weekly Sunday VFMA-run Farmers' Market, the Melbourne Showground's Farmers' Market. Selecting this market allowed significantly more time to be spent at this location compared to markets held once a month, and allowed the study of a new market from its very beginning, while providing a location central to the ongoing VFMA Accreditation Program debate. The two other markets selected were large urban markets, namely Collingwood Children's Farm Farmers' Market and Bundoora Park Farmers' Market. While these markets were of comparable size, age and popularity, they differed in terms of location and accreditation status. Further field research was undertaken at the VFMA offices, on visits to other Victorian Farmers' Markets, and on the farms and in the kitchens of stallholders away from the markets.

Primary fieldsites were selected with care, following preliminary research into Melbourne's Farmers' Markets and my initial interactions with market participants. An understanding of the scene in Victoria that gave rise to the VFMA and the Accreditation Program was needed before decisions could be made to limit the scope of the field, to allow gatekeepers to be identified prior to entering the field (Rossman & Rallis, 2003:163). Once research began, influential figures, particularly those seen as 'insiders' and 'outsiders' to the VFMA Accreditation Program, could be identified using a snowball approach to participant selection, that is, allowing participants to guide the research (Crotty, 1998:2).

Selecting three markets for intense study allowed maximum time to be spent at each market, while providing an opportunity to follow stallholders to other markets included in their monthly market schedule and allowing time to visit stallholder farms and kitchens on weekdays. Selecting three markets, I was able to spend alternate Saturdays visiting markets throughout the state for comparison, expanding my visits to also include rural markets in key stallholder's local areas. This flexibility allowed the research not only to follow the mobility of my participants, but also to follow different issues as they emerged in the field. For example, I was able to attend markets when specific issues arose, to see 'suspect' stalls and markets as rumours spread, to gather varied opinions and to allow the participants to guide the research. Through these brief visits, I was also better able to understand Melbourne, Victoria's growing regions, and Melbourne's Farmers' Markets, as complex and varied. This perspective became more and more vital as distinctions between city, suburban and rural markets featured prominently in participants understanding of the markets, particularly in regards to Accreditation.

All but two markets were held monthly, on either Saturday or Sunday. So while the selected markets were attended every time they were held within the first full year of field research, almost every Farmers Market in the state was attended at least once, excluding those that opened in the final months of study. Not only did this 'quick view' provide comparisons and allow me to introduce myself to different stallholders and market management organisations, but it also gave stallholders who attended several markets each month a visible reminder of my presence, and increased opportunities to interact. Several commented that they saw this as an attempt to understand what it was "really like" for them at the markets. Stallholders commented that they were 'impressed' with this mobility, as it reflected their own mobility, and were consequently more forthcoming in our

interactions. For example, one stallholder I saw at many markets commented that she appreciated that I was attempting to better understand the “hard work” of a stallholder, that is, the distances travelled by stallholders to “make a living”, as I could then get a sense of the “up and down” nature of markets, and the “difficult” decisions she and her family faced when new market opportunities arose in locales with “the right kind of customers” that could mean leaving loyal customers behind at a less successful market.

## **Gatekeepers**

### The Victorian Farmers’ Market Association (VFMA)

As the Peak Body for Victoria’s Farmers’ Markets, and as the instigator of the Accreditation Program, VFMA cooperation was required to research Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets. I carried out participant-observation research with the VFMA through volunteering with their organisation, attending meetings, and interviewing staff members. I attended the VFMA Annual General Meeting in March, an Accreditation Workshop in August, and VFMA Accreditation Panel meetings. I also attended two stallholder inspections, a kitchen and a farm, with Accreditation Panel members. VFMA participation in this study was approved by the VFMA committee in November 2009, and I initially utilised my relationship with the VFMA to determine “gatekeepers and key persons of interest” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003:163) within the broader Farmers’ Markets community.

Relationships between stallholders and market managers who were actively involved in the VFMA, and those who either could not or would not be involved with the VFMA, were central to the Farmers Market movement in Victoria. The central inner-city location of the VFMA, then in Abbotsford, on the same site as the Collingwood Children’s Farm and Slow Food Farmers’ Market, limited the involvement of many stallholders who worked during the week, or lived many hours from the city. The complex role of the VFMA within the Victorian Farmers Market community is described in more depth in Chapter Four.

As the Accreditation Program framed this research and was a central concern for participants, leading to many discussions of does and does not belong at a Farmers’ Market, it was crucial to involve this organisation in this research. However, it was also important to distance myself from the organisation and to situate myself as an independent researcher, in order to access participants that were critical of the VFMA.

VFMA support for my research was initially strong. However, as my fieldwork progressed, cooperation waned, coinciding with tensions surrounding Accreditation within the wider Farmers’ Market community. The expansion of the VFMA as an organisation at the end of my fieldwork also limited time to build rapport with new staff. As fieldwork progressed and the Showgrounds Farmers’ Market struggled, I found that it was harder to gain access to the offices, and tensions surrounding the VFMA, Accreditation Program and the Showgrounds Farmers’ Market meant that it was pertinent to distance myself from the VFMA in the later stages of my field research, as I further detail in Chapter Six.

As I gained the trust of stallholders over time, some had assumed that I was 'on their side' and could relay their problems with the roll out VFMA Accreditation Program to the VFMA. A few asked me to speak to the VFMA indirectly on their behalf, anonymously voicing their concerns. By this time I was also strongly associated with the Melbourne Showgrounds Farmers' Market. The continued 'failure' of this market increased tensions between stallholders and the VFMA, for as customer numbers declined at the Showground's Farmers Market, stallholder frustration at the VFMA grew. This added to escalating tensions within the organisation arising from changes to Accreditation and membership rules. Similarly, some staff at the VFMA voiced concerns that I would 'side with the stallholders' and write critically about the Accreditation Program, primarily based on my involvement with the Showgrounds market. Tensions surrounding the Accreditation Program are discussed in Chapter Four. My response to such tensions was to situate myself as an impartial party, neither for nor against accreditation, but as someone who could sympathise with participants and the frustrations they faced with the program, though difficulties accessing the VFMA offices at the end of my fieldwork indicated that participants had placed me on the 'stallholders side' of the conflict regardless.

### Key Farmers' Market Organisations

Three organisations dominated Melbourne's Farmers' Market scene. Two were commercial operations, Regional Farmers' Markets and In Season Farmers' Markets, while the other, Melbourne Farmers' Markets, coordinated markets on behalf of community organisations (VFMA, 2011a:1). The market managers of these organisations were pivotal to the Farmers' Market community. Not only did their decisions shape the kind of markets that were promoted as Farmers' Markets, but the monthly market schedule meant that stallholders moved frequently between the three organisations' markets.

However, the market community was far bigger than these three organisations. Other markets were run by local councils or charity organisations, with some markets operated as individual commercial operations. In the country, stallholder committees, charity organisations or volunteer committees ran some local markets (VFMA, 2011a:1). These markets had varied relationships with the VFMA and other market organisations. Therefore, it was important to include these markets and market organisers, to include a range of views from the Farmers Market community, rather than to rely solely on inner-city or VFMA-associated markets, which would not reveal the complexities of my field (see Crotty, 1998:1-6). Comparisons were made by stallholders who attended different types of markets. Talking to those involved in the various Farmers' Market organisations was therefore essential to develop an understanding of Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.

## Primary Fieldsites

### Fieldsite One: The Melbourne Showground's Farmers' Market

The VFMA owned and operated the Melbourne Showgrounds Farmers' Market, the primary fieldsite for this research. Starting in April 2010, this market was established by the VFMA to showcase the Accreditation Program, provide an inner city market for new stallholders and to raise revenue for the VFMA after the planned 2011 cessation of government funding. The weekly market allowed prolonged participant-observation research with the same stallholders in one location. As a new market, it allowed me to observe a market that was not yet embedded in the community, observing how new customers and stallholders established themselves from the very beginning. With only 20-30 stalls, this market started very small and almost 'failed' during fieldwork, providing an insight into how and why many new markets close within their first 12 months (Stephenson et al, 2008:188). However, the Showgrounds market later moved to a nearby high school grounds and became the "Flemington Farmers' Market", where it thrived with a sustainable cohort of regular customers. Prior to this move, the VFMA handed control of the market to the market manager, and he now runs this market, along with two new monthly accredited markets started since then, as a commercial operation. It is now considered a steady and successful market by regular stallholders. The rise and (almost) failure of this market is analysed in Chapter Seven.



Figure 2: The Showgrounds Farmers' Market



## Fieldsite Two: Collingwood Children's Farm Farmers' Market

The Collingwood Children's Farm was the keystone market of the Melbourne Community Farmers' Markets (MFM) group of markets, and was frequently described by participants as the most well-known and popular monthly Farmers' Market in Melbourne<sup>13</sup>. Melbourne Community Farmers' Markets (MFM) had four monthly inner-suburban Melbourne markets in 2011. A new country market at Coal Creek in the Gippsland region was started by this organisation during my fieldwork, and since then, the organisation has established fortnightly markets in affluent inner northern and inner western suburban locations.<sup>14</sup>

MFM was established by market coordinator Miranda Sharp.<sup>15</sup> Prior to establishing the Collingwood Children's Farm Farmers' Market, Miranda Sharp was a chef and caterer, selling her own preserves and sauces at the Red Hill Craft Market. She was also a freelance journalist for 'Epicure', the food-focused weekly supplement in the Victorian newspaper The Age (MFM, 2011a:1).

Starting the VFMA in 2002 with Peter Arnold, she maintained the role of President of the VFMA since its inception, and was widely credited with 'starting Farmers Markets in Victoria' by those at the VFMA and stallholders associated with her markets (MFM, 2011a:1). While Miranda Sharp coordinated the MFM markets and selected stallholders, or the 'market mix', each market employed a manager, and the resident community organisations<sup>16</sup> maintained financial control of the markets themselves, using the markets to raise revenue for their organisations (MFM, 2011a:1).

As the President of the VFMA, Miranda Sharp was instrumental in advocating the need for a Farmers' Market Accreditation Program. Her markets were the first to be accredited (VFMA, 2011a:1), and Accreditation Signs, or 'ticks', were prominently displayed by stallholders at these markets.

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<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that while Collingwood Children's Farm Farmers' Market was known as the most popular Farmers' Market by my participants, it was not the most well-known or popular market in Melbourne itself. Rather, others in Melbourne could easily cite large tourist-orientated markets, such as the Queen Victoria Market, wholesale produce or bric-a-brac markets such as Footscray Market, Prahran Market or the South Melbourne Market, as iconic Melbourne markets. Farmers' Market customers remain a very small group of consumers within Melbourne itself.

<sup>14</sup> These include the suburbs of Coburn, Carlton, Fairfield and Newport. See <http://www.mfm.com.au/>.

<sup>15</sup> As Miranda Sharp is a public figure within Melbourne's Farmers' Market community, she has not been deidentified in this research.

<sup>16</sup> Collingwood Children's Farm, Veg Out Community Gardens, Gasworks Art Space and Slow Food Victoria.



**Figure 3: The Collingwood Children's Farm Farmers' Market**

The Collingwood Children's Farm Farmers' Market, one of the first urban Farmers' Markets, maintained an iconic status in the Farmers' Market community for many participants. Stallholders that attended the market frequently called it their "best", and those that did not attend this market often complained that the market had an unfair advantage over other markets, with a beautiful locale, frequent positive media coverage and trendy inner suburban surroundings. The market also featured heavily in discussions surrounding Accreditation, with the market one of the first to be Accredited and the market operator, Miranda, the longstanding chairperson of the VFMA. The central role of this market in the Victorian Farmers' Market scene, and as the focus of much of the Accreditation debate, required the Collingwood Children's Farm Farmers' Market to be included in this research.

Nevertheless, Miranda herself cautioned against focussing entirely on the Collingwood Children's Farm Farmers' Market. After corresponding via email, I first met Miranda at this market early one chilly autumn morning. After chatting for several minutes about the market and my research, she paused and commented "ok, just remember that all markets aren't like this one. We are pretty lucky here ... others don't have it as good as we do", noting the beautiful location and the market's iconic status. Therefore, while it was important to include the Collingwood Children's Farm Farmers' Market, it was also important to look at other markets that did not "have it as good" as this market.

Many stallholders implied that to be selected for a “Miranda market”, as these markets were often called, meant access to the most affluent, dedicated customers. One argued that they were “as close to a guaranteed source of good income” as a stallholder can get, and others hinted that these markets provided access to “the right kind of customers”. Nevertheless, some stallholders did complain that they struggled at these markets, and a few left during fieldwork, with others quickly taking their places. Some stallholders at Collingwood Children’s Farm had been at the market since it began in 2002. There was a long waiting list for all of the MFM markets, particularly Collingwood. According to Miranda Sharp, maintaining a fair and equitable market mix for all stallholders was an essential element of the success of a Farmers Market (MFM, 2011a:1), rather than “letting in too many stalls” that would “take business away” from loyal stallholders.

Through my fieldwork, I discovered that some stallholders who weren’t able to get into the MFM markets believed that there was an “in-crowd” associated with these markets. Different stallholders anonymously hinted that this ‘in-crowd’ controlled the VFMA and, as one commented, kept “the best markets for themselves and their friends”, though favouritism of any kind was adamantly denied by market organisers and VFMA staff. Such divisions are discussed in Chapter Four, as they provided insight into the complex community of Farmers Market stallholders.

### Fieldsite Three: Bundoora Farmers’ Market

Bundoora Farmers’ Market was run by Regional Farmers’ Markets, at the time the largest commercially operated group of Farmers’ Markets in Melbourne. Regional Farmers Markets was a private business owned and operated by Peter Arnold.<sup>17</sup> Peter Arnold was originally from England, and claimed a varied career that included working on large farms in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria (RFM, 2011:1). A larger-than-life character, he began managing Farmers Markets in 1999, when he assisted in the set up and running of small country markets in Korumburra and Drouin, Gippsland (RFM, 2011:1). Miranda Sharp and Peter Arnold set up the first inner-urban market together at Collingwood Children’s Farm in 2002. In 2003, they were employed by the Booroondara Council to set up the Booroondara Farmers Market, a very popular market in the affluent suburb of Hawthorn. However, they soon parted businesses with, in his words, Miranda “keeping” Collingwood and Peter “claiming” Booroondara. The Booroondara council decided to take direct control of the market soon after, employing a market manager and engaging the local Rotary Club to set up the market and collect a gold coin door fee. Peter continued to set up his own markets as commercial operations throughout Melbourne and regional Victoria. RFM operated eight suburban and four country monthly markets in 2011, as well as a seasonal market at Venus Bay and a weekly market on Churchill Island in the summer school holidays (RFM, 2010:1). Many RFM markets have been opened and closed over the past ten years, including Drouin and Boronia (RFM, 2011:1). The markets were run as commercial businesses, and market managers were employed at individual markets.

The largest and most successful RFM market was the Bundoora Park Farmers’ Market in Melbourne’s northern suburbs, established in 2004. Set in a large recreational park consisting of large open grass fields and native shrub, the market location was beautiful, evoking the countryside

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<sup>17</sup> As Peter Arnold is a public figure in Melbourne’s Farmers’ Market community he has not been deidentified.

despite being located only metres from a major arterial road. Peter Arnold was identified quickly not only as a key gatekeeper in the Farmers' Market community, but also as the strongest voice in opposition to the Accreditation Program. Therefore, it was vital for one of his markets to be included in the study. Bundoora was selected specifically because it was a comparable size to Collingwood Children's Farm Farmers' Market, with approximately 80 stalls per market. It was one of RFM's longest running markets, and had a cohort of loyal customers and regular stallholders.



**Figure 4: Bundoora Park Farmers' Market**

Like many other RFM markets, Bundoora Park Farmers' Market was operated in conjunction with a local Rotary club<sup>18</sup> that set up market spaces and car park facilities and in return collected a door fee and sold a barbeque breakfast for fundraising. At Bundoora Park Farmers Market, the most successful RFM market, the Rotary Club of Rosanna worked in partnership with RFM. Their chairperson reported to me that they had made over \$20,000 from the market door fee, which was used for their charity initiatives, and he claimed that the market "revived and saved" their once-dwindling club. When interviewing customers at this market and others operated in conjunction

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<sup>18</sup> Rotary Clubs are part of the Rotary Association of Australia, which is part of Rotary International. Rotary was established in the US in 1928 "for the purpose of doing good in the world". It is an organisation with particular traditions and hierarchy. Rotarians, the name given to members of Rotary, volunteer to raise money for selected charitable endeavours as part of their membership. For further information, see <http://www.rotary.org.au/en/FOUNDATION/Pages/default.html>. During this research, I spent time with the Rotary Club of Rosanna at Bundoora Park Farmers' Market, and presented my preliminary research findings at one of their monthly meetings.

with Rotary, I found that many customers believed that the markets were run solely by the charitable organisation.

Peter Arnold was instrumental, along with Miranda Sharp, in setting up the VFMA. He continued to be a part of the VFMA until the Accreditation Program began in 2009 (RFM, 2010:1). At this time, there was a “difference of opinion”, as he told me during our interview, on this matter and he “terminated the association” with the VFMA. Peter Arnold argued that the VFMA had “lost touch” with what customers wanted, and that variety at a market is important to attract customers. However, he also argued that he was not against ‘authentic’ markets. In 2010 he added a statement on authenticity to the RFM website:

“Since opening our 1st Farmers Market in 1999 we have always had strict criteria for all stallholders to follow in bringing their authentic produce to market. We take these criteria very seriously and continuously conduct audits at each market to confirm that each stallholder is following the RFM criteria.

Although it is only necessary for stallholders to meet the RFM criteria to attend our markets, many of them have, or will seek accreditation for their produce through the Victorian Farmers Market Association and we support their endeavours to do so.

We also meet the expectations of our patrons by offering as much variety at our markets as possible. It is widely recognized that there are some 'grey' areas in the VFMA accreditation model which are open to interpretation and are best addressed by the individual market operator.” (RFM, 2010:1)

RFM markets were often criticised by stallholders and other market managers for allowing stalls that did not, in their opinion, fit into the ‘Farmers Market’ model. RFM markets openly allowed some ‘re-selling’, for example a stall that sold South Australian-made mettwurst attended many RFM markets, which Peter claimed he allowed as customers wanted their product, and the stall was still a local small business in need of support. I have spoken to many types of stallholders at RFM markets, including accredited stallholders and those that have not sought accreditation. The relationship between non-accredited and accredited stallholders at these markets, and differences in how stallholders acted, spoke to others and responded to questions in different settings, further highlighted the complex relationships formed by the movement of stallholders in Victoria, which is discussed further in Chapter Four.

## **Other Fieldsites**

Other MFM and RFM markets were included in my visits to markets, particularly as I followed key stallholders through their monthly market schedules and followed events and conflicts as they occurred in the field. However, many other markets were also visited that were not associated with the VFMA, MFM or RFM. Interactions at these markets revealed more diversity and complexity within Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets than if I had been restricted to the study of three key organisations.

I also visited markets run by the third biggest commercial operator of Farmers' Markets, In Seasons Farmers' Markets (In Seasons, 2010:1). However, due to reluctance expressed by the organisers, I was unable to include one of their markets as a primary fieldsite. Interviewing the market organiser, I was informed that they saw Farmers' Markets as a festive experience, and allowed petting zoos, some craft stalls and other stalls that were not allowed at Accredited markets.<sup>19</sup> They were frequently criticised for allowing resellers and opening too many markets, thinning out the customer base for stallholders. Nevertheless, many of my key participants also sold at In Seasons Farmers' Markets.

Other urban and regional Victorian Farmers Markets were run by councils, with the local Rotary or Lions Club assisting with setting up the market and collecting a gold coin door fee. Booroondara Farmers Market, an accredited market, was a prime example (City of Booroondara, 2011:1). Other markets were run directly by Rotary, Lions club or other community organisations. These markets varied widely and included both Accredited and non-Accredited markets.

I visited many community run markets during my field research. Market managers from markets that were strongly associated with the VFMA, such as the Kingston Farmers' Market; those formally associated with the VFMA pre-accreditation, such as the Yarra Valley Produce Group Farmers' Market; and those not associated at all with the VFMA, such as the weekly Mulgrave Farmers' Market; were visited at their markets and interviewed either at home or at their market. This not only provided different views on Melbourne's Farmers' Markets, but also allowed the differences between various markets as they were discussed by stallholders participating in this study to be observed.

To get a sense of Victoria as a whole, particularly the different regions stallholder participants came from, I also visited Farmers' Markets in every growing region in Victoria at least once. These visits also served as a chance to view my stallholder participant's 'home towns', and to maintain contact with key stallholders. As people or places were included in visitations based on their recommendations, I could follow what participants felt was important for me to know and see for myself.

Stallholder or volunteer committee-run Farmers' Markets were found only in rural towns, and these limited access to local producers, for example, the small market in Fosters in South West Gippsland, the Prom County Farmers Market, was run purely by a stallholder committee (VFMA, 2011a:1). Their stallholder fee was significantly lower than commercial markets or inner-city markets.

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<sup>19</sup> In April 2014, Warren and Abbie James launched their own Accreditation program. However, this was not done under the In Seasons name but under the banner of the "National Farmers' Market Association", a brand new association that lists Abbie as President and Warren as Vice President on their website. This association claimed to be a non-for-profit entity and the only national accreditor for farmers' markets, though only In Seasons markets were listed for Melbourne on their website in May 2014 (NFMA, 2014:1). As this Association was developed post-fieldwork, it could not be considered in the analysis of Melbourne's Farmers' Market movement for this project.

The new National Farmers Market Association Accreditation Program has some similarities to the VFMA Accreditation Program, but differed in many key respects. For example, this program did not include property inspections, instead requiring applicant to provide three business referees to "confirm good standing within the industry and the authenticity of your product". Similarly, while both programs stated that re-selling was prohibited, the NFMA required 'value-add' producers to only list the ingredients used in their 5 best-selling items, not all items sold. For more information, see <http://www.nfma.org.au/about-us/>

As country Farmers' Markets were frequently referred to by some stallholders and urban market customers as 'true' Farmers' Markets, or 'the best' Farmers' Markets, it quickly became apparent that I would need to visit these markets and interview market managers in these locations. Situating of legitimacy in rural landscapes is discussed in Chapter Six. However, despite placing legitimacy on these country markets, many stallholders at urban markets no longer attended their 'home' market. Visits to country markets frequently extended to include visits to nearby stallholder properties pre or post-market. Some market organisers also offered me the chance to attend committee meetings. For example, at Trentham Farmers' Market, I was invited to attend their committee meeting and assisted them in organising their one year anniversary market, which I also attended. Through this, I was involved in markets in the country and city, working with VFMA critics and supporters, as well as fiercely independent markets that wanted nothing to do with city operators.

## **Researching Farmers' Market Producers**

Simply attending Farmers' Markets would not be enough to establish a rapport with producer participants or to understand the lived experiences of stallholders that produced goods and travelled to different markets week after week. In ethnography, time is the most valuable resource, as it allows trust to develop between researchers and subjects, and allows the taken-for-granted assumptions of participants to become evident to the researcher (Dewalt et al, 1998:259-299). Therefore, participant-observation fieldwork at stallholder farms and kitchens was essential. Visiting participants at home not only provided a space outside of the markets to talk without reservation, but also allowed stallholders to demonstrate what they thought it was important for me to see and know about their livelihoods, and for me to demonstrate, through action, that I was eager to understand. So the field extended to include stallholder farms, factories and kitchens, as well as the markets themselves. Market managers were also interviewed at home, at their place of work or in public cafes near their homes, far from the market spaces, to encourage frank and honest discussion.

While I chatted to hundreds of stallholders at various markets, participants from the three key markets were selected to visit at home. As both Collingwood and Bundoora Farmers Market had up to 80 stalls per market, I was unable to visit all of the producers. Other stallholders were interviewed at markets either before the markets, when the markets were quiet, or when they had sold out of stock. The Showgrounds Farmers Market was smaller, with numbers ranging from 20-30 stalls, which allowed almost all stallholders that regularly attended the market to be visited at home. Those that I was unable to visit were interviewed at the market itself.

Initially, stallholders were included that provided a diverse range of views and experiences (see Rossman & Rallis, 2003:163). I attempted to cover all different value-added stalls of the markets, from pasta to cakes to curries to jams and preserves to soap producers excluded from VFMA Accreditation. Fruit and vegetable producers were interviewed from every growing region in Victoria represented at the markets, as were meat producers from free range pork to venison, lamb, beef, buffalo, rabbit, chicken, and turkey.

Participant selection evolved as research progressed and connections between different stallholders were revealed. For example, some participants were included opportunistically because their farm was close to other stallholders,<sup>20</sup> following other stallholder suggestions, even if they did not attend the three key markets. This snowball approach indicated regional alliances and connections at urban markets. Listening to stallholder suggestions also allowed what they saw as important to be prioritised (Crotty, 1998:2). For example, a fifth-generation farmer also invited me to interview his father. His father had experienced both selling to and working at the Melbourne wholesale market for 40 years. His insight into the wholesale market was invaluable, particularly as issues with the wholesale system led many producers to first consider selling at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.

Many stallholders were quite eager to have me visit them at home or their place of business. This was particularly true for farmers, many of which were the most keen and accommodating to have me visit and 'help out'. Those who lived more than two hours' drive out of Melbourne often offered overnight stays, occasionally for a number of nights. At these farms, I helped pick, sort and prepare produce for market; fed, rounded up and help transport livestock for slaughter, prepared meat products in on-farm butchering rooms; made cheeses in on-farm cheese factories; packed boxes and trucks for upcoming markets; joined stallholders on errands such as picking up children from school; milked goats, fed animals, helped to prepare meals, and joined families and resident WWOOFERS<sup>21</sup> in the evenings. Stallholders used this time to teach me 'right' way of doing things and demonstrated their ingenuity through displaying homemade timesaving technologies and techniques, all the while emphasising the 'hard work' of farming.

These visits had an immediate positive consequence for my research. While many stallholders were willing to answer my questions at the markets, it wasn't until stallholders knew that I had driven out to farms and 'worked hard' with the farmers that my presence at the markets was accepted.

For example, in the first few weeks of research, I interviewed a couple that managed some regional markets and sold primary produce and value-added goods at these regional markets. Many stallholders that attended their markets also attended my primary field sites. At this stage, I had attended the Bundoora Park Farmers' Market once, where I received a cold and disinterested reception from a local tea producer, who also sold at the couple's regional markets. On my next visit to Bundoora, I was astonished to be greeted warmly by the same tea producer. With a big grin, he explained that he had heard from the couple I visited that I had "showed up in working boots, ready to get to work". He explained that this showed I wasn't simply a "city kid", that I was "on the farmers side" and "willing to learn" about the stallholders. We then talked for 15 minutes about growing green tea in the Yarra Valley, which he proudly described as "the most ideal place to grow tea". He told me how his label was developed, how his family featured on his tea labels, and how they came up with varieties that described different moods, highlighting the benefits of their tea varieties. He assured me that he used locally grown herbs and plants, except for his African Rooibos' tea, which can only be sourced from South Africa as "it is classed as a weed and banned everywhere else".

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<sup>20</sup> 'Close proximity' for my fieldwork, in rural Australia, could mean over 100 kilometres apart. Participants spoke of such 'neighbours' as 'country local', indicating that the meaning of distance, of time and space, differed in rural and urban contexts.

<sup>21</sup> WWOOFERS are Willing Workers on Organic Farms. Referred to as 'backpackers' by participants, WWOOFERS were mostly young tourists that worked on farms in exchange for meals and accommodation. They were not paid workers. Several farms I visiting during my research relied on their labour. See <http://www.woof.com.au/>



Observing the stallholder at markets throughout the year, I later realised that this was an extended version of his usual sales pitch to new customers. However, he also told me how upset he was that a tea re-seller was also at the market, and that their presence affected his 'takings' at every market they shared. We also spoke about the different markets he was at and the issues he had with different market organisations. This encounter revealed quite early how different stallholders communicated at different markets, and how important it was for my position as a researcher to be made clear when asking questions at the markets. Furthermore, by identifying himself as a 'farmer' and pointing out his issues with a value-add competitor, the stallholder made clear who he thought did and did not belong at the markets, urging me to agree that "Farmers' Markets are meant to be for farmers, right?"

Working with stallholders allowed reciprocal relationships to form with key participants, providing participant-observation experience and building rapport. When I worked with participants or stayed at stallholder farms for a length of time, we would sit down for an 'interview', usually at the end of a working day. I quickly found that this was expected of me by my participants, and gave them an opportunity to present their thoughts on the Farmers' Market scene, internal politics, the VFMA Accreditation, and my research. It also gave them an opportunity to tell their story, the history of their farm or business, where I was able to record it. Recorded interviews were open-ended, so while some specific topics were covered in each interview, the interviews were guided by the participant's own responses (see Crotty, 1998:2), to allow the participants own words and understandings to be at the forefront of conversations. In this way, interviews moved between oral histories, personal narratives and topical conversations (Madison, 2005:26). I was concerned that my questions would lead participants to consider what I felt was important, rather than what they saw as important (see Crotty, 1998:2), and so my aim was for the interviews to remain as conversational as possible, using them as an opportunity to expand on and record topics discussed 'in the field' during the day.

There were clear limitations to this technique, for example at every interview the question of the VFMA Accreditation program was used to provoke discussions of the markets, which potentially led to discussions of legitimacy and authenticity. However, the Accreditation Program was omnipresent in the field, and stallholder participants vocalised their opinion of the program to me as a part of my fieldwork. For the very few that did not wish to voice their opinion, this topic was broached but then the conversation moved on to surrounding issues, such as who they thought did and did not belong at certain markets. By virtue of timing, this research was connected to the VFMA Accreditation program, and I elected to use this as an opportunity rather than a limitation, embracing discussion while declaring myself as independent from the VFMA or other interested parties. Nevertheless, establishing a rapport with participants at the markets, then working with them 'in the field' prior to any recorded interview, led interviews to be informal and conversational, thereby supporting rather than dictating participant-observation research.

For value-add stallholder participants,<sup>22</sup> recorded interviews usually occurred while working in their home or commercial kitchen. This allowed for conversation to develop as we worked, without the

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<sup>22</sup> Stallholders were defined by the VFMA as 'value-add' stallholders if they did not grow or rear the primary ingredients in the products they sold, that is, that they were not primary producers. Rather, value-add stallholders made food products from purchased ingredients.

expectations involved in a sit-down interview. I was able to observe how they worked, ask questions about technique as well as their history, and allow conversation to cover a range of topics as we chatted. While laborious, this method provided an opportunity for stallholders to show me how hard they worked and teach me the 'right' way of preparing goods. For example, while making pasta with a couple in their at-home "two-person pasta factory", the stallholders demonstrated different pasta shapes and techniques from around Italy. This led to a conversation about regional Italian foods, family traditions and their frustration at 'fake' Italians that made "terrible" and "cheap" pasta, citing other stalls that also sold pasta at some of their markets. "Terrible" they commented "pretending they're like us, but they're not. They've got nothing behind it." This interaction hinted at different understandings of ethnicity, authenticity and legitimacy at the markets, which is examined in Chapter Four.

However, not all participants were willing to have me assist with their production processes. Some visits consisted of a tour of the kitchen or farm, followed by a "sit down and chat" interview over the kitchen table over food or drinks. This was preferred by those whose businesses were quite large, that is, large enough to employ several staff, or were familiar with being interviewed by media outlets. Despite their limitations, spending time with stallholders over many markets beforehand meant that these interviews could be quite illuminating, and included personal reflections on their lives as producers and their experiences since joining the markets. However, they did not provide the valuable participant-observation experience gained by working alongside other participants.

Being invited into people's homes often provides an element of frankness to discussions (Caputo, 2000:27). It is important to note however that I was wary of stallholders, market managers, staff at the VFMA and other participants efforts to ensure that I was 'on their side'. This was done through over-exaggerations, the pointing out of improbabilities in other stallholders' stories, or subtle attempts to gain information on other stallholders, market managers or the VFMA. Similar strategies have been noted in research on market participants elsewhere (see Alkon, 2008:490). This was particularly significant as the local politics surrounding the Accreditation Program escalated. I found myself having to be careful with what information was and was not to be shared. As I examine in Chapters Four and Five, I found that tensions around the notion of 'legitimacy', in terms of proving oneself to be a 'genuine' 'hard-working' farmer or producer, was central to many interactions. This seemed to go beyond the recent Accreditation Program, and an idealised notion of a 'true farmer' was revealed as a central concept, as discussed in Chapter Five.

There were some regular stallholders who refused, or strategically avoided, a home visitation during my research. Some were 'too busy', or offered to participate but then found excuses when I attempted to arrange a time to visit. Others were reluctant at first, and only agreed after I had been a part of the markets for several months. For example, a primary produce stall had avoided a visit for many months. As several other stallholders had indicated to me that they were "dodgy" because their products looked "too clean, like from a shop", I persevered, talking to them at markets to build rapport. After 11 months, the stallholder, a young man of Italian heritage, offered for me to visit their farm, "to talk to mum, she's the one you should talk to". I came to the farm to find two large conventional farms, with several sheds, tractors and staff in the fields. Given a limited tour, I was

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For VFMA accreditation, these ingredients had to be sourced from local primary producers. The significance of this distinction between primary producers and value-add producers at the markets are examined in Chapter Three and Four.

then led to a small “staff kitchen”, where I was invited to interview the young couple stallholders and their mother, whom I had met at previous markets. Early in our discussion, I was told why they were reluctant at first to be interviewed. “You know, because we’re Italian, those others ... it’s like they think we own a fruit and veg shop or something. We’ve got packaging because that’s what we sell [at the wholesale market]. You’ve seen our place ... that’s what we sell.”

Another limitation was that I was unable to visit the wholesale market in Melbourne. Several attempts were made to visit the Melbourne Wholesale market with my closest participants. However, these visitations were all cancelled, often at the last minute. I offered to meet participants before dawn to enter the market with them, and at other times offered to stay at their farms, help pack their truck and travel in with them in the mornings, but neither approach was successful. Several excuses were given by participants for cancelled visits. After three attempted visits with a particular market gardener, all cancelled at the last minute, the farmer admitted that he did not want to be ‘caught out’ bringing an ‘outsider’ into the wholesale market space, even if I sought permission before entering and did not record or take notes on the property; though they also admitted that, as they buy goods for their farm-gate shop and home delivery business, they claimed that they did not want me to be seen by other Farmers’ Market stallholders participating in these transactions. Another grower admitted to me that the thought of bringing someone from the outside caused significant trepidation, for there “might be consequences” for themselves as sellers. These interactions led me to conclude that, while I became an ‘insider’ at the markets and welcome at both their farms and in their homes, I was an ‘outsider’ to this aspect of their businesses, particularly if they had referred to these markets negatively in our conversations. This reinforced the notion that farming participants were selective with what aspects of farming they wanted to be seen or were deemed appropriate for the Farmers’ Market audience.

## **Researching Farmers’ Market Customers**

Through participant-observation at the markets, I noted and observed customers at all markets visited, particularly at my three main Melbourne markets, both as a customer and working behind the stalls, noting demographics and shopping behaviours. Open-ended interviews were conducted to gain different perspectives and substantiate observations. A broad selection of participants of different ages and gender were interviewed, including those who shopped alone and those shopping with family or friends, to get an overview of a range of views and experiences (Rossman & Rallis, 2003:38-39). Often conversations began at stalls over the produce or goods sold, after which I explained my research and interviewed those who were happy to be interviewed.

Unlike stallholder participants, interviews were used as an initial point of contact for customer participants, engaging them at following markets through informal chats. I established a rapport with Showgrounds Farmer’s Market customers who frequented the market on a regular basis. Relationships with customers were harder to establish at larger monthly markets, though when I saw customers whom I had previously interviewed I would engage them in a conversation when possible. I interviewed some customers that attended multiple markets each month. However, the most valuable customer interactions were informal, as is a benefit of long term participant-observation research (see Dewalt et al, 1998:260). These were often between customers and

stallholders, between different customers, between myself and customers, or observed in individual's actions at the markets.

However, interviews were only a small part of this research. Interactions with customers when working behind stalls with stallholders, or when shopping as a customer, were most informative, for this was where customers could be observed asking stallholders questions, handling produce, questioning prices or returning items, sharing recipes or stories, offering advice to other customers, giving their recommendations, and showing enthusiasm or cynicism. Stories were told about the produce sold, advice was sought by customers, and questions were asked and answered on where food came from, often inciting elaborate story-telling by stallholders. These customer interactions are interspersed throughout all Chapters, but are analysed in detail in Chapter Seven.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that this research does not focus primarily on these Farmers' Market customers. Due to the practical constraints of field research in a limited timeframe, the focus of this research is on the stallholders that sell at these markets as well as the markets as spaces for social interaction between country and urban participants. This is not a thesis on urban consumers, but rather a thesis that examines how producers and market operators situate themselves and their products to appeal to a small group of urban elites that value locality and authenticity and seek out the Farmers' Market experience. While the growing trend of localism, returning to 'nature' and the search for authenticity through consumption are encountered in this research, I do not attempt to explain the origins of such rising trends.

## **Conclusion**

Participant-observation research at the markets, through spending time on both sides of the stall, formed the heart of this research. However, by visiting other Farmers' Markets throughout the state, spending time at the VFMA as well as on the farms and in the kitchens of stallholders, deeper understanding of not only of the markets was possible but also how the markets were experienced by stallholders, who themselves travelled great distances and visited multiple markets to earn their living. It is important to emphasise that it was these participants, rather than market customers, that were the primary focus of this research.

Listening to participants' recommendations and following up gossip led to new and fruitful discoveries. While I sought to be an 'open book' to prevent misunderstandings with participants, participants decided for themselves where I fitted into the market community. Reciprocity is important to establish trust of participants (Rossman & Rallis, 2003:159), and so I endeavoured to be 'useful' and 'help out' wherever possible. However, my visits to farms and association at the markets were also used by participants, particularly as a mark of legitimacy, which was vitally important in the politics of the markets in the context of the Accreditation Program. Stallholders would tell customers, other stallholders and market managers of my visits to their properties, using these visits to validate themselves as growers or makers, which is explored in detail in Chapter Five. The next Chapter analyses how different understandings of 'local food' at these varied markets added further complexity to Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.

## Chapter Three: Local Food at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets

Farmers' Markets offer people a chance to source local food straight from the producer, with an emphasis on primary producers, namely farmers. Inherent in this assumption is that, through direct contact, individuals can 'really know' what they are consuming; and 'feel-good' about their consumption choices, knowing that the money they spend at the market supports local food production.

Inherent in this focus on local food are many assumptions that need to be questioned. Who is local, and what counts as local food? Who are the farmers or producers that sell at the market, and what makes them acceptable, where others are not? Why do these producers need the support of shoppers in the city, and why should supporting local producers count as a 'feel good' shopping experience? Does it matter if the person behind the stall is directly involved in the production of foods sold? What is it that makes shopping at the markets a place of 'real' food, and a good food experience for a small group of urban consumers? This Chapter breaks down such assumptions, arguing that the concept of local food as good food choice is complex, context-based and relational.

This chapter will introduce the concept of local food as good food through different experiences at the key markets introduced in the previous chapter. Locality is then further explored in Chapter Four and Five in the farming stories and rural narratives at play at the various markets.

### Promoting Local Food

Researchers have noted that in alternative consumption spaces such as Farmers' Markets, the notion of 'good food' is often combined with 'local food' rhetoric (Chalmers et al, 2009:323). These assumptions are produced and reproduced by alternative agriculture networks (Connell et al, 2008:169-185; DuPuis & Goodman, 2005:359). Such narratives are particularly salient in the Farmers' Market scene, for as Smithers and Joseph observed in a study of Farmers' Market customers in Ontario, Canada, "...many consumers believe or assume a series of (largely unspecified) benefits by virtue of their attendance—a testament perhaps to the current potency of the FM brand" (Smithers & Joseph, 2009: 7).

The association between locality and quality has been tied historically to the romanticisation of local foods in Europe, through social movements such as Slow Food, a movement that seeks to protect uniquely local foods from mass-produced imitations in a globalised food landscape. The idea of branding foods as unique to a specific location was based on the notion that inherent qualities in the soil, climate, or traditional techniques produced a 'unique' flavour, as seen in Champagne in France and Parmesan cheese in Italy, where producers have limited the use of their names to their geographic locale (Pratt, 2007:289). The labelling of these speciality products reflected a romanticisation, or "romantic commodification" (Zick Varul, 2008:660) of the place of origin. Locally branded foods are thereby taken to indicate that the unique qualities of the location are transferred

to the produce (Ilbery & Kneafsey, 2000a:2207). According to Pratt, such practices led to the “logical fallacy” that locally branded foods must equal quality (Pratt, 2007:290). As he argued:

“Because the field is pre-set, the terms can become synonymous, or at least immediately evoke each other (the 'local' is 'authentic'). This merging of terms makes the alternative movements appear to be as connected, and to address all the same issues, as the mainstream food chains to which they are opposed.” (Pratt, 2007:287-288)

Portraying such unique local foods as good food is commonly used in tourism advertising, to bring in visitors while encouraging locals to ‘support their local community’ and local economy (Hinrichs, 2000:298). Similar promotions were evident at country Farmers’ Markets, and country stallholders also used specific regional branding to promote their products at urban markets. “What you get here is real food from real places” remarked Simone, market manager, as we set up the Showgrounds market one cold Sunday morning, pointing to the images of rolling green Gippsland hills on display on one of the market stalls.

However, the Slow Food and European definitions of local foods allow local products, such as champagne and parmesan, to be transported around the world for consumption. This kind of international consumption is in stark contrast to the local food movement and the ideology of the Farmers’ Market brand (Alkon, 2008:488). Rather, for local food movements, it is the consumer’s proximity to production that is paramount. Local food is food that has travelled the least, with the least physical and metaphorical distance between producer and consumer (Feagan & Morris, 2009:235-243). These are products that can, and are, grown elsewhere. Not only that, but they are readily accessible throughout the year in supermarkets, for example Californian oranges and Italian-grown kiwi fruits can be found in the summer when these products are not in season in Victoria. So it is not necessarily the uniqueness of the growing region or the scarcity of the products that makes local foods desirable, but the distance itself.

## **Local Food Movements**

Local food movements seek to resituate place and history in the consumption landscape (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005:361). As complex multinational food chains hide food production practices from everyday consumers (Lockie et al, 2000: 315-322), commodities such as food have been “stripped of their history and origin”, which threatens people’s “understanding of foods” (Fischler, 1988: 275-292). It is argued that these food chains rely on unsustainable agricultural practices and have led to an increasingly uneven food system, disadvantaging developing countries and small-scale food production practices globally (Alkon, 2008:487). In response, social movements have arisen in post-industrial nations that promote a ‘return’ to local food production and consumption (Kneafsey et al, 2008; DuPuis & Goodman, 2005; Higgins et al, 2008). In these contexts, localism is held to not only be the antithesis of large scale globalising forces (DuPuis, Goodman & Harrison, 2005:243), but also the solution to a range of social, political, environmental and economic issues attributed to such global food systems (Hinrichs, 2000:295; Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:287-299).

The term ‘local food movement’ is used to describe a variety of local, national and international campaigns to promote awareness and use of local produce (Kloppenburger et al, 2000:182). These

vary widely, and include the international Slow Food movement (Leitch, 2003:437-443); environmental campaigns to 'reduce food miles' (La Trobe, 2001:182) and promote sustainable agricultural practices (Alkon, 2008:488); healthy eating (Larsen & Gilliland, 2009:1158-1162) and ethical consumption initiatives (Grasseni, 2013:198-216); fair price initiatives that seek to 'restore justice' in the food production system for local producers (DuPuis, Goodman & Harrison, 2005:243); and 'buy local' national pride campaigns (Hinrichs, 2003:33). As Roos et al stated:

"Local food is thus conceived today in terms of gastronomy, tradition, authenticity, origin, quality, distance, social relations, production, provisioning, sustainability and politics." (Roos et al, 2007:1)

Farmers Markets, which focus on locally grown food and value-added products sold directly from the producer, epitomise the values of the local food movement (Oths & Groves, 2012:130-132). Not only do Farmers' Markets promote the consumption of local food, they embed those food choices in social relationships through market interactions (Feagan & Morris, 2009:236). Farmers' Market advocates argue that this embeddedness not only encourages local food producers, but the 'right' kind of food producers, particularly sustainable agricultural practices that contrast with the unsustainable large-scale farming practices found in global food chains (Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000: 293; King, 2008:111-113). As Alison Alkon, in her ethnography of a Farmers' Market in West Oakland USA, commented:

"... farmers market participants reinforce their belief that morally embedded economic exchange is not only congruent with just sustainability, but the most promising channel through which to pursue it." (Alkon, 2008:488)

In such local food movements, seasonal, local foods are often referred to as 'real' food (Weiss, 2012:623-624). This is viewed in opposition to processed foods purchased at supermarkets and other conveniences such as fast food outlets (Guthrie et al, 2006:562; Long, 2011:56-57). Therefore, for Farmers' Markets and other food movements, to be 'real' is to be 'known', to be specific to a producer or location (Stiles et al, 2011:227), as opposed to the 'unknown' of the supermarket aisle.<sup>23</sup>

However, the values attributed to local food are not universal. Pratt argued that 'local' labels are taken to mean different things in different contexts, and can be appropriated by conservative and progressive groups with different political implications (Pratt, 2007:289). Connecting locality, quality and legitimacy can stem from varied motivations from different actors within local food movements, particularly at Farmers' Markets, where such local food transactions are played out in a particular and temporary social space (Tiemann, 2008:478; Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:287), making 'local food' a concept that needs to be unpacked and understood in this particular context.

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<sup>23</sup> Throughout my research, I noted that supermarkets, particularly 'the big two', attempted to capitalise on positive associations with local food by introducing local food labels and advertising campaigns that emphasised Australian producers and produce. This trend received some media attention at the time (for example, see <http://ausfoodnews.com.au/2010/08/02/woolworths-and-iga-supermarkets-go-local.html>), and was a frequent topic of conversation at the markets, particularly as local food advocates accused the supermarkets of compromising and appropriating their values to hoodwink unsuspecting customers. While there is not enough room to analyse these supermarket campaigns here, they do indicate that the values of the local food movement had a growing appeal, indicative of broader social trends, which extended far beyond the small population that frequented Farmers' Markets.

## Local Food at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets

In Melbourne, all market organisers promoted the markets as a place where customers could access Local Foods. Farmers' Market branding claimed to offer customers an opportunity not only to find 'real local food' but also to connect with 'real local farmers', using promotional slogans such as "Straight from the Land into your Hand",<sup>24</sup> "Fall in Love with Local Food",<sup>25</sup> "I don't buy food from strangers", and "Farmers' Markets: one degree of separation".<sup>26</sup>

In interviews, customers constantly reinforced positive attributes that they associated with buying local at these markets. As one customer commented, "I come here to buy local. Why else would I be here?" However, what was meant by local, and the benefits attributed to buying local, were diverse. Local food was alternatively seen as fresher, healthier, more ethical, or more environmentally friendly. Others saw supporting local food in political terms, as they could 'vote with their dollar' to support local farmers, and 'vote' against the supermarket by buying their goods directly from producers. These sentiments indicated an unproblematic association between local food and good food at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.

While these customer reactions are further examined in Chapter Seven, this Chapter seeks to introduce the varied ways that market organisers and stallholders sought to define local food. I will then detail the experience of shopping at various Farmers' Markets to bring a sense of what it was like to be a customer at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets, before delving into deeper analysis of specific market experiences in later Chapters.

### The Local Gourmet Producer

To examine the ways in which local food ideals were presented at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets, I will start by introducing a stallholder whose business philosophy epitomised the ideals of 'local, seasonal, and sustainable' as promoted by international local food movements.

Kayla was a stallholder who attended the four inner-city markets run by the Melbourne's Farmers' Markets group. Out of the four, Kayla referred to Collingwood Children's Farm Farmers' Market as "one of the most beautiful, and the best".

Youthful and vibrant, Kayla had worked as a professional chef for 15 years in fine dining in Australia and Europe before settling down "on a beautiful bit of land" in the Daylesford region of Victoria, a popular tourist destination known for its natural mineral springs, gourmet restaurants, and health spas. Espousing "green ideals" and a love of "nature, natural food, you know", she created gourmet vegetable-based dips from produce grown in her own backyard and sourced from local growers, sometimes incorporating found ingredients "like wild fennel ... it grows like mad up here, all over the side of the road!". Her "homemade style" dips were sold at a premium price of \$7.50 per tub or "three for \$20", with the range limited to four or five varieties at each market, depending on the

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24 In Seasons Farmers' Market Pty Ltd, Commercial Farmers' Market operators, slogan. See <http://www.inseasonmarkets.com.au/>

25 Regional Farmers' Markets, Commercial Farmers' Market operators, slogan. See <http://rfm.net.au/>

26 "I don't buy food from strangers", and "Farmers' Markets: one degree of separation" are bumper sticker slogans by the VFMA. See <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10150569650028381&set=a.445225628380.240627.120417488380&type=1&theater>



seasonal availability of produce. With no preservatives and minimal salt or oil, the dips had a limited shelf life. For city customers, Kayla's dips were available exclusively at the Farmers' Markets. They could be sold as gluten free, vegan, vegetarian, or a perfect accompaniment to roast lamb or a goat curry. She sold these dips under her own label.

On her simple website, she provided a personalised message on her food philosophy:

"We are passionate about two things: making the best dips possible while treading as lightly as we can on the Earth.

We make our dips according to the Slow Food philosophy and ensure low food miles by sourcing our ingredients from local farms.

Based in the beautiful Central Highland region of Daylesford, we are lucky to be surrounded by many organic farms, from where we handpick our seasonal produce.

We look forward to seeing you at a market soon,

...

Oh, and don't forget to recycle your containers, or why not grow seeds in them or use them for storage?"

While espousing a preference for organic goods herself, Kayla's dips were not labelled organic. "I use [certified] organic ... [but] I can't call them [the dips] organic because what's in my backyard isn't certified" she explained to me, a sentiment that was frequently repeated to her customers, "I can't afford to be certified ... I'd have to put my price up to absorb that and I don't want to do that." The origin of the ingredients she used was important to Kayla's "business philosophy", as she explained:

"When the beetroot are in season [at another stallholder's organic farm] I'll come up there and I'll help dig them out, and it's this sort of concept, where they're done the day before then they're on the shelf the next day. And I think that's really special, it's how I like to eat, understanding that people don't always have the opportunity to eat that way."



Figure 5: Kayla's stall.

Kayla's stall was set up simply, with checked cloth covering a trestle table and wooden crates used to hold up a simple handwritten sign. On a piece of wood sat a row of dips, with a loaf of sourdough bread ready to cut pieces for tasting. With a Spanish name and simple "rustic" design, Kayla's approach to selling was to portray a "simple, homemade, rustic gourmet sort of look" that complemented her "simple, homemade, gourmet" dips and soups.

Kayla would take her time to chat to her customers, telling stories about the origin of the produce, her garden, her adventures in Europe "working with the best ingredients", her garden, and her idyllic Daylesford lifestyle where "people come in and out of my kitchen, help out, chat, it's great!" She had regular customers who would stay at her stall awhile and chat about their lives, but many more would walk past, sample the dips and keep moving, though she happily answered questions and attempted to engage as many as she could in conversations about the dips they sampled, prompting discussions about the ingredients, the weather, or other topics of the day. When she had attended the markets throughout her first pregnancy, regular customers had shared stories of their own experiences of parenthood. These stories continued after the birth of her son, who frequently joined her at her market stall.

On cold winter days, she also brought in a large pot of homemade soup, selling steaming bowls made with seasonal vegetables and "herbs from my [her] garden". While she sent an employee, "a friend" who "helps me make the dips", to one of the markets for "a weekend at home", she argued

that it was always better to sell your product directly, because “you’re the best person who can market your product. And I’m in complete control of my product, my orders each week ... I change the product each week ... it makes sense to me and it feels right. Also I can tell people exactly like, you know, these mushrooms were picked this morning and this is where they were from to make that mushroom soup.” She added:

“It cuts out the middle man I guess. Like I’ve been asked by people if they can buy my dips, and put it in their café or in their shop and buy buckets of it and repackage it. And it’s kinda like, ‘noooo!’ [laughing], you can’t, because I’ve gone to too much trouble designing the labels and organising stuff, and, ahhhh, the branding is an important part of my business [laughing].”

Kayla’s stall epitomised many of the assumptions that are found in Local Food movement literature (Kloppenborg et al, 2000:182). Kayla’s stall championed the ideals of the Farmers’ Market brand. Her dips were handmade, using local ingredients either grown by her or by local producers that could even be identified at the same markets. By selling directly to her customers, she could engage customers in discussions of provenance, and incorporate tips and advice offered by those customers into her business. Though her stories of seasonality, the dips she sold not only came from a ‘place’ that was beautiful and idyllic, but were also part of her own transformative story, as she went from the fast, high-stress urban life of fine dining to a simple, ‘wholesome’ life in the country. Bringing other primary produce stalls into these stories located the goods in a community of local food production.

### **The VFMA Accreditation Program**

While Farmers’ Market branding emphasised local food sold directly from the producer or maker (Andreatta & Wickliffe, 2002:167), the Victorian Farmers’ Market Association (VFMA) Accreditation went further, as it emphasised not only the locality of the producer, but also the locality of the ingredients the producer was allowed to use (VFMA, 2009:1). ‘Value-add’ stallholders such as Kayla, that is, stallholders who create specialty food products such as dips, cakes and jams but did not grow all of the ingredients themselves, were required to use Victorian ingredients where available, further emphasising the importance of locality at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets (VFMA, 2009:5).

To receive VFMA Accreditation, each product sold by a ‘value-adder’ stall needed to be approved by the VFMA Accreditation Panel. Applicants were required to submit lists of the ingredients used to make each product. They were then required to state the proportion of the ingredient used in each product, and whether each ingredient was grown in Victoria, interstate, or overseas (VFMA, 2009a:5).

This information was then sent to the VFMA Accreditation Panel, who calculated Accreditation via a 100-point system determined on the proportions provided. The Panel could elect to inspect any applicant they suspected of dishonesty or who did not fill out their forms correctly, as I observed during participant-observation during Accreditation Panel meetings and site inspections. The VFMA Accreditation Officer, a staff member, also engaged stallholders in this process, encouraging them to

exclude certain items from sale or alter suppliers, meaning that some stallholders re-submitted applications multiple times.

This laborious process was the source of much private resentment and frustration among specialty stallholders throughout my field research. The Accreditation Panel was staffed by stallholders that had volunteered and were elected into their positions, and the implications of this process, which caused distrust and anguish to build between those thought of as 'insiders' and 'outsiders', is discussed in Chapter Four.

Kayla's approach fit ideally with the VFMA's Accreditation Program. She proudly declared that she was one of the first "value-adders" to apply for and receive Accreditation, though with only a limited range of seasonal dips and soups sold, she admitted that this process was easier for her than for other 'value-add' stallholders. For Kayla, the use of local ingredients indicated freshness and quality, as well as a connection to the country region she called home. The ingredients came with a story, about the water, the soil and the people of her country region, and this story was shared with customers at the exclusive inner-city markets she attended.

### **Alternative Definitions of Local**

However, not all stallholders, or market managers, agreed with the VFMA's definition of Local food. Paul, a market manager that operated commercial markets in metropolitan and rural locales, disagreed. He argued that the market experience, buying from stalls directly in a local place, constituted 'local' food. He saw it as not his "place" to "tell them [stallholders] what they should do with their business" and saw the VFMA's insistence on local ingredients as "invasive". Chatting at one of his markets one Saturday, he pointed to many "customer favourites" that would not survive Accreditation, loudly declaring with indignation that it would be "criminal" to stop them from attending his markets:

"It's more important that we have the mix, rather than people walk away from the FM, and saying 'well I'm so sorry they didn't have any beautiful muesli but at least they kept to the rules', that's not what it's about. I have to please all these people, these people walking in the gate, that's more important ... And yes I have no resellers here, I've got one vegetable seller that I am going to talk to who grows three quarters of what he does [looks over to stall]. I've just noticed this morning that he is selling sweet potatoes in there, now I know he can't have grown them... [We talked for a while about how sweet potatoes only grow north of central New South Wales] ...

... And you look round here; you won't find more than five Accreditation signs because the stallholders aren't bloody interested. They just want to go to the markets ... The motives for the stallholders, they're all different. There are 52 in here, and they'll be 25 different motives to why they're coming. And, and, we have to cater for that, but my intention is to make sure that I satisfy the people walking through that gate. So when they leave, they think 'geez, next month, I can get so and so.' And that's why. If I don't have people walking through that gate, then I lose all these guys (stallholders), and I'm out of a job.

See, the VFMA have got it the wrong way around. They think they're the, that stallholders at the market should work for them. And it's not. It's the other way round. Actually the VFMA should work for the stallholders. I work for the stallholders. Cause, you know, without them, I'm out of a job ... They are the Peak Body, being that association, who are our voice to government ... they think the accreditation is the bee all and end all but it's not. It's not. If you talk to either stallholders or talk to the public – [turns and points assertively at a stall]. You see the one that will not be accredited is the one behind me the SA mettwurst [reseller of South Australian made smallgoods] – now that's South Australia ... But – he's South Australian. But it's like – so many people like it, and he knows what the product is – I'm not going to say 'never darken my doorstep again', because he adds another flavour to the market. It's more important that we give the people what they want, rather than saying 'we've only got 12 stalls but at least they're all accredited'. And it's not right."

Speaking to Paul on this occasion, and my more during the course of fieldwork, a different understanding of local emerged than that promoted by the VFMA. Rather than focussing on individual products and ingredients, his focus, and the focus of the RFM markets, was on the experience of the market itself. While interacting with the producer themselves was important, it was not the only thing that was important. Shopping in a local place and buying goods from the same person each month, Paul believed, provided the local food experience desired by participants.

### The Pasta Producer

At Bundoora Farmers' Market, nestled between a bakery stall and a cheese producer just left of the market entrance, there was a stall that appeared from a distance to be selling nothing. The products were not displayed on trestle tables or in woven baskets, but were to be found in the large, white, portable deep freezer that stood in the centre of this stallholder's tent, accompanied by a smiling middle-aged woman with wild black hair and at least one of her teenage daughters. Behind them was strung a large printed sign, yellow tubular writing on a sauce-red background with the name of their business, and a VFMA Accreditation tick hung, slightly lower, by its side. Behind the tent, an old two horse cart was painted white and emblazoned with the same logo. In the freezer, stacks of frozen filled pastas, lasagnes, gnocchi and pasta sauces filled the cavernous space, visible under laminated signs detailing the description and prices of dozens of varieties of pasta, from gluten free and vegetarian to 'roo ravioli' and ocean trout. Identical packet labels, printed in basic black and white, stated the product name, ingredients, and cooking directions.



Figure 6: Fran's stall.

The woman behind the stall was Fran, a self-described "Australian born Italian". Her regular customers flowed in and out of the tent all through market days, leaning on the freezer as they chatted, keeping Fran and her daughters on their feet. Nearby stallholders often joined in the conversations, particularly near the end of the morning when they had sold out of their wares.

Fran enthusiastically invited me to her place to talk about the markets and I agreed to help out while I was there. On arriving at an unassuming house in the middle of a small country town just past the outskirts of Melbourne, Fran and her husband William proudly showed me to a shipping container sitting in the middle of their back yard. Inside was an immaculate, though small, pasta factory, complete with large walk-in freezer. With our hands washed, hair netted and recorder on, we went to work making pasta as we chatted about the markets, about our shared Italian heritage and the different regions of Italy, about family and food and their business. Six hours later, with the recorder batteries long dead, we were still laughing and chatting and making the different pastas to sell at the markets.

Fran and William had started making pasta commercially when the airline he was working for went out of business, and it was now their family's solitary source of income. For them, the markets provided an opportunity to produce quality goods on a small scale without the upfront costs of owning and operating a shop, as they supported their three daughters. However, attending multiple

markets per month, and selling in local stores, kept them “very busy”, “working flat out all week” to meet demand. “We work each day, and we make something each day” stated Fran, “my joke is ... when I get to go to the market, that’s my time off, my time away from here!” Selling the pasta frozen, rather than fresh, allowed bigger batches to be made and provided the variety they felt their customers wanted. While proud of her northern Italian heritage, Fran was happy to make pastas that originated from all different regions, making her own flavour combinations and introducing new ingredients.

They had applied for Accreditation, both because they supported the idea of ‘producer only’ markets and because they would like to have the opportunity to attend inner-city markets. However, with so many products available, the process itself was laborious. Every single ingredient on every single item sold needed to be provided to be approved. “How can we say we use Victorian wheat, when the supplier doesn’t know if it’s Victorian or from South Australia or from New South Wales? Isn’t Australian wheat enough? .... And you can’t get Victorian kangaroo, it’s not allowed, it gets painted blue at the abattoir and made into pet food. So we get our roo from SA [South Australia]. You have to! So what, they want us not to make roo ravioli anymore? That’s one of our best sellers at some markets.”<sup>27</sup>

While Fran sold mostly at outer suburban and country markets each month, they did not sell at their local market at Lancefield, as the organisers had a fresh pasta producer already at the market and were careful not to have too many producers with the similar products. As residents of a town ‘just down the road’ from this market, Fran’s stall would have fit well with the country market’s local food philosophy. However, her exclusion hinted at another distinction for local foods made by market managers, that is, that certain types of local foods were seen as a better ‘fit’ in an Accredited market than others; in this case, fresh artisan goods were preferred over a locally produced frozen equivalent. This distinction hinted at other ways in which foods were classified as good food by market participants, which are discussed in Chapter Seven. However, Fran declared no animosity towards either this market or the other pasta producer. Fran’s frozen pastas were available at the butcher ‘across the road’ from the market, as another stallholder I knew informed me when I visited Lancefield market, and as Fran declared “the locals know us anyway!”

After a while, Fran revealed that they were frustrated, like other pasta producers I spoke to, that a large dried pasta producer dominated the inner-city “Miranda markets” and prevented smaller producers such as themselves from reaching those customers. On another occasion, a different pasta maker remarked to me:

“You know those guys [at the inner city market] are huge ... and the markets are meant to be about local ... You need a whole lot of equipment to do what they do [flavoured dried pasta] ... big new fancy factory ... they’ve got ‘porcini mushroom flavour’, you can’t tell me those are Australian! They’ve just got their workers there [at the stall], they don’t care... You can

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<sup>27</sup> It is interesting to note that wild local indigenous foods, such as kangaroo, were not allowed due to government regulations, yet the provenance of foods that were introduced and farmed, such as wheat, were considered paramount. Chapter Six further explores how constructions of locality and authenticity appeal to particularly European agrarian idylls, rather than one of indigeneity.

get their stuff everywhere, interstate, on planes, at Leo's [gourmet supermarket]. I wouldn't be surprised to find them at Coles!"

In 2011, another pasta producer set up at the Bundoora Farmers' Market at the opposite end of the market to Fran's stall, next to a large stall selling dumplings and another selling ready-to-eat hot pizza slices, all under different banners but operated by the same stallholder and his staff. While shrugging off the new "competition", Fran was politely frustrated at the market manager for allowing such a "large business" into the market space. More tellingly, other stallholders and regular customers came up to the Fran's stall to voice their outrage at the other stall's presence. Comments went back and forth, from "that's a bit of a massive business", to "why are they making pasta, they're not even Italian", "using cheap ingredients, customers won't be fooled, they won't be here long", "do you think people realise it's all the same shop? Bit sneaky", "look at all that branding, printed tent and all, looks like a shop", and "that dumpling stall is pretty offensive too [due to its name], if you think about it." "I can't believe those fake Italians are coming here trying to flog that rubbish. Don't worry, we love your pasta, we're sticking with you!" declared an elderly woman, who had clearly finished her shopping for the day but diverted back to Fran's stall to state her loyalty, much to Fran's surprise.

For Fran and William, Farmers' Markets allowed them to start a small food business, selling their pasta directly to customers. For them, local food at the markets meant small primary producers and small local businesses. For a large business to hire staff and sell at the markets was disingenuous. Therefore, local food at the market was not only about the locality of the producer but also the size of their operation. This contrasted with the VFMA Accreditation Program's definition of local food, where the size of an operation did not enter into consideration.

Similarly, they thoroughly embraced the notion of local food that was employed at Lancefield Farmers' Market. By allowing only stallholders only from the local growing region, the Macedon Ranges, the market supported the local community, making the local foods consumed inherently beneficial not only to the local economy (Hinrichs et al, 2004:32) but to the community as a whole. While they understood that this was not possible at a city market, the idea of a community of support for local producers was seen as an important aspect of the Farmers' Market experience. Therefore, when other competitors were allowed into markets, particularly struggling markets that did not "need" more stalls, this could be viewed as a betrayal, if not by Fran herself then by other stallholders and loyal customers who voiced their own feelings on the matter. Local food wasn't just about locality or size but community, loyalty and belonging.

However, Fran's story also spoke to another construction of local food that dominated Melbourne's Farmers' Markets. This was a definition of local food and authenticity that emphasised ethnicity, and appealed to particularly European idylls of good and authentic food. The appeal to a European idyll is examined in Chapter Six. For Fran and many other producers, their heritage, in this case Italian heritage, provided a claim of legitimacy, for only Italians knew how to create 'real' pasta. Despite the locality of the other pasta producers, without a claim to such Italian heritage, their position at the Farmers' Markets was deemed less legitimate. Here, the locality and legitimacy of the food was embodied in the ethnicity of the maker, providing a historic link to the 'authentic' product (see



Abram, 1997:46). As her loyal customers comments maintained, this definition of good, local food was evident on both sides of the market stall.

Throughout the state I heard customers and stallholders refer to producers as purveyors of 'real' food by virtue of their ethnicity. For example, there were dumplings made by 'real' Chinese producers that used 'real' traditional recipes; pizza bases and gnocchi made by 'real' third-generation Italians that grew some of the produce used in their sauces; 'real' vegetarian curries made by migrants from India; 'real' British pork pies and smallgoods made by 'British expats' using traditional recipes; and Turkish golzeme producers. All such stalls held claim to labels of good local food by virtue of their ethnicity, whether they were first or fourth generation Australian.

However, these claims were not all equal. For example, a golzeme producer that attended an inner-city market demonstrated their family heritage and the freshness of their produce through family members, women of different ages, making their golzeme fresh on barbeques at the back of the stall. This stall was celebrated and held as an example of 'good local food', 'authentic' and 'real food' by market managers and customers I interviewed. However, at other markets, different golzeme stalls displayed more 'professional' branding on their marquees, their stalls also frequenting festivals and other public events. They served pre-prepared golzeme that were heated on the barbeque hot plates at their stall on request. While popular, I did not hear these stalls referred to in the same way as either 'local' or 'authentic', despite the vendors having similar Turkish family backgrounds.

This claim to locality through ethnicity was not restricted to value-add producers. Rather, primary producers could also be seen as local, or more legitimate, if they were growing produce that was associated with their heritage. Italian producers that grew artichokes, eggplants and tomatoes were asked advice on both the cooking and growing of such ingredients by customers frequently. As one commented prior to buying a box of artichokes from a producer with a clear Italian accent "I want to know the traditional way, how they should be prepared. I've got no idea! I'd probably throw all the good stuff away... Lucky you're here to teach people like me about these things!"

The claim of ethnicity as local differed from Kayla's claim to locality, which was based on 'knowing' the producers of the ingredients. However, with a Spanish label, and with her stories of fine dining experience in France, she too was appealing to a European food idyll. This is further explored in Chapter Six.

Fran, like Kayla and Paul, believed that the Farmers' Markets were for local food and local producers. However, while all examples above praised the value of buying local, they indicate very different constructions of what is local food. Furthermore, the stallholders, VFMA and market managers all claimed to understand what their customers wanted from their local food experience, which were then accommodated in their approaches to the market.

## Shopping at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets

Farmers' Markets are not only places where local foods can be purchased, but are also spaces of social interaction. Farmer's Markets are reported to 'strengthen local pride', 'improve local business ties', as 'community building' and facilitating 'communication between individuals that do not usually communicate' (Chalmers et al, 2009:320). For example, Holloway and Kneafsey in their study of farmers' markets in the UK found that customers "...develop ethical notions of community and co-operation, and thus the consumer is seen as purchasing not only food, but elements of a lifestyle embracing an ethic of community and care" (Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000: 293). Markets are also seen as places where local businesses can be given the opportunity to develop, to try new products in a "safe and supportive" environment (Hinrichs et al, 2004:32). Social connections also allow producers to charge higher prices, as "farmers markets offer fair exchange for the time and energy put in by farmers and producers to grow and make top quality foods" (RFM, 2010:1).

However, as seen in the different approaches of the VFMA and RFM above, and in the stories of two different specialty stallholders, understandings of local food differed greatly among the Melbourne Farmers' Market community. To understand these differences, it is first important to understand the experience of shopping at the different Farmers' Markets themselves, for how the markets, the stallholders and their promotion of 'local food' differed affected how local food was conceived and experienced at these markets.

### The Inner-City Market Experience: Collingwood Children's Farm Farmers' Market

The Collingwood Children's Farm Farmers' Market is located on the banks of the Yarra River, looking out onto a steep bank covered with trees. Set at an urban farm, its setting gives the customer a sense of being in the countryside, despite its inner-city location.

The market was located amongst dense inner-city housing, between busy thoroughfare roads and the Yarra River, which snaked its way through Melbourne's central business district, lined with parklands, cycling tracks and native vegetation. The streets surrounding the market were narrow, with single story century-old terrace houses nestled between newer townhouse and apartment developments. The market space was separated from the dense inner suburban landscape by the Abbotsford Convent; a monumental collection of brick and stone buildings from the 1800s framed by large walls and surrounded by extensive gardens in which the Collingwood Children's Farm was built. A convent until 1975, the building was home to artist studios, artisanal food businesses, community organisation offices and the one-room office space used by the VFMA and Slow Food Victoria. The Slow Food Farmers' Market was also hosted in the convent grounds on the fourth Saturday of every month.<sup>28</sup>

Customers numbered well into the hundreds at any point of time on market day. To reach the market, customers had to wait. There was minimal parking on the road side, with parking inspectors usually not far away on market day. At the entrance to the Convent and farm, volunteers sat at the

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<sup>28</sup> <http://abbotsfordconvent.com.au/>

gate of the car park to charge \$2 per car, usually \$4 on weekdays, a fundraiser for the Convent grounds. The laneway to get into the car park was narrow, framed by the convent walls on the right and primary school grounds on the left, with cobblestone drains on either side. Customers patiently lined up to get into the car park for considerable lengths of time, battling heavy traffic on surrounding main roads on arrival and departure. Located a distance from train and tram stations, many customers rode bikes, and these could be found chained to poles, on fences and in dedicated bike parks around the entrance. Local residents informed me that they walked, along the river or the road, to reach the market. Many brought their dogs.



**Figure 7: Collingwood Farmers' Market**

When volunteers opened the gate and collected their fee, customers found themselves at the top of a reasonably steep decline into a green but mostly hidden landscape. A raised walkway meandered past several types of poultry on the right, past goats, pigs and sheep on the left, overlooking roosting sheds and green pasture. At the end of the path was the farm café to the right, a building of wood and corrugated stainless steel, and to their left, a fundraising stall, manned by a different organisation every market, selling cup-cakes or simple treats and handing out pamphlets or a petition to sign. A wooden milking shed, complete with milking demonstrations at 10am, was directly down the hill from the path, in front of which a large group of volunteers ran a frantic pancake stall, the first indication of the market below. A narrow dirt path led past the milking shed, further down the hill past pigs and donkeys in allotments and an overgrown vegetable patch on the

left, flower stalls on the right. A wooden gate stood open at the end of the path, the entrance to the I-shaped 'sheep paddock', as it was named. Here, customers finally entered the market space. No hint of city landscape could be seen. All that was visible was the steep bank of the river directly opposite the gate, covered in large gum trees and thick undergrowth. Trees lined the banks of the river, out of eyesight. All that was visible were trees and grass and mud, lines of stalls, and crowds of people shopping at the market.

The paddock was lined with pole-to-pole marquees of different shapes and sizes that framed a sometimes grassy but often muddy stretch of ground. The gate to the market opened where the market was its narrowest, and so crowds appear thicker, the stalls closer together. However, as the ground sloped downwards, the market opened up to a broad paddock. Customers sat on hay bales in the centre of the market space, busker's played instruments, dogs on leads wandered with their owners, and young children ran around in play. There was a festive atmosphere to the market.

A large number of regular customers at this market were very dedicated. Many stallholders would know by their regularity, coming to the market around the same time and visiting the same stalls every month. I observed customers that spent hours at the market, leaving with over-burdened trolleys or baskets under prams, or armfuls of reusable bags. Nevertheless, large numbers of customers at this market could be described as casual or occasional shoppers, as groups and individuals would enter the market throughout the day, perhaps purchase some ready-to-eat food or drink, and leave with only a few specialty items.

The experience of travelling from the car park down into the farm takes customers into a virtual countryside. The very process of walking the long, meandering pathway, the steep and joyful decline into the market space and the arduous trip back up to suburbia placed the market in an alternative space. Suspended from the tensions and stresses of the world around, the market was a place to linger, to have a coffee or some hot food, to enjoy the countryside. Multiple trips to the car were difficult, and so everything had to be collected before making the journey back out to the world above. The size of the market, the crowds and the noise generated by those crowds some found festive, some found stressful. Either way, it was not possible to do a 'quick shop' at this market.

A visit to Collingwood Children's Farm Farmers' Market was an occasion, one that incited anticipation. With no easy access, the journey, by foot, bike, bus or car required forethought and preparation. Plastic bag-free, shoppers needed to bring their own, and with the size of the market, a large bag, pram or trolley eased shopping considerably. Some items required specific forethought and preparation, for example a cold pack could be needed to transport cold items such as ice-cream or the large range of free-range meats, which ranged from Belted Galloway beef to mutton to duck to venison to turkey. An entrance price added to the feeling that the market was an event, rather than a mundane shopping opportunity. Despite another market being held a fortnight later next door at the Abbotsford Convent, with many of the same stallholders, several customers could be observed 'buying up' for the month to last until the next market.

At this market, VFMA Accreditation was clearly visible through Accreditation 'ticks' on display behind almost every stall. A-frame signs explaining Accreditation were found at the entrance. However, they barely seemed necessary, as the market space itself suggested that only farmers and local

producers were in the market space. Promotions preaching the virtue of local food at this market were everywhere. Signs at stalls promoted the regions and the land the producers came from, and some stallholders presented their produce with dirt and leaves and a roughness that suggested it just came out of the ground. As many stalls at the market sold fresh produce, the space was alive with colourful displays of abundance and productivity. Some value-add stalls had refined packaging and branded marquees, but even these maintained simplicity in their presentation. The sense that the produce and producers at the market were local was accentuated by the farm environment in which the market was situated. Farm animals, a muddy paddock, wooden barns and fences, trees and vegetable gardens, flowers and a milking shed, complete with daily milking display, lent to the 'country' feel of the market and hence the locality and legitimacy of the producers.

Kayla's stall fit well within this market space. Her artisan stall with few select products, European labelling and rustic 'homemade' looking dips were surrounded by the same green landscape evoked in her stories of Daylesford and the same organic produce that went into her dips. Even the loaf of sourdough bread for sampling was sourced from another stall. However, while Kayla's stall epitomised the small artisan grower ideal of the local food movement, this market also included stallholders that owned and operated large companies. One stallholder, selling kohlrabi and leeks from identical stacked black boxes, cheerily proclaimed to me that her family farm "sold more A1 leeks to Japan than anyone in the world" and she attended the market "for fun ... and to socialise". Her inclusion at the market, which did anger some other stallholders, did not conflict with the VFMA or market managers understandings of local food and supporting local producers. In my observations, unless they asked, customers were unaware of the size of the farms, as they enjoyed the 'feel-good' experience of shopping for local food in the idyllic country-style locale.

### **The Large Suburban Market Experience: Bundoora Farmers' Market**

Bundoora Farmers' Market, a Regional Farmers Market (RFM) market, was situated approximately 17 kilometres from the centre of Melbourne at the entrance to the city's largest parkland. 180 hectares in size, the park encompassed a natural gorge, native bushland, playgrounds, a golf course, and stretches of open fields. The market was set up near the lowest entrance of the park, just out of view from a large, multi-lane road that ran from the city to the Western Ring Road, the freeway that circled the suburbs of Melbourne. This road was lined with large chain stores and shopping complexes. Two further kilometres down this road was the main campus of Melbourne's third largest university.

Diverting from the large, busy road, customers turned into the park, following a windy two-lane bituminised road, past a playground, to a fork in the road. On the left was situated a small car park, with the road leading through the park and out onto a suburban street. There were native trees on one side and a large expanse of grass on the other, with two rectangular fields framed by lines of sparse gum trees. The first paddock was roped off with string and small red flags for parking. The next field, closest to the road, contained the market. Cars could enter at either side of the bitumen car park. Past the market field were more green fields lined with gum trees. A single large gum tree sat in the centre of the market field, framing the market space.

Approximately 90 stalls formed a large oval of mismatched tents. The backs of a row of stalls were immediately visible from the car park, a line of cars with trailers, vans and utility vehicles. Loud generators roared behind a few of the tents, others had thick electricity cords stretching back to the low wooden fence line of the car park to a central electricity box. One gap in the row of tents was left at the top of the car park. Here, a blue and yellow tent manned by elderly members of the local Rotary club stood to collect a \$2 entrance fee from market shoppers. This fee was a courtesy, as any customer could avoid the entrance by walking in between the lines of stalls, though in my observations this rarely occurred. Members of the Rotary club, mostly senior men wearing yellow and blue, organised the car park, directing traffic onto the field next to the market.



**Figure 8: Customers at Bundoora Park Farmers' Market.**

The visible presence of the local Rotary club at this market led many customers to believe that the market was run and operated by this club. No customers I interviewed were aware that the market was run as a commercial business by an external group, with Rotary collecting the door fee as a fundraiser in return for volunteering. Again, this market's location removed its customers from the built up suburban landscape that surrounded them, although unlike The Collingwood market, houses and cars were always visible and the roar of the nearby road could be heard clearly from the market space. Nevertheless, the location was idyllic and far removed from the shopping centres nearby.

From the entrance, customers walked past a couple of flower, wine and beer stalls before the path opened up to a field surrounded by small tents. There was too much distance in-between to see both sides clearly at the same time. The centre was occupied by a single stand, a barbeque breakfast, from a blue trailer and tent emblazoned with the Rotary logo, next to the large central gum tree. An open marquee stood nearby with some plastic table and chairs. The field sloped slightly towards the suburban road, so the whole market was visible from the entrance, besides stalls hidden from view by the central gum tree.

Although the market had plenty of customers, the number of stalls and the size of the field made it look sparse. Customers rarely ventured into the centre of the field; if so they were racing back to a stall, cutting a corner or, if the weather was nice, eating their breakfast or lunch on the grass. With an abundance of hot foods, specialty goods and take-home ready-to-eat meals, the market felt festive.

On entering the market, customers had three choices: go clockwise, go anti-clockwise, or venture into the centre and straight for the Rotary barbeque stall. There was a different coffee stall in both directions. Clockwise, the first stalls encountered were 3 bread stalls, pasta, milk, cheese, then vegetables, coffee, and smoked meats, leading to eggs, more bread, citrus and more vegetables, to a row of value-add producers. Anti-clockwise, the market contained mostly specialty stalls, including cakes, take-home curries, mixed herbs, hot dumplings, liquorice, flavoured nuts and honey.

Directly across from the entrance of the market, next to one coffee stall, was a stall selling beef and lamb. The stall was operated by farming families, one from the Yarra Valley, the Little Creek Cattle Company who also owned a butchers shop, and the other from near the Victoria-New South Wales border, Killara Lamb. I observed that there was a line up at this stall on every market day. I counted 15 to 17 customers in this line at any one time consistently through market days. Some customers picked up orders of several kilograms, while others raced to get their favourite cuts before they sold out. The rush would not end at this stall until the end of the market or they sold out. While there were other meat producers at this market, this stall was overwhelmingly popular. When I interviewed customers, many claimed that the meat from this stall was not only quality, but also affordable, as a middle-aged couple told me, "It's so much better than we get round here, and it's a pretty good price". In discussions, customers appeared focussed on the value of the meats, rather than celebrating that the meats came directly from local farms.

Bundoora Farmers' Market was a monthly market, and like the Collingwood Children's Farm Farmers' Market, this made it an occasion. Customers could approach the market space with ease, coming and going throughout the day. However, because of the sheer size of the market space, it was difficult to shop quickly at this market. A timed loop of the market, without stopping and chatting at stalls, was 20 minutes.

Most significantly, this market did not focus on fresh produce as predominately as Collingwood. Out of the 90 stalls present, only one large and two small stalls sold fresh vegetables, and a handful specialised in particular fresh food items, such as oranges, tomatoes, mushrooms or apples. Overwhelmingly, the majority of stalls were specialty producers, or "value-adders" in the language of the VFMA. While there were many meat producers, all bar the "bargain" beef and lamb stall did

not claim to source straight from the farm, and rather specialised in smoked or prepared meats. While some other stallholders disparagingly called certain stalls “butcher shops” and disliked their presence at the market, customers did not appear to make such a distinction. While some customers purchased their favourite items in bulk, particularly at the beef and lamb stall, others left with only a few specialty items, making their grocery purchases elsewhere.

Despite the size of the market space, far less customers brought their own trolleys to do their shop than at Collingwood, though most brought their own reusable shopping bags. Many wandered in couples or groups, met with friends or family and consumed some of the many hot foods available, leaving with a few specialty items rather than their complete groceries as observed at Collingwood.

The local food focus at Bundoora Farmers’ Market appeared initially to come less from ‘straight from the farmer’ sentiments to having a local shopping experience, as customers purchased specialty items from specialty producers once a month in a beautiful local setting. However, customers frequently spoke to stallholders about the goods they sold, asking similar questions regarding how they were made, swapping recipes and offering advice. Customers were wary of stalls deemed “too shiny”, as a middle-aged woman described one of the value-add stalls, or had different staff rather than regular stallholders each market, or products that were deemed too expensive. Local food was therefore conceived not only in terms of locality, quality, and immediacy, but also in customer interactions with stallholders. Therefore, local food at this market meant more than simply a local shopping experience as Paul had suggested.

### **The Weekly Market Experience: Melbourne Showgrounds Farmers’ Market**

The Showgrounds Farmers’ Market began during my field research, and so I was able to observe and document the flows of the market from the start. The decline of this market at its first location, and its move to another location at the end of my field research, illustrated the importance of an aesthetically pleasing and accessible setting for successful markets, as analysed in Chapter Seven.

The market was based, as the name suggests, at the Melbourne Showgrounds. The Showgrounds covered a large hillside in the inner western suburbs. While the Showgrounds had a grand, large entrance on a main road at the foot of the hill, there was no indication at this gate that there was a Farmers’ Market on the grounds, just a small sign hanging from the fence line, barely visible to passing traffic. To enter this market, a customer had to travel uphill for 1.4km up a side street that followed the curve of the grounds.

Even from this side road, this market was obscured from view. The road continued up and over the hill, though a smaller road lined with houses followed the curve of the Showgrounds compound. Following this road, it was only when customers arrived at the very last gate, Gate 7, which opened into a large gravel car park, that they enter the premises. If they drove, here a Showgrounds employee charged them \$3 for car parking unless they were a ‘carrot club member’ of the market. On parking at the top of the hill, customers could then enter the grounds through a large steel fence to walk back towards Gate 5 and finally see the market.



Old Showground sheds, recently restored, lined either side of their walk. A raised green platform, lined with red brick walls and covered with artificial grass, sat between the sheds. Looking downhill from the car park, customers saw different coloured marquees lining a gravel path. Opposite this path was another artificial grass area, with a large tree and wooden benches obscuring the view of another car park filled with stallholder vehicles, behind which sat the large steel fence of the Showgrounds compound. At the end of this path was a large refurbished shed, its glass wall open. While a few marquees lined the path, the majority of this market was inside this shed. Stalls were set up down a small step in a rectangle in the centre of the shed, and so the back of some stalls was visible at the entrance. The colour of the stalls and their produce contrasted with their stark, concrete surroundings. Tables and chairs sparsely lined the centre of the market space.



**Figure 9: Concrete surroundings at the Showgrounds Farmers' Market**

The market size ranged between 25 and 50 stalls, with 20 to 200 customers at any one time. Each stall besides the coffee stall displayed a VFMA Accreditation sign. Some days the market was consistently busy, others the crowds were noticeably sparse. From the start, there was a dedicated group of loyal customers who attended nearly every week, spread out throughout the day. Other regular customers attended every two or three weeks, enjoying a gourmet market breakfast from the resident chef, a coffee and time with friends or family. The market struggled with issues of accessibility, particularly on days with events at the Showgrounds when parking was limited and traffic a serious issue. Some days, customers had to explain to Showgrounds staff that they were

Farmers' Market customers or else pay \$10 or \$12 festival parking fees. At almost all of the markets, from the first until the last, I spoke to customers who were local to the suburb visiting for the first time that had only just discovered the market. Nevertheless, being weekly, the market developed a loyal following. It had a friendly, communal atmosphere, as customers both attending for brief weekly shopping trips and stayed for breakfast and coffees, sitting at tables provided by the market organiser either inside or out on the artificial lawn.

Large blackboards in the shape of a pear, a pig, and a piece of Swiss cheese, covered in colourful pictures, information and slogans, greeted customers as they entered the market space. Signs lined the outside path with the symbol of the Showgrounds Farmers Market, and other signs claiming this to be an accredited market. One of the chalk boards explained that all products here are "straight from the farm, no middle man", another simply stated "we grow it, we make it", to which the reply "we love it!" was scrawled on the base of the sign.

As a fundraiser for the VFMA, customers could elect to become "market members" for a small fee. In return, stallholders, reluctantly, were asked to give these customers a set discount. Many stalls displayed laminated signs with the "weekly carrot club discount" handwritten on them, though these were not always immediately visible.

Inside the market, what was most striking were mounds of vibrant colours from at least three different vegetable stalls; large stalls overflowing with mountains of multiple-coloured produce, in greens, purples, orange and red. For such a small market, these stalls stood out vibrantly. Citrus and apple stalls dominated the far left corner of the market space, with several different meat producers at the opposite end of the market joining ready-to-eat quiches, hot and take-home pies, and jam, honey, egg and cake stalls in-between.

I noted the characteristics of many customers that frequented the market as market days progressed. Middle aged women were the most frequent visitors to the market, with or without their partners, some with children and some with dogs on leashes. A considerable proportion of customers were young adults in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties, shopping alone, as couples or as young families with pre-school and primary school aged children. Some met friends for coffee or breakfast. Some brought trolleys and shopped for all their essential groceries for the week, whereas others would only buy a few select vegetables and treats. While this market, with the appeal of a breakfast stall, good coffee and children's activities, maintained a festive environment, it gradually transformed into a market where customers gathered essential ingredients from select stalls and then left to continue their day, with few customers staying longer than an hour. Value-add stallholders maintained loyal customers, but their presence became less frequent, as specialty items were not required every week, so they struggled to make enough to cover their stallholder fee. Except for times when customer numbers were scarce, the market maintained a friendly, community atmosphere.

The Showgrounds market experience differed considerably from two market experiences described above. Firstly, the market predominantly focussed on fresh produce. Very few specialty stalls attended every week, as they were used to occasional markets where customers travelled to make special purchases, with most sticking to a monthly or fortnightly market schedule. The gourmet

market breakfast, buskers, cooking demonstrations and 'kids club' provided the festive environment promoted by the monthly markets, but with the market located inside a large concrete shed surrounded by artificial grass and one solitary tree, it did not provide the same beautiful, outdoor, natural 'country' environment found at other markets.

The VFMA Accreditation was not only visibly promoted through 'ticks' displayed at nearly at every stall, but also through multiple A-frame signs, blackboards and the VFMA-branded managers tent full of promotional material regarding the Accreditation program. Market staff spoke about Accreditation to customers, and primary producer stallholders entered into many conversations regarding their farms, their land or their farming practices with customers. However, this did not discourage accusations of re-selling. For example, a large 'shop-like' stall that was at the market for the first few months elicited many stallholder and customer conversations after its sudden disappearance from the market scene, with accusations of re-selling rife, particularly from other vegetable stallholders.

However, while the market was set up to provide customers a place to do their 'weekly shop', it was not an easy market to access, and many customers resented that the Showgrounds venue charged for parking or that there were often long lines of cars for other events run at the same locale. This set up was not conducive to a relaxed 'weekly essentials' shopping experience. Frustratingly, regular shoppers also found that the market frequently missed some basic shopping 'ingredients' such as eggs or milk after the first few months as stallholders elected to attend the market fortnightly or monthly instead of weekly, which meant that further trips to local shops were required to 'fill in' missing items. So while the Accreditation's definition of local restricted the types of stalls that could attend the market, some customers were more concerned that this meant they were unable to do all their shopping in one place.

This frustration revealed another definition of local food by many of the participants. While many reiterated their distrust of supermarket produce, they spoke positively about shopping at a nearby local green grocer, the local butcher and the Queen Victoria Market<sup>29</sup>, all not far from this market locale, particularly when it came to 'filling in' missing essentials. For example, while speaking to a regular customer one morning, she enthusiastically preached the benefits of supporting local farmers at the Farmers' Market. Then, without hesitation, she started to talk as enthusiastically about the wonders of buying 'cheap' produce from a large wholesale market in a nearby suburb, declaring "I love a bargain. The Queen Vic Markets are just great, aren't they? So many lovely local goodies!" For this customer, both places were considered 'good' locations to find local food, despite the fact that wholesalers, not farmers, sold local, interstate and imported produce at the Queen Victoria Market. Buying local through supporting local businesses, not just 'farmers' or the direct producer-to-consumer experience, was seen by this participant as following a local food philosophy, and so such shopping was not excluded by their patronage of the local Farmers' Market.

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<sup>29</sup> The Queen Victoria Market is a central market located at the northern end of Melbourne's CBD. Consisting of different sections that sell fresh produce, fresh meat and seafood, cheeses and smallgoods, hot food and an expansive undercover bric-a-brac market, the QVM is both a venue frequented by local shoppers and an iconic tourist destination in Melbourne. See: <http://www.qvm.com.au/>

## Conclusion

Farmers' Markets promoted themselves as places where customers could find local foods direct from the producers. However, this customer experience varied considerably at the different markets. Even the way in which a customer entered the market could influence the atmosphere of the market, and how customers spent their time and their money.

The ways in which the market experience was shaped by the location of the market was evident in the way that customers shopped at the markets. They could be a place to buy special 'treats', meet friends or family, have a bite to eat, or places where one could simply shop for everyday ingredients. It is important to note that these markets changed over time. Most specifically, at the weekly market, where unpredictability of stalls led to a decline in customers, and the eventual moving of the market to a school yard five kilometres from its original location. Customer loyalty needed to be reciprocated by stallholders, will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

Many of the ethnographic examples used throughout this thesis came from these particular markets. However, as I visited as many Victorian markets as possible during my field research, I have also included examples from different locales that were particularly noteworthy. By expanding my observations and interviews, I was able to both look at the markets more generally, and define clearly the characteristics of the markets, and customers, that were unique to those individual markets.

Farmers' Market branding champions the consumption of local foods. However, in such promotions, exactly what counts as local food is left to the beholder. This Chapter has introduced some of the many ways that local food was understood by participants at different Farmers' Markets in Melbourne, problematizing the 'local food is good food' assumption inherent in all Farmers' Market branding. However, this was just a starting point. What remains is to examine what it is that makes these different understandings of what is local and local food equally valid within the sphere of the Farmers' Market brand. By focusing on primary producers, the next Chapter will analyse the stories that are told by stallholders and shared by customers as goods are bought and sold at the markets that specifically connect the produce, and the producers, to the local countryside.

## Chapter Four: Who Belongs at a Farmers Market?

In 2009, prior to this research, two articles appeared in the national rural newspaper *The Weekly Times* that sent shockwaves through Melbourne's Farmers' Market community. The articles, titled "Farmers' Market Con Job", and "Stalls not All Run by Farmers" (White, 2009, 2009a), were based on comments from one farming stallholder who claimed that 'fake' farmers were attending Melbourne's Farmers' Markets. These 'fake' farmers, it was alleged, were re-selling produce purchased elsewhere for inflated prices. *The Weekly Times* was frequently read by Farmers' Market stallholders, particularly those from rural Victoria, but not widely read in Melbourne's suburbs. Nevertheless, the publication of these articles was attributed by stallholders, market managers and VFMA staff as the impetus behind the VFMA Accreditation Program.

This chapter examines reactions to the VFMA Accreditation Program from the perspective of stallholder and market manager participants. The VFMA Accreditation Program appeared to set out, in no uncertain terms, what is and isn't allowed at a Farmers' Market. However, through detailed ethnographic descriptions of both an Accreditation workshop held at the VFMA office in August 2010 and from markets throughout Victoria, this chapter demonstrates that such concepts were contested within the Farmers' Market community. Participants created hierarchies of legitimacy among producers, where others were deemed more or less legitimate, based on not only what they produced but also who they were and how their businesses were assumed to operate. This was observed both at this meeting as well as at the markets, where those that were not involved in the VFMA or were against accreditation altogether voiced their opinions.

I utilise the term 'hierarchies of legitimacy' because authenticity was not viewed as binary by participants at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets. Rather, stallholder legitimacy was viewed in terms of 'more' or 'less'. For example, while farming primary producers were viewed highly in terms of their place at the markets, farms that were too large or too small were often derided as 'unfair', usurpers that unfairly compromised 'real' farmers from making a profit by competing with them at the markets. Similarly, while value-add producers tended to be situated lower in hierarchies of legitimacy, products that fit with stallholder perceptions of Farmers' Markets and what their customers would find desirable could be viewed as more legitimate than those that sold wares that participants could easily find elsewhere.

These hierarchies of legitimacy, while differing greatly amongst participants, revealed assumptions held not only of farming and small business but also about the customers that the markets served. For just as customers sought the 'right' kind of producers or the 'right' kind of product, stallholders sought out the 'right' kind of customers that could be attracted to the 'right' kind of market. The right 'market mix' attracted the right customers and ensured that all stalls could make a profit without unfair competition, which could therefore ensure their own business survival. A sentiment repeated constantly was that, as one stallholder commented, "we [Farmers' Markets] have to differentiate ourselves from other markets", for "we have to be different or we're doomed to failure." Ensuring that Farmers' Markets only contained legitimate producers was therefore essential to the survival of everyone's businesses.

As the opinions in this Chapter on Accreditation and the legitimacy of other stallholders were given in confidence, all examples utilised in this Chapter have been de-identified<sup>30</sup> in consideration of participants that are still involved in Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.

## **Authenticity and Farmers' Markets**

According to Charles Lindholm, "Authenticity gathers people together in collectives that are felt to be real, essential, and vital, providing participants with meaning, unity and a surpassing sense of belonging" (Lindholm, 2008: 1). Lindholm described the search for authenticity in consumption as a part of the modern capitalist consumer landscape (Lindholm, 2008: 53). 'Authenticity' at Farmers' Markets refers to the inclusion of direct producer-to-consumer sales and the sale of only local produce, though definitions of local vary, external certification of 'organic' produce, and the exclusion of resellers (AFMA, 2010a: 1). Internationally, many Farmers' Market organisations go further by excluding arts and crafts, imposing restrictions on the ingredients used in value-added products such as cakes, and limiting the size and type of farm allowed to participate, to encourage small farm participation or environmentally friendly produce (Alkon, 2008: 488). This is believed to ensure a separate, specific identity, and that the name "Farmers' Market" remains differentiated from other produce and craft markets. This view is emphasised in the passionate belief that a lack of adherence to common rules will "cheapen the brand" of Farmers' Markets for all (Alkon, 2008: 488).

Accreditation programs for Farmers' Markets, based on the above criteria, have been pursued in the United Kingdom (FARMA, 2010: 6), New Zealand (FMNZ, 2009:1) and in some areas of the United States (CFCFM, 2009:1) and Canada (FMO, 2009:1). All programs emphasise "authenticity" as a value or aim. This form of authentication has been likened to organic certification programs, as Smithers and Joseph noted:

"The broad rationale for certification is well established and has been played out in detail in the realm of organic food. Its purpose, generically, is a good one—to provide assurance to consumers that the food product they are purchasing is what it purports to be—and to protect certified farmer-vendors from the fraudulent actions of competitors...However, its ability to permit inferences concerning the legitimacy or authenticity of individual "organic" producers is problematic." (Smithers & Joseph, 2009: 4)

Accreditation programs have arisen out of concerns that the rapid rise of Farmers' Markets has led to dishonest business dealings that tarnish the 'brand' (Smithers & Joseph, 2009: 1). Farmers' Markets do not always 'live up' to consumer expectations, though producer and consumer expectations have been found to differ greatly, particularly between economic and environmental interests (Alkon, 2008a: 272). This is particularly evident over concern with resellers claiming to be producers and selling at markets for inflated prices, which has been evidenced in markets in New Zealand (Lawson et al, 2008:11-25), Canada (Smithers & Joseph, 2009: 1-11), the United Kingdom (Shears, 2010: 206) and the United States (Andreatta & Wickliffe, 2002: 173). Certification has arisen out these disparities between ideology and practice, expressed as a need to "protect the integrity" of the Farmers' Market brand (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000: 288).

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<sup>30</sup> Due to the sensitive nature of this topic within the Farmers' Market community, utilising pseudonyms was not considered enough to deidentify participants in this chapter. Therefore, descriptions are utilised instead of naming individual participants.

## Melbourne's Farmers' Market Stallholders

According to the VFMA, true Farmers' Markets cater specifically for farmers, as their 2009 statement regarding Accreditation made clear:

"An authentic farmers' market in Victoria is defined as a predominantly fresh food and produce market that operates regularly at a public location, which in turn provides a suitable environment for farmers and food producers to sell their farm origin product and/or associated value added primary products directly to customers." (VFMA, 2009b: 1)

The VFMA Accreditation divides stallholders broadly into two categories, primary producers and 'value-adders' (VFMA, 2009b:1), distinguished at the markets via their Accreditation signage with either a black 'tick' (primary producer) or brown 'tick' (value-adder). Stallholders categorised as such could apply for Accreditation if their stall fit into one of four categories: Farm Based Fruit and Vegetable Producer, Meat and Dairy Producer, Non-farm based Artisan Producers of Food and/or Drinks (also described as Value Added Food Producer), or Shared Farm-Based Stall. Strict limitations were constructed around the fourth category of stallholder:

"Stallholders will be able to apply for accreditation under one of four groups. Each group will have its own self assessment [sic] verification form. The groups are as follows:

1. Individual growers of farm based fresh fruit and vegetables. This group will also cover nuts, honey, herbs, plant/flowers and value added produce where the main ingredient is from the maker's own farm.
2. Individual farmers of farm based meat and dairy produce including eggs, fish and value added produce where the main ingredient is from the maker's own farm.

Farmers accredited under 1 and 2 will also be able to sell non-food based products made by them using produce from their own farm, provided this is not more than 10% of the goods sold on the stall. The product must contain at least 50% of the raw farm ingredient and must be only one step in the value added process from the raw e.g. spun wool, hide, olive oil soap, bees wax candles etc.

3. A shared farm stall may be proposed by a group of up to 4 growers from the same region who may not have the resources or produce available to operate a whole market stall each. A successful group may trade at a VFMA accredited market for the duration of one year, the aim being that after this period each producer will be in a position to trade under their own name.

Applications will be considered if:

- It is a genuine share arrangement with no reselling allowed
- The applicants fit into groups 1 and/or 2. An application is made by a lead farmer who is representing the group, all strictly from a local region. The 'local region' is defined as a Regional Development Victoria (RDV) region, a council shire, or an 100km radius from the lead farmer making the application
- The application is transparent in its detail, including that all farmers involved: sign an agreement not to re-sell; have produce clearly labelled from its origin

farm; commit to attend markets on a rotational basis with a representative from each farm attending at least one market in ten.

- There are no more than four growers involved, and each farm agrees to have a site visit.

The share farm stall classification will be reviewed on an annual basis.

#### 4. Value-added artisan food and/or drinks product (not farm based)

Applications must illustrate the following points:

- product must be made from scratch from raw ingredients
- product must be made, brewed, pickled, baked or smoked in Victoria, preferably in the local region
- the ingredients should be sourced from other stallholders, local producers in the area or within Victoria
- At least one person selling at the market must be involved in the business and have an intimate knowledge of the produce

All other stalls such as ‘food to go’ (coffee, community sausage sizzles etc.) or other (confectioners, spice blenders etc.) may not meet accreditation guidelines and would have to attend in the percentage of unaccredited stalls ie [sic] 10% in the city, 25% in regional Victoria, provided they are not re-packagers or re-sellers.” (VFMA, 2009b: 1-2)

While the criteria for these categories were modified during the course of this fieldwork, the categories themselves did not change. These categories clearly stated a desire for Farmers’ Markets to focus on primary produce, with re-packaging of any type of food and non-food items strictly prohibited:

“In line with the currently adopted charter, the following will not be allowed at a VFMA accredited farmers’ market, or at a market which is a member of the Association:

- Re-sellers of fruit, vegetables or any other farm based product
- Re-packagers of any food or drink
- Art and Craft stalls
- Bric-a-brac stalls” (VFMA, 2009b: 1)

While value-adders were a valued part of Melbourne’s Farmers’ Market, in this model, primary producers, specifically farmers, were prioritised. However, in practice, these categories were not as clear-cut as Accreditation suggested. Stallholders created far more elaborate categorisations. Legitimacy was constructed in terms of ‘more’ or ‘less’, in stark contrast to the VFMA’s either/or approach, which led to ‘grey areas’ in the Accreditation program.

A hierarchy of legitimacy was the most evident in people’s opinions on who should be allowed at a Farmers’ Market. For example, a primary producer stallholder associated with the VFMA declared, while complaining about a ‘value-adder’ that they felt did not belong at their market, that:

“Farmers’ Markets are for farmers! The rest ... they just support them, bring in customers ... [value-adders] can’t take away anything from the farmers or what’s the point?”



Other VFMA-associated stallholders, including value-add and primary producers, frequently reinforced the sentiment that farmers' markets were primarily for 'farmers'. This contrasted with the view of local food emphasised by commercial Farmers' Market operators as set out in the previous Chapter. However, this went further. Through expressing their support or disapproval of different stalls, I was able to build a picture of more or less legitimate stalls as described by different participants. For example, a value-add stallholder, a fan of Accreditation that attended VFMA-Accredited inner city markets, explained:

"The markets, they're for farmers, you know, farmers doing the right thing ... Some of them value-add too and that's good ... then there's people like me that value-add, but we use local ... you know, we're doing it for them [the farmers], we can take what they've got and make it something people come back for, you know ... Then we have all the Slow Food peeps [people] with their traditional goods ... it's really important that people get to try different things there, celebrate difference you know, that's all part of it ... good gourmet foods, stuff you can't get elsewhere because it doesn't work elsewhere with economies of scale and all the rest ... But it's not just that, it's got to be about the farmers before anything else you know?"

Later on in the same conversation, the stallholder clarified their position on stalls that were not as legitimate:

"Of course you get the big guys [large farms] and the really little guys [hobby farmers] ... I'm not against them myself, some of the farmers' have a bit of an issue with them but I figure that as long as they do the work they get in right ... But ... at some of the other markets, you get these value-adders ... you might as well be in a shop, right? Food from factories, who knows what's in them ... that's not what people come to the markets for, you know?"

For this stallholder, farmers "doing the right thing" were the most legitimate stalls at the market, followed by value-adders that were either primary producers or 'helped' farming stallholders by utilising their produce. Value-adders that were unique, culturally diverse or produced artisan products were viewed as adding to the experience of the markets, whereas stalls that sold processed "food from factories" were not only seen as less legitimate but were also damaging to the Farmers' Market brand. These opinions were framed in terms of customer preferences, that is, that the stallholder was simply reiterating what they felt that customers wanted out of their Farmers' Market shopping experience. Their opinions were therefore granted the authority of being 'better for business' and 'giving the customers what they want', as the commercial operator who had reached very different conclusions had claimed in the previous Chapter.

However, even these hierarchies were not consistent and were highly dependent on the relationships between different producers, the market management, the market and stallholder's affiliation with the VFMA, the proximity of stalls and competition between products sold. On another occasion, the same stallholder spoke disparagingly about another stallholder that, while as both a farmer and value-add producer, aligned with their view of legitimate stalls, was seen as "trying to do too much", which therefore created "unfair" competition for other stalls that only sold a few similar items "as their whole business". While this stall fit within the VFMA Accreditation guidelines that the stallholder supported, fairness and the need to not impede another stalls ability to make a "fair" income was prioritised over their status as primary producers.

Attributes of honesty, quality, trust and greed were brought up frequently when participants discussed the legitimacy of other stalls. Sometimes these comments were explicitly utilised to declare that other stalls should not be at the markets, but more often their use was strategic, as conversations suggested that some other stalls were worth questioning. For example, a vegetable producer hinted that another “shouldn’t have pumpkin this time of year” in early summer, whereas another asked “if those behind the stall know anything about them pastries they’re selling”, suggesting that they were the paid staff for a larger business and not artisan producers. I was told to question any primary producers whose goods came from boxes “with names that don’t match the name of their farm”, as it was suggested that those boxes were purchased via the wholesale market, making the stallholder a reseller. Some stallholders, knowing of such accusations, went to lengths to explain how they sold some of their wares to the larger farms named on the boxes or used second-hand boxes.

The legitimacy of stallholders was also demonstrated in comments regarding the quality of other stallholder products, as goods were described as “old” or “out of season” or conversely as “too clean” or packaged to be “straight from the ground”. Others questioned the size of farms in relation to the produce they sold, as one stallholder commented: ““Oh come on. You know how big their farm is. You know. There is no way – no way - they could do that many markets and still have produce ... You know it, right?”

At other times, I was actively warned by surrounding stallholders when they viewed my interactions with stallholders that were considered less than legitimate. For example, other vegetable stallholders quickly informed me that another stall was nothing more than “a fruit and veg shop ... I mean, he even has sweet potato, and you know that they don’t grow in Victoria.” Similarly, a stall that sold cuts of meat was pointed out as “a butcher shop” that had “no place at the market ... you go ask them, you ask them where their meat comes from, betcha they’ve got no idea.”

Rumours and gossip circulated around different groups at the Farmers Markets. These stories were spread around the city and country markets, for example a farmer could be condemned or saved by producers from their own regional area. The mobility of stallholders, attending many Accredited and non-Accredited markets throughout the monthly market schedule, allowed the circulation of stories of “dodgy” stallholders to travel quickly through the state.

Stallholders consistently indicated to me how hard they worked in order to suggest that they were the most legitimate of market stallholders. Hard work was even used as justification by a vegetable producer for their ‘occasional’ reselling of produce at non-Accredited Farmers’ Market that they attended, for while they were hard-working legitimate farmers who only sold their own wares at Accredited markets, it was “obvious” that their competitors were reselling at other markets and that was “hurting” their business. The notion of hard work as a marker of legitimacy, particularly in relation to farming, is analysed in depth in Chapter Five.

Stallholders sought to defend themselves from suggestions that they did not belong at Farmers’ Markets. For example, I heard complaints from stallholders who felt they were labelled as dishonest or targeted for visits by the VFMA due to their nationality, that they attended “the wrong market” or

did not “know anyone on the panel”, or alternatively, thought that other stallholders received favourable treatment because of “who they know”. A farmer with an Italian background felt that his family were mistrusted and seen as resellers, as he lamented “people think we own a fruit shop or something, just because we’re Italian you know.”

This farmers’ story further complicates constructions of ethnicity and legitimacy at the markets. As mentioned in the previous chapter, a producers’ ethnicity, particularly claims to an Italian heritage, could offer legitimacy to producers that specialised in produce and products that were considered traditional. However, this farmers concern was not the opinions of their customers, but the attitudes of other producers and market managers. When I interviewed this farmer and his family members at their farm, they spoke of the difficulties they had experienced entering the produce market in the post war period when Australian farming was still predominately ‘white’, and hinted at “issues” through the 1980s and 1990s in the wholesale market between “older farms” and “some Italians” meant that “all Italians” were distrusted by some in Victoria.

While other primary producers of Italian heritage did not share such concerns with me, hints at “troubles” historically in the wholesale market were inferred by many, though the stories I was told I was also informed specifically by participants that they were not to be shared or used in this thesis. However, issues of legitimacy and ethnicity were also evident in who was missing at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets. While market gardeners of Vietnamese decent did farm near Melbourne, I did not meet any who sold at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets. While such producers were not excluded, and many market managers I spoke to sought to celebrate diversity in stallholders to lend legitimacy to ‘traditional’ foods and produce, the absence of farmers and produce from non-European backgrounds further indicates perceptions of Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets as white, middle class spaces.

Many of the stories I was told of different producers did not reflect my personal experiences at the farms which were brought into question. I later discovered that many stories I was told were to do with rivalries between different producers, some of which had a long history of family conflict, even going back generations. Similarly, I was acutely aware of stallholders that attempted to persuade me of their own legitimacy or of others illegitimacy, despite my assurances that I was not there to ascertain whether or not they were ‘real’ farmers or to judge their food production businesses, but rather was far more interested in the notion of more or less legitimate producers itself.

## **Responses to the VFMA Accreditation Program**

Responses to the Accreditation Program were mixed amongst stallholders in my field research, and some participants changed their opinions over time. There were stallholders that strongly supported Accreditation. Many farmer participants, however, believed that the Accreditation was not tough enough. This was particularly true for many vegetable producers that I visited, who argued that others farms should not have received Accreditation, or complained that the VFMA “never checked their farm” and so could not be relied upon to check others. Other stallholders informed me that they were not against Accreditation per se but argued against the process, or expressed the opinion that the VFMA were “city folk” who did not understand farming and so could not judge legitimate

and “dodgy” stalls, despite farmer representation on the Accreditation Panel. Other stallholders saw the VFMA as unnecessary “red tape” and more people “making their money” off of the stallholders “hard work”. “Everyone’s got their hand in your pocket ... as a small business ... the council, the taxman, the bloody VFMA, the lot of ‘em” declared one particularly irate stallholder.

Many ‘value adders’ indicated their frustration with the Accreditation process. The process was seen as cumbersome, as some made a large range of products and complained that it would take ‘forever’ to write down all ingredients that they used in all of their products. Others found the process confusing, especially those for whom English was a second language. Some stallholders argued that the issue of using local ingredients was not as clear-cut as the Accreditation process assumed. For example, ingredients such as Victorian-grown organic flour were not available, and other recipes used a lot of sugar or ingredients such as banana or cocoa that could not be grown in Victoria. Some told me in interviews that they were told by the VFMA Accreditation Officer to “add another product with a local ingredient and you’ll get through” the 100-point system, and I observed this myself when conducting participant-observation fieldwork in the VFMA office. The cost of using local ingredients was particularly remarked upon by value-add stallholders who either did not attempt Accreditation or had had their applications rejected.

Visitations to farms and kitchens by Accreditation Panel members were limited, which frustrated many supporters, particularly as the year progressed and concessions in the Accreditation rules were made. I frequently heard comments from stallholders such as “they [other stallholders] could just make it all up on the forms”. Concessions were made throughout the year that either pleased or displeased stallholders, as allowances were made for pet food stalls and non-food plant seedling stalls, and long standing stallholders began to be expelled from VFMA Accredited markets.

The insistence in the VFMA Accreditation Program rules that ingredients of products needed to be completely local, rather than simply the products themselves being made by a local producer, and not just key ingredients but all ingredients, reflected a very particular viewpoint on what was considered ‘local food’, one that was constantly contested and debated in the field. On the other hand, it was almost universally accepted by my participants that only Victorian food products should be sold at Victorian Farmers Markets, but as we have seen in Chapter 3, opinions differed as to what counted as local food.

## **The VFMA Accreditation Workshop**

The VFMA Accreditation Workshop on the 30<sup>th</sup> August 2010 was held to flag potential changes to the Accreditation rules following difficulties and complaints with the programs’ initial roll out. This meeting allowed some of the debates surrounding Accreditation at the markets to be discussed. This meeting is analysed here alongside examples from the markets, to provide insight into constructions of legitimacy at the markets.

While all VFMA member stallholders and market managers were allowed to attend, a room and catering was organised for up to 20 people at the Abbotsford Convent in inner suburban Melbourne. The meeting was held on a Monday to allow stallholders from further afield to stay in town after

their weekend markets to attend. As country stallholders tended to travel home after weekend markets, the meeting was more accessible to city-based ‘value-adders’ and primary producers from properties near town, or those with minimal time needed on their properties. Many producer stallholders worked in other jobs during the week, or returned to their farms, or had Monday as their ‘weekend day’ of the week. Stallholders with larger businesses did not always travel into Melbourne to attend markets, electing to send staff or family members ‘down’ for the weekend. Therefore, the attendees of this meeting were limited and not reflective of the overall Farmers’ Market stallholder community.

The meeting was advertised at VFMA markets. While I did not observe VFMA staff at other non-Accredited markets in the weekends before the meeting, I saw some stallholders at the meeting that did not attend any accredited markets, which indicated word had spread through other communication channels as well as stallholder networks as individuals attended various markets throughout Melbourne.

The meeting was held directly after a VFMA Committee Meeting. As committee members, consisting of stallholders and market managers, and VFMA staff entered the room, stallholders trickled in, mingling and chatting while they enjoyed tea, coffee and biscuits. I was given permission to observe and note, but not record, the meeting.

Stallholders were in attendance in addition to committee members, many of whom were also stallholders, as well as market managers from urban and rural markets, the committee chairperson and four VFMA staff. Value-adders were the minority at this meeting, and as the meeting started I noted that primary producer participants congregated at the front of the room, whereas value-stallholders sat towards the back. All were informed of my presence at the meeting. The chairperson sat at the front of the room at a table with VFMA staff, looking back at rows of forward-facing chairs.

Farming participants sat in the front rows, taking prominent positions in the front row and in seats next to the central aisle. This group included farmers that value-add, such as a cheese maker who was also a dairy farmer. Value-add producers, mostly cake and other specialty makers from the inner-city markets sat further back in the room. Market managers were interspersed throughout the room. I noticed one stallholder that does not attend any inner-city markets, a young vegetarian curry producer of Indian descent, who sat in the far back corner of the room. The only other producer in the back row was a woman that I had not seen at the markets before but soon discovered that she operated a specialty baked goods stall at several markets. Young staff from her catering business manned her stalls at the various markets.

A new VFMA staff member for Accreditation introduced himself, stating his experiences with the FARMA Accreditation model in the United Kingdom,<sup>31</sup> and then presented a PowerPoint presentation on the VFMA’s Accreditation model. This included suggestions that the VFMA adopt the New Zealand model of “Accredited” and “Approved” stalls,<sup>32</sup> providing space for leniency for value-add producers that did not currently meet the VFMA Accreditation guidelines, particularly for

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.farma.org.uk/certification-farmers-market/>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.farmersmarkets.org.nz/>

regional markets. In addition to this, items to be discussed included: Non-food products at stalls, Shared farm stalls, and ongoing VFMA Accreditation Fees. He explained that committee members would facilitate discussion, led by the chairperson.

The key points of discussion at the meeting are analysed below, however overall it was clear that those present wished to tighten rules regarding Accreditation, rather than modify them to accommodate other stallholders. Constantly, it was emphasised that Farmers' Markets needed to differentiate themselves from other types of markets, labelled "trash markets" repetitively through this meeting. At one stage, the chairperson declared that "we're not going to try to compete with the likes of those wholesale cheap-as-chips places, we're going to be better, not cheaper, and if they [customers] don't like it, they can shop somewhere else."

The uniqueness of Farmers' Markets was paramount to all discussions surrounding Accreditation. At this meeting, participants emphasised that "we [Farmers' Markets] have to differentiate ourselves from other markets", for "we have to be different or we're doomed to failure." When a stallholder suggested that "people think Farmer's Markets are becoming elitist", her concerns were quickly dismissed as a "myth". "Elitist is a bit of an urban myth" noted one farming stallholder, "Yeah, one of those concept myths" agreed another. Education, it was decided, was what was needed to 'debunk' this myth for, as a committee member declared, "we shouldn't apologise for high standards." This was despite frequent complaints from non-VFMA Accredited market managers and stallholders who claimed that the VFMA's rules catered only to an exclusive inner-city clique and presented 'unrealistic' challenges for suburban and rural markets.

Suggested leniency for value-add stallholders was met with dissent. Primary producers at the meeting toughened their stance on shared-farm stalls, fearing "supermarket style super stalls" that could damage their businesses. Primary producer participants dominated discussions, with value-add participants relegated to a supporting role. This was particularly clear when a specialty baked goods producer declared: "we know how hard farmers work ... we are humbled, we are riding off the backs of farmers, but we bring people to the market", reminding those present that without value-add stallholders, the markets may not attract the customers that were so vital to the farming stallholders' survival.

While the discussions at this meeting reflected some observed discussions at VFMA Accredited markets, they were not representative of the views of other participants from other markets or organisations. Therefore, examples taken from this meeting are contrasted with ethnographic examples from markets throughout Victoria. At this time, I noted that as Accreditation progressed, it excluded more and more existing markets and stallholders from the VFMA model. I could not fathom Regional Farmers' Markets or In Seasons markets accommodating the expectations set at this meeting and since then none of their markets have received Accreditation. Nevertheless, this meeting provided an insight into market relationships and power dynamics between farm-based producers and value-add specialty producers, and between different types of Farmers' Markets, making explicit assumptions of who did and did not belong at a 'true' Farmers' Market.

## The 'Right' Kind of Farmer

That Farmers' Markets were for farmers was undisputed, and market managers and stallholders reiterated this statement at every market I visited. However, interactions revealed that not all farmers were considered the 'right kind' of farmer to be at the Farmers' Markets.

### Hobby Farms

Negative comments were frequently made regarding stallholders perceived as 'hobby farmers' at the markets, that is, producers who appeared to only sell at the markets as a side-business. While at least one partner in many farming couples were employed off-farm, small-scale producers that were seen as "backyard operations" for otherwise full-time employed or retired individuals that sold a limited range at the markets, particularly fruit and vegetables. These producers were described by other stallholders, to me and to other stallholders, as "dodgy", "taking our business", as "not real farmers" and "just here for fun", all with an element of disdain. Similarly, the very term "hobby farmer" was seen as negative in discussions between different stallholders. As I heard a farming stallholder say to a cake producer one Saturday morning at an inner-city market, "She's just a hobby farmer, look at her. She doesn't need to be here, she's just taking our customers."

Farms that were considered too small to supply markets were subject to insinuations of reselling. For example, at a visit to a vegetable producer's farm, as we stood on a hill surveying their property, the farmer took the opportunity to demonstrate the amount of land, and work, needed to 'really' supply Melbourne's Farmers' Markets:

"We only wholesale [two product lines]. All the rest is for Farmers' Markets and veggie boxes. You might want to get a picture of this [gestures to whole farm]. Two, four, six – it's not even nine Farmers' markets a month! So those people with only six acres that say they do it all – they're having a lend of ya! [laughs]."

The size of the farm or business considered a 'hobby' varied considerably. For example, some primary producers only had a limited season, and small-scale producers of products such as olive oil were often retired or worked full time in other vocations. However, disparaging comments were only made regarding such producers if the market manager had "allowed" too many stallholders to attend a market. For example, a stallholder informed me that at weekly markets there should only be one olive oil producer as "people don't buy it every week". Similarly, no more than two olive oil stalls were considered suitable at monthly markets, as any more would "eat into the profits" of all stalls, making the market "not worth it" for all concerned. However, in this instance, the stallholder regarded large olive oil producers as the ones that did not belong at the markets. "They don't need to be here ... they sell in shops ... the little guys ... we need the markets ... they don't need the markets, and they're taking all the best places [at the best markets]."

So while small-scale artisan producers of products such as olive oil were considered favourably, small operations selling primary produce, particularly fruit and vegetables, were viewed far more harshly. This was evident at the VFMA Accreditation meeting when participants discussed the possibility of Shared Farm Stalls.

When the VFMA staff member suggested that Shared Farm Stalls could help regional markets encourage local producers to attend their markets, farming participants reacted angrily to the suggestion. One stallholder commented that “backyard farmers undermines real farmers ... hasn’t cost them anything [to grow the produce, attend the market] ... you need to limit the number of farmers that can come together ... there was a stall like that at Booroondara and it was like a supermarket!” Following this, an urban market manager replied “I agree wholeheartedly. If they can’t be there as producers, then they shouldn’t be there at all.” This sentiment was met with agreement in the room, leading the VFMA staff member to assure those present that they would be “farmers, not backyarders”. As the conversation continued, stallholders questioned the motives and necessity for such stalls:

“When we started we came down, paid \$50 [stallholder fee], just sold [one type of product]. That’s it.”

“For what reason? Why can’t people commit to one market a month?”

“If we had someone else selling our [meat product], then they wouldn’t know about it, would they ... I mean, that’s the point, isn’t it.”

“[A country market manager] told me that shared stalls are a nightmare with regs [regulations] and the council ... I mean, what if something was contaminated? ... Who’s to blame then?”

One small-scale certified organic producer, who had often been the target of the derogatory “hobby farmer” label due to the limited size of her property and range of goods sold at the market, suggested that stallholders could “split their stall for half a year” with another producer if they struggled with monthly markets. It is worth noting that many stalls at the market were seasonal, and only attended the markets during the limited season of their produce, but these were not the focus of conversations at this meeting.

One of the market managers that had raised the option of Shared Farm stalls defended the proposal, noting “to clarify ... this is just meant as an introduction for regional markets ... just for fruit and veg ... people setting up markets to allow them to get enough fruit and veg producers interested and attending the market ... The market manager has a responsibility to ensure that they do not compete with other like stalls.” The VFMA staff member asked if, hypothetically, a “gypsy pig stall be allowed to sell lamb.” However, these suggestions were met with further suspicion, with one farming stallholder questioning whether these stalls did work as business incubators, asking for “evidence” because “I haven’t heard any of that.”

An inner city market manager, exasperated, explained that she had a very popular collective of flower producers that were denied Accreditation based on the Shared Farm Stall rules. “They weren’t competing with anyone else ... all legitimate growers ... non-for-profit basis ... no other flower people at the market, no competition...” When asked what would happen if another flower producer was introduced to the market, she claimed that would be “a managerial issue” outside of the scope of Accreditation.



As the conversation reached its conclusion, it was clear that the primary producer stallholders in the room either wanted Shared Farm Stalls banned or limited, regardless of the views of market managers that supported their inclusion. No value-add stallholder spoke on this issue.

These interactions indicated that for a stallholder to grow produce themselves, with their own hands, to sell directly to customers was important in their categorisation as 'real' farmers doing 'the right thing', but it was not the only consideration. If a stallholder was not seen to have worked hard for the goods they sold, either by selling on behalf of another or having a backyard operation akin to gardening, they were not considered 'real' farmers and thus represented unfair competition to more worthy stalls at the same markets.

### Big Farms

Similarly, the derogatory 'hobby farmer' label was applied to farms that were considered "too big" to be at the market. This was seen particularly at Collingwood Children's Farm Farmers' Market, where after six months of attending the market, a few vegetable stallholders informed me that another stall was from "a massive farm" and really "shouldn't be here ... stealing our customers". Talking to this stallholder, she confirmed that she did not "need the money at all" but came to the market "for a laugh" and "to meet people". The sentiment that her farm did not belong at the market was justified by one stallholder in this way:

"She doesn't need the market ... we live on what we earn here. It just isn't right, it isn't fair ... Customers don't know, that's the part that gets me ... they think they're supporting farmers and they're supporting big business!"

Farm size was raised by a primary producer stallholder at the VFMA Accreditation market as an urgent issue. Claiming at first to be asking on behalf of another stallholder, she voiced concerns "about the big, big producers" that were "let in" to the markets under current Accreditation rules. "We need to tighten guidelines ... employees [selling at the market] could be anyone" she declared, despite the VFMA staff members insistence that any staff needed to "be actively involved in production." A reference to a specific large operator that sold herbs was defended by the market manager from one of the markets the stallholder attended, as he claimed that "the daughter [of the business owner] comes to the market with dirt under her nails", inferring that this indicated that she was actively involved in the production of the herbs sold at the markets.

When another suggested that stalls could be limited if they had "retail specific businesses", this was met with sharp dissent from other primary producers, one commenting "I do both the shop [in a country town] and the markets ... if I didn't then I couldn't do any at all." As the debate continued, a meat producer declared that "the question here is fair trade ... I know a person who fits into Accreditation fine ... they are huge in the meat industry ... do they need to be there? What can we do?" To which the first stallholder declared "Tighten up link to production!"

While this matter remained unresolved at the markets, it made explicit some of the concerns that I heard frequently at the markets that were not openly discussed by VFMA-associated participants

and market managers. Again, those not involved directly in primary production themselves remained silent on this issue, indicating that they may not have had the authority to speak on such topics. This was despite large value-add businesses being the topic of many discussions at markets, particularly when they were seen to take the place of more worthy, artisan, small-scale producers of similar products.

### The 'Wrong' Kind of Farmer

However, notions of the 'right' kind of farmer differed greatly at regional, urban, VFMA and non-VFMA markets. An incident at the markets just prior to the VFMA Accreditation meeting highlighted the conflicts that arose around Accreditation, and the differences between the markets.

At an outer-suburban market that was not associated with the VFMA, I met a scruffy man with colourful language who sold eggs and raw milk, a product that I had not yet seen at other markets. When I asked about the raw milk, he joked "yeah, rub it on your skin it'll make ya beautiful", though it was clear that the milk was intended, and purchased by customers, for drinking, "but then they cracked down on it. It was the dairy industry wanting to control the market. I don't care. They can sell their shitty milk, I'll sell my own milk."

I explained my research to the stallholder. When I mentioned the VFMA Accreditation program, he became very animated, declaring loudly "I have some opinions about that!" before declaring "it's a joke. A bloody joke. I refuse to be accredited." As he continued, it became clear that had actually been refused Accreditation:

"They come down and visit my farm ... and they wouldn't accredit me. They said that I can't be an egg farmer because I don't collect my own eggs. I said come on guys, really, I'm 63 years old, been doing this for a long time. Because I employ other people to pick me up the eggs. I tell them I don't bloody milk the cows myself either ... We're trying to get through to the idiots at the VFMA that we need people in the country – now if we can provide employment for them, that's what it's all about! Now the VFMA suffer from blindness ... those VFMA people [many insults and expletives] ... they don't know what they're doing."

This rant, which went for some time, attracted the attention of the market manager, who declared that it was "terrible ... what's being done" to this stallholder, informing me that they gave him a "stallholder of the year" award. When I mentioned that I planned to visit farms, I was quickly told by the stallholder that it would not be possible, for "it's a bloody long way."

Later, I was informed by other stallholders that he had been "kicked out" of two prominent inner-city markets after years of attendance because of "dodgy practices". His situation was discussed at various markets by different stallholders, where he was either held as a martyr to the "red tape rubbish" of Accreditation or condemned as a dangerous and dishonest trader, just the kind that the VFMA Accreditation sought to remove from the markets.

The stallholder did not go quietly, and after being told that he was no longer welcome at one of the inner-city markets, I was informed that he still turned up, "blocked an exit" and insulted the market

manager in front of customers and other stallholders. At the other inner-city market a week later, I observed him parked in the market's car park, where he sold eggs and campaigned against the market manager before entering the market to persuade other stallholders to support his cause.

Volunteering at the VFMA in-between these markets, I discussed his situation with the VFMA Accreditation officer, just after the officer had been on the phone to the stallholder in question. His application was rejected, the staff member informed me, due to "issues with the quality of his products". He did not have health certification to transport cold goods such as raw milk, and on a visit to his farm there were "no cattle to get milk from". While those that visited his farm could "see the eggs are free range", he was not certified free range, a requirement of the VFMA Accreditation program. However, the VFMA officer stressed that the "main issue" was that he "doesn't have a certificate from his local council to say that he can sell food."

Later, at the inner-city market where he had set up his stall outside the market grounds, a group of farming stallholders gossiped about the situation, commenting on his "revolting" practices, that "people should be able to drink raw milk, but ... [his] hygiene is just so terrible", noting the "unrefrigerated" van and fridge unit that "wasn't plugged in". "He really should know better", lamented another farming participant. Others at the market that I spoke to claimed that they "didn't understand" what he had done wrong, with one commenting "that's his business gone now ... he's done it to himself the poor bugger but what can you do?"

Speaking to the market manager, she was more sympathetic but lamented how the situation had deteriorated over the previous months:

"We sent him so many letters by registered mail, informing him what he needs to do ... every opportunity ... Now he's acting surprised but we've been telling him for a long time ... Now he's getting on to [mentioned other stallholders] ... so people are now saying 'this is terrible, why are you doing this' but they don't understand, don't realise what we've already been through ... [after the other market] people rang to see if I was okay ... if they talked to me they would know about the registered letters, about everything."

The stallholder ceased attending the inner-city markets but continued to operate at the non-VFMA associated outer suburban market, and as time passed the stallholder was seldom mentioned by other participants. However, this situation illuminated how Accreditation brought to the surface differences between various types of Farmers' Markets in Melbourne, for even at markets that the stallholder did not attend, his situation was utilised either as a way to condemn or approve Accreditation practices.

For the VFMA, the 'right' kind of farmer needed to be certified, but for others this was seen as unnecessary 'red tape', though that was not the main issue debated at the markets. More importantly, the incident situated the VFMA as "city folk" that "didn't understand farming", as one market manager described; framing the VFMA as another unnecessary tier of bureaucracy that farmers and other small businesses were forced to endure. The assumption that hard working farmers should be able to sell their wares with as little impediment as possible reflected a particular ideology surrounding the farming way of life that is discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

## Earning a Good Reputation

*The Weekly Times*, the rural newspaper for Australia was read by many Farmers' Market stallholders, and frequently featured positive articles on Farmers' Market stallholders. Stallholders displayed articles on notice boards at their market stalls. An article in *The Weekly Times* was something that a producer knew other stallholders would read, and would be mentioned at the markets. However, stallholders admitted that their customers, particularly at urban markets, did not read *The Weekly Times*, and yet they saw the articles as a highly desirable promotion for their businesses. In this case, the target audience was not customers directly, but other stallholders, for the newspaper articles strengthened a stallholder's claim that they were a 'real' Australian farmer or producer, and therefore held a legitimate place at the markets. *The Weekly Times* articles included colourful photographs of a stallholder's farmland and showed stallholders with their produce, standing in fields picking produce or tending their livestock. While these scenes did not necessarily completely silence rumours of reselling or dodgy practices, they provided a public marker of legitimacy.

The desirability of a *Weekly Times* feature article also revealed how producers saw their relationship with the media, for legitimacy could be gained, not through paid advertisements, but through unpaid media attention that validated their 'hard work' and success. Newspaper articles, mentions in food blogs and on social media were held as badges of honour that supported a stallholders' position as a vital drawcard for customers to the markets.

Any mention of the markets in prestigious food sections of state-wide papers, such as *The Age's* Tuesday *Epicure* or weekend *Life and Style* section were seen to bring customers into the market for the benefit of other stallholders. However, at commercial and non-VFMA associated markets, these 'trendy' papers indicated a stallholder's position as part of the "VFMA in-crowd", as one market manager remarked, noting that the VFMA had a "cosy" relationship with the paper. Similar attention was paid to certain radio shows. For example, if a market was not mentioned on ABC radio early Saturday morning when other markets were listed, it was a point of discussion during market set up amongst stallholders. Television shows were seen to influence sales, for example when channel ten's "Masterchef" program used kohlrabi, a root vegetable sold at Farmers' Markets, and ham hocks in a Friday night show, stallholders at markets the next day reported that those products sold out 'very quickly'. After the conclusion of my research, visits by the Masterchef program to particular stallholder farms were met with similar mixtures of celebration, resentment and suspicion.

Endorsement by food celebrities also played a role in the perception of 'good' stallholders at the markets. For example, a couple of producers appeared in celebrity chef Kylie Kwong's cookbook *It Tastes Better*, a tribute to her 'favourite' primary producers (Kwong, 2010), and other stallholders were featured on *Italian Food Safari*, a television show on SBS. These 'achievements' were celebrated repetitively at the markets, and evidence was proudly displayed on photo boards at their stalls. It was interesting to note that paid advertisements were barely seen or promoted, and when they were known to occur, they were viewed negatively and seen as evidence that a producer was "too big" for the Farmers' Market. For example, an egg producer that ran television advertisements on a regional television channel was derided by other stallholders from his area for being "too big" and "not really free range enough" to be a legitimate Farmers' Market stallholder. The notion that media coverage needed to be earned, rather than purchased or given through alleged VFMA

connections, highlighted the complex ways in which legitimacy was negotiated between stallholder participants at the markets.



Figure 10: Boards at stalls displaying positive newspaper articles and reviews.

### The 'Right' Kind of Value-Adder

If Melbourne's Farmers' Markets were 'for farmers', as was often repeated, then value-add stallholders were necessarily relegated to a secondary position. The sentiment that value-add stallholders needed to "support farmers" or, as a VFMA staff member noted, needed to "support the spirit of the market", revealed an assumption that certain kinds of food producers were more acceptable than others in the market space. These assumptions placed VFMA and non-VFMA markets at odds, particularly commercially operated markets, as what were considered 'appropriate' stallholders differed in inner-city, suburban and regional locales.

The VFMA focus on local producers that used local ingredients, as the VFMA Accreditation staff member explained at the Accreditation meeting, was to "try to work out how much local benefit" was gained through production. However, he noted that this was "cumbersome" for the Accreditation Panel, as each item sold at a stall required assessment, with the total average assessment needing a score of over 100 points for the stall to receive Accreditation.

The relative silence of value-add stallholders on questions of farm stall legitimacy indicated that, as one stallholder commented to me later, it was "not their place" to comment on farming practices. However, this courtesy was not reciprocated by farming stallholders when discussions involved criteria for value-add stallholders at the markets. Rather, farming participants and market managers continued to dominate the debate, relegating value-add stallholders to secondary status.

While a focus on local ingredients was supported by all participants at the VFMA Accreditation meeting, it was clear that the practical application of these rules had been problematic. A market

manager who was also on the Accreditation Panel noted that he felt as if he was “playing god” with baked goods stalls, as they could not be sure whether their wheat came from South Australia or Victoria, and sugar “could only come from Queensland”, its production unsuited to the Victorian climate. When a primary producer and value-add stallholder quipped that Accreditation should focus on “what people put in the pastry ... not the pastry itself”, it was reinforced by numerous market manager and farming participants that stallholders needed to be “encouraged” to support local farmers and “committed” to getting their ingredients from local sources.

The potential introduction of an “Approved” category was dismissed by all bar this market manager and the VFMA staff member, for “it would just cause confusion for customers.” Any leniency on ingredients was seen as “a step in the wrong direction” by more than one farming stallholder at the meeting, with one participant claiming that “Ma and Pa people come in, fit their product to adjust to the matrix, get in [Accredited]” and this led to the “wrong” stallholders attending Accredited markets. A fear that large stalls could introduce “zero point” products that did not ‘belong’ at the markets was emphasised when one farming and value-add producer commented “what if a baker brought in chocolate crackles?” She gave this as an example that had “already” happened, exclaiming “what made them think that would be okay?!”

A regional market manager argued that regional markets, with their focus on producers that are only within their specific local region as opposed to the entire state of Victoria, should have some leniency as it was “difficult” to convince value-add stallholders to apply for Accreditation when they only sold at their local country market. There was some sympathy for this position, particularly from an inner-city market manager that was often accused of luring stalls away from regional markets, whose comment that “regional markets have it tougher” was met with general agreement. However, the threat of “opening the floodgate” to disreputable value-adders ensured that no changes to the rules were made, as a farming participant retorted “that’s why they [regional markets] only need 25% accredited so that is more than enough.”

At this point, value-add stallholders that were not also farmers started to speak at the meeting. When a market manager participant asked “how do you differentiate from wholesalers ‘we don’t know’ and ‘I’ve tried to get local, tried to find out’”, the Indian curry producer spoke for the first time, agreeing with others that the key ingredients were the “most important” to support. “I’ve tried ... [but] I can’t find some of my ingredients in Victoria.” She mentioned spices and other key “authentic” Indian ingredients, before emphasising that the “key ingredients”, the vegetables, were all grown in Victoria. A farming stallholder joined in, citing a “genuine” sushi producer that could not get Accreditation as “we don’t do seaweed in Australia.” However, when the Indian curry producer mentioned that she felt that local food was “about the local economy”; her sentiment was quickly dismissed by the chairperson, as he gruffly stated “the impact on the local economy is negligible girl ... if they [customers] don’t buy from the Farmers’ Market they’ll just buy from the supermarket, that’s still the local economy.” This condescending remark passed without comment from the predominately female audience.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> While the majority of VFMA staff and stallholders that participated in VFMA meetings were female, the male chairperson, accreditation officer and two male market managers featured prominently in discussions at this meeting, and were particularly dominant in this conversation. Gender relations at the markets were interesting, as stalls were predominately operated by women, particularly for farming couples where women were considered to do the ‘smart work’ of running a business and men to do the ‘hard’ work of physical labour. This gender division is further discussed in Chapter Five, but is not the primary focus of this thesis.

However, the largest division at the meeting surrounded the issue of organic value-add stallholders. On this issue, the room was divided between those that felt that certified organic value-add goods, in keeping with the “spirit of the markets”, should be allowed some exception to the local rules when certified key ingredients could not be sourced from Australia, and those that thought that no exceptions should be allowed regardless. A certified organic vegetable producer was the most vocal advocate for leniency for certified organic value-add producers, whom she argued “have to maintain 100% organic [ingredients] ... or they lose their certification”, claiming that certified organic sugar had to be imported from Brazil as no Australian product was available. Again, this argument was framed in terms of giving customers what they wanted, for “customers want [certified] organic ... we don’t want to alienate those customers.” A certified organic baker then added his voice to this argument, telling those at the meeting that he was “an organic baker ... I can’t find enough organic ... before 2006 the only organic flour was American ... we try to use local [ingredients] ... but it’s not always possible.”

However, others at the meeting were more dismissive. “If anything, there should be negative points for imported ingredients!” another farming stallholder claimed, suggesting that demand for these products could encourage Australian manufacturers, for “anything that should be, can be grown in Australia ... if you create demand... if you put it out there people will start, if there is demand someone will do it.” He suggested that imported products were a “lazy” option, for “it’s cheaper to import of course.” While a market manager questioned how a value-add producer could encourage a farmer to grow their products on a farm, stating that it was not his “responsibility to dictate” what farmers grew, this concern was not addressed by the farming participant or others at the meeting.<sup>34</sup>

Others at the meeting were more dismissive of organic certification, but once again this dismissiveness was justified through an appeal to customer tastes. “Customers don’t trust organic certification ... they ask a lot of questions ... We haven’t bothered with it” claimed a farming participant. Another farming participant claimed that customers could talk to producers to “know” how products were grown, a far better approach in her opinion to certification: “We have our sign up, people talk to me ... If you grow good food, people know ... It’s up to people [customers] to talk to the stallholder and find out ... that’s different from having a piece of paper.” After a while, the meeting chairperson claimed that he did not “see the fuss” about organic certification, for “there’s evidence it isn’t as healthy ... I can quote newspaper articles ... I don’t want to hear anything more about organics.” Much to the surprise of certified organic producers at the meeting, discussion then moved to the next point on the agenda, without any modification to the existing rules.

These interactions revealed many assumptions regarding the positioning of primary producer and value-add participants at the markets. All arguments presented, whether for or against the current accreditation rules, placed their authority either in advocating for greater support for farmers or appealing to customer preferences. However, even appeals to customer preferences were a secondary concern, for while customers may inadvertently purchase goods that did not use local ingredients if they were available at the market, their assumed overall preference for local food was thought to trump any desire for these items.

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<sup>34</sup> This interaction hints at nationalistic sentiments that were present in the ‘Australian-only’ aspect of local food discussions at the markets. These are further explored in Chapter Five, Six and Seven.

This interaction also provided insight into what kind of value-add producer was seen as preferable at the market. It was not enough simply to use local ingredients, but to sell goods that were in keeping with the Farmers' Market brand, even if this was not explicitly stated in the accreditation rules. Chocolate crackles, a sweet treat commonly featured at children's birthday parties in Australia made from supermarket ingredients including rice based cereal, copha and cocoa was held as the antithesis of the Farmers' Markets. That customers may purchase these items was irrelevant to the discussion. That the stallholder sold other items that fit with Accreditation was also irrelevant. This item at their stall tarnished the Farmers' Market brand, not only by using imported ingredients but by selling something viewed as 'common', supermarket food. That this product did not fit with the Farmers' Market brand, according to the farming stallholder in question and others in agreement at the meeting, should have been 'obvious' to the stallholder in question. Such underlying assumptions, comparing 'common' foods to 'real' Farmers' Market foods, further highlighted how participants situated the markets as middle class, elite consumption spaces.

These understandings of what was considered in keeping with the Farmers' Market brand had, in practice, visible effect on the roll out of VFMA Accreditation. I observed such value judgements being utilised during my observations of Accreditation Panel meetings, the details of which I was not given permission to report. However, I found that similarly, stallholder acceptance at the markets had just as much to do with their distinctiveness and appeal to the imagined elite tastes of market customers.

For example, when a new cultured butter producer began to attend inner city markets, including the Showgrounds and Collingwood markets, the stallholder received an overwhelmingly positive reception from market managers and other stallholders. Receiving immediate entry into markets rumoured to have long 'waiting lists' of potential stallholders, the professionally set up stall provided customers with a product that had previously only been available as an expensive, exclusive European import. Although the product was pricey, at eight dollars for a cylinder of artisan cultural butter, it was not in direct competition with any other producer, for while other producers provided gourmet cheeses at similar prices, no other stall produced butter. At the inner-city market, the stall was welcomed warmly by other stallholders, and quickly became an active participant in the 'swaps' between stallholders at the end of the market day. "This is great, I don't need to do any shopping now!" she exclaimed at the end of one of her first market visits, though another stallholder admitted to me that she would "never" spend eight dollars on butter, but swapping produce made this new, exclusive ingredient an affordable indulgence.

Unlike many of the cheese producers at the markets, this stallholder was not a farmer, nor was her product associated with a specific dairy. Rather, having purchased an iconic old butter factory in an idyllic part of regional Victoria as a restaurant, the stallholder had travelled to France to learn about cultured butter production before she went into operation in Australia, selling the goods under the place-name brand of the original butter factory. With old-fashioned labels and a professionally presented stall, including branded tent, tablecloths and marketing material, the stall emphasised the notion that their butter, cultured butter, was "real" butter, highlighting the good food values of genuine French food traditions and the idyllic local branding of a beautiful part of rural Victoria.



Again, this association situated the producer within a particularly European rural idyll, which is discussed in Chapter Six.

This stallholder quickly became part of a network of 'real' Farmers' Market stalls that swapped their goods and advocated for the markets. The markets promoted her product on their websites and in their customer email lists, with the VFMA including it in their weekly "What's Fresh" article in the Tuesday food section *Epicure of The Age*. Customers and market managers engaged in social media, posting photos and describing their discovery of 'real' butter as a revelation, spread on sourdough bread fresh from the market as the epitome of 'real', local food. Positive media attention surrounding the product helped to promote the markets she attended. Her products began to appear on the menus of exclusive restaurants around Melbourne. It found its way into artisan food shops, and was mentioned in local and national food blogs, newspapers, and magazines. Soon, the producer became 'too big' to attend all of the markets she originally attended, including the Showgrounds market, but she maintained a presence at Collingwood Children's Farm Farmers' Market.

The overwhelming acceptance of this stall into the VFMA Accredited market community illustrated how the 'right' kind of value-add producers could be embraced and celebrated as much as farmer participants. However, other stallholders, such as the vegetarian curry producer that attended the VFMA Accreditation meeting, received a far less welcome reception, despite both producers situated as non-farming value-add producers that utilised local ingredients, the same category in the VFMA Accreditation program. This highlights how protection and promotion of the Farmers' Market brand as an exclusive place for good food went beyond the simple inclusion of primary produce direct from the farmer. While nationalistic sentiments peppered the local food rhetoric of celebrating 'Australian' produce, an emphasis on the 'right kind' of foods revealed the markets as places where participants demonstrated their class (Bourdieu, 1984:169-175); situating customers as individuals who had both the luxury of time to shop, prepare and enjoy good food as well as the education to 'know' better. This distinction was intricately tied to an imagined European idyll, situating the markets as elite spaces of 'real' good food, separated from the 'ordinary' foods enjoyed by 'other' Australians.

### **No Craft Allowed at a Farmers' Market**

All Farmers' Market managers interviewed agreed that their markets were specifically food focussed, and that they needed to remain food focussed. However, VFMA Accreditation went further, explicitly banning any craft or non-food products either than a few select farm-made items that could be sold on farmers' stalls (VFMA, 2009b:1). A similar ban on non-food items at Farmers' Markets was part of the New Zealand Farmers' Market Authenticity scheme (FMNZ, 2009:1). A member of the Accreditation Panel summarised the reasoning behind the VFMA's no craft allowed rule:

"If someone comes to a market with \$50, then they buy a woolly jumper for \$40, then they've got nothing left to spend on the other stalls ... craft [at the markets] takes money away from farmers."

However, regional, non-VFMA and commercially operated markets frequently featured non-food product stalls. At a number of regional markets I observed stallholders that sold knitted woollen items, for as a regional market manager explained: “well they’re farmers too ... they have sheep ... they’re local ... they deserve to be here.” One suburban commercial market organisation was known to have a petting zoo at their larger affluent markets, as well as small craft stalls selling cards and toys. While these stalls, as the market manager explained “attracted customers” and “give a festive feel to the market”, which “makes them come back, bring their kids”, several VFMA-Accredited farming stallholders complained about their presence to me, one declaring that it “makes it more like a trash market” and undermined the food focus of the market.

Stalls that sold handmade soaps were a persistent topic of debate during the roll out of the Accreditation program. While soap makers had stalls at many urban and country markets, as non-food products they were not allowed under the VFMA rules. Not only that, but soap producers had to be expelled from a market before a market could obtain Accreditation (VFMA, 2009:5).

I visited a soap producer that attended the Bundoora Farmers’ Market. As a non-Accredited market, they were not concerned that they would be ‘kicked out’ of the market, as they had heard had happened elsewhere. These producers saw themselves as just like any other ‘value-add’ stall as they were supporting Australian farmers. Their soaps were made from Australian olive oil, goat’s milk and beeswax, which they purchased wholesale. Retired from other careers, their soap making operation was situated in the carport of their family home in a nearby suburb, and they admitted that they were “lucky” that they did not have to worry about the same council health regulations and licences as food producing stallholders. Their view of the markets, akin to the market manager from Bundoora, was one that was “local focussed” as opposed to “just farmer focussed”. The role of the Farmers’ Markets was to “support local business.” Stallholders situated in close proximity to this stall at the market were very supportive, and often urged me to note how regular customers “came to the market for that lip balm” or “just had to get” a particular soap each month. However, a different stallholder situated further from the stall complained to me frequently about their presence at the market, loudly wondering why the producer did not “just go sell at a junk [craft] market.”

Attitudes towards non-food items at VFMA Accredited Farmers’ Markets were played out at the VFMA Accreditation meeting. At the time, the VFMA Accreditation rules stated that no non-food products were allowed to be sold at the market, unless they were products made by a farmer and sold at their own stall, although these products could not account for more than 10% of the total goods sold at that stall (VFMA, 2012a:3). A certified organic vegetable producer raised the issue that this limitation “hurt farmers” and she would like to see that number increased, but only for farming stallholders, for a “value-adder could come in and ... do bloody anything” and the markets needed to “give farmers more latitude!”. In the ensuing debate, justifications given by participants revealed attitudes towards the presence of non-food items and non-food stallholders at their markets.

Grand statements were made that emphasised not only the food focus of the markets, but also the farmer focus of the markets. For example, one stallholder at the meeting declared that:

“Farmers’ Markets are about fresh food from the source ... it’s heart breaking when farmers can’t sell their stuff ... Customers want to know where their food comes from ... People can be at other markets to sell other goods ... city markets ... should provide what people eat.”

A value-add preserver stallholder agreed, adding that “non-food stuff doesn’t go off. It stays the same ... no urgency to sell.” Following this, a baker stallholder noted that “Farmers’ Markets allow country people to create their own industry, to live on the land and support themselves”, before adding that “goats milk soap” was a “beautiful extra product from a [goat] farmer when they make it” but should not be allowed at another stall.

When another value-add stallholder asked “so farmers have to make their own soap but someone who is hand making soap and supporting farmers not allowed?” they were told that it “came back to the point about fresh food” by a market manager. This conversation continued until the chairperson stated that he disagreed with any non-food products, because “from a customer’s point of view, people will point to a product and say ‘what’s this got to do with Farmers’ Markets?”

Although the issue of “difficulties” faced by regional markets in attracting stallholders and customers was raised and supported in sympathy, no flexibility for regional markets was passed, with one stallholder warning that he would “hate to see country Farmers’ Markets become more craft.” At the conclusion of this debate, no changes were made to the existing rules. The 10% allowance for farming stallholders remained, for, as one farming stallholder quipped during this discussion, “it takes more skill [to farm] than just buying ingredients.”

These two examples revealed how Farmers’ Market participants sought to differentiate their markets from other, less exclusive, markets. Both the soap producers and surrounding stallholders, and the participants at the VFMA meeting, justified their position in terms of providing what customers wanted from a Farmers’ Market experience. However, the emphasis in the meeting was on the ‘fairness’ of the markets, particularly for farming participants. Selling non-food items, non-perishable and without the logistical and regulatory restrictions of fresh foods, was seen, as one stallholder quipped, as “too easy”. The ‘hard work’ of farming and food production needed to be appreciated, and such stallholders needed to have every opportunity to access their customers limited funds. Furthermore, underlying all debates surrounding non-food products, beyond superficial arguments, was the fear that these products would “cheapen” the Farmers’ Market brand. Farmers’ Markets needed to be different experiences for customers than craft markets, or “trash markets” as they were frequently derogatorily called. To lose that differentiation could transform Farmers’ Markets from an exclusive shopping experience to just another “cheap” weekend market.

## Making the Markets Fair for All

The question of ‘who belongs at a Farmers’ Market’ was not reducible to a simple list of desirable and undesirable types of stalls. Another vital element to the perceived legitimacy of different stallholders and fairness of the markets was what participants referred to as the ‘market mix’.

The right ‘mix’ ensured that all stallholders had the opportunity to sell their wares without ‘unfair’ competition.<sup>35</sup> If a market manager allowed too many of the same kind of stall, this was seen as detrimental to all stalls. Similarly, if a market manager failed to provide essential stalls, such as adequate farm-based fruit and vegetable sellers or egg producers, this was seen as just as detrimental, limiting the appeal of the market for customers. Every market I attended and every stallholder I spoke to paid careful attention to the market mix. The ‘greed’ of market managers was referred to time and again as a major limitation of markets that failed to uphold a suitable market mix. “They [market managers] get paid so much. What do they do for it? Really. Like, they’re meant to look after us, right?” questioned one farming stallholder, annoyed that four other vegetable growers were allowed to be at the same small suburban market. “They just want our money, then they bugger off, they don’t care ... and we suffer” griped an olive oil producer at a small new market when they spotted yet another stall selling similar goods. Stallholders cited their stallholder fees, considered excessive, as evidence that market managers were part of a system geared against their businesses, “just another lot with their hand in your pocket” that profited from their ‘hard work’. This sentiment is explored in more detail in Chapter Five.

Most stallholders cooperated with others that sold different goods to their own. Stallholders recommended products from other stalls to customers, suggested recipes that included other’s ingredients, and told customers which stalls to buy from, claiming they were “the real deal”. “You know what these’d go well with? Those fresh avos [avocados] from the Orange Lady” commented a stallholder selling heirloom variety tomatoes, “oh you should try her cakes, they are just divine” mentioned another. This cooperation was essential to the Farmers Market philosophy and was good for business, as a stallholder emphasised at Bundoora market one day:

“We look out for each other ... customers don’t come for one thing ... it’s the whole market ... you want them to get the good stuff ... not the, well, you know [insinuating towards another stall] ... have a good experience, get the nice things ... things that aren’t too much of a rip off ... [and then] they’ll be back for more!”

Tensions were raised, however, when another stallholder encroached on a stallholder’s ‘territory’. For example, when another stallholder brought a small amount of eggs or fruit from home, it would be seen as impinging on the business of other stalls that specialised in that product. Akin to hobby farmers, they were accused of “stealing customers” and ‘unfair’ or ‘greedy’ practices. Though if the producer in question was not well respected by others they would garner little sympathy, for example an egg producer that was considered ‘dodgy’ and ‘grumpy’ by other stallholders received

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<sup>35</sup> Some stalls were excluded from such considerations. For example, all markets were considered to need a coffee stall, because as one stallholder remarked, “everyone needs caffeine”, unless their exclusion was negotiated by market managers with local businesses such as cafes. Charity stalls collecting for local organisations were often excluded, but that did not mean that their presence was accepted by stallholders, such as cake makers or produce stalls that sold similar goods, particularly when the stalls were seen to be detrimental to the stallholders’ business.

little consolation when a meat producer began to bring eggs to sell at their stall, despite the egg producers frequent complaints of “disrespect”. Such instances rarely resulted in direct conflict, though that was not to say that the conflicts were not played out at the markets. Most complaints were made to other stallholders or to me, with occasional requests made for market managers to ‘have a word’ with the offending stall. Other times, stallholders could be seen ‘getting back’ at ‘dishonest’ or ‘greedy’ neighbours, by reciprocating.

For example, at a struggling VFMA Accredited market, a farmer that made value-add goods out of fruits grown on her property was upset when a nearby fruit producer brought in blackberries from his neighbour’s farm. The two had always been friendly and she was visibly upset, not simply at the other stallholders reselling, but also because the market was struggling and she often made a loss or no profit attending the market with only her jams and preserves. During berry season, she was able to bring fresh berries that could be sold at a higher price than jams, thus giving her a better income, one that could sustain her presence at markets in the off-season. By “taking advantage” of the berry season, the other stallholder had not only “broken the rules”, but had impinged on her ability to be a viable stall. However, she did not mention her dissatisfaction to the market manager or the other stallholder at this market. Rather, at the next market, she brought lemons and other fruits from her own farm. These were items that were regularly sold by the stallholder that had brought in the berries. She explained to me why she was, reluctantly, taking this course of action:

“I grow everything I put in my jams. I could bring it in fresh every market and actually make some money but I don’t. Well, I don’t see why not now.”

Stallholders were also particularly upset if other stallholders with similar stalls were seen to “cash in” on products they had previously sold exclusively, but with less recourse to reciprocate. As one complained “last year we were the only ones doing garlic. Now everyone’s doing it.”

Issues surrounding the legitimacy of other stallholders were most aggressively vocalised between stalls that brought the similar products to the market, and so competed for the same customers. Vegetable producers, for whom accusations of reselling could strip them of their morally superior position within the markets hierarchies of legitimacy, were particularly known for such conflicts. Rumours and accusations were directed at other stalls via comments to customers, to other stallholders, to market managers and to me as a researcher. Insinuations and outright accusations were masked through jokes, snide remarks and the noting of specific goods at other’s stalls. Comments could be as simple as “why do they have pumpkin at this time of year?”, or “bit early for tomatoes, isn’t it?” to “what’s with the genetically modified produce hey [laugh], looks a bit non-organic to me”. Such comments insinuated that other stalls were being dishonest by reselling produce from the wholesale market or passing conventional goods as organic. At one market, after a series of insinuating comments directed at other vegetable producers, a stallholder sighed and remarked “it’s like we’re the only ones doing the right thing”. He was not the only one to express this sentiment at this market, even on the same day.

As these examples illustrate, the vital issue of the ‘right’ market mix reflected not only a need for stallholders to protect their businesses, but also what was considered to be valued by market participants, namely, trust, farming connections, and hard work. Insinuations of dishonesty,

particularly reselling, told others that certain stallholders did not belong at the Farmers' Markets. For a primary producer, particularly a vegetable producer, to be accused of reselling removed them from the pinnacle of an ideal Farmers' Market stall, that is, a hard working farmer, to the worst kind of stall in the hierarchy of legitimate stallholders, namely, the dreaded 'reseller'. The higher moral valuing of farmers at the Farmers' Markets is further elaborated in the following Chapter.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter utilised the VFMA Accreditation Workshop, interspersed with ethnographic examples taken from the markets, to identify stallholder constructions of whom and what belonged at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets. As discussed in the previous chapter, such constructions highlighted different understandings of local food, farming and good food. Though participants claimed to advocate for limitations on stallholders on behalf of customers, citing honesty and the uniqueness of the Farmers' Market experience, customers were not at the forefront of their discussions. Rather, fairness and hard work were constant themes, as anything that compromised the ability of hard working stallholders to make a fair income and therefore make the markets worth their time was viewed disparagingly. This included market managers that allowed too many stalls of one kind into the markets, the presence of businesses that were 'too big' and resellers who did not put in the hard work that went into creating food products from scratch. All of these debates revealed underlying assumptions about the kind of customers that the markets both wanted and needed to attract. Particularly, they demonstrated where participants situated Melbourne's Farmers' Markets, distinguishing them as elite spaces within Melbourne's consumption landscape. How customers reacted to such distinctions is discussed in Chapter Seven.

Hierarchies of legitimacy revealed constructions of the market that, more often than not, placed farmers "doing the right thing" at the pinnacle of Melbourne's Farmers' Market stallholders. This gave farming a morally higher status than the work of other businesses that operated at the markets. The next Chapter examines this positioning of farming, and farmers, and analyses the ways in which the 'hard work' of farming was displayed to others and sold to urban customers at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.

## Chapter Five: The Hard Work of Farming

“You’ve got to be dumb enough and smart enough to be a farmer.” (Frank, dairy farmer)

The previous Chapter revealed that a generalised belief in supporting farmers was central to the branding of urban Farmers’ Markets, particularly in inner-city locales. This shaped the VFMA Accreditation program, as well as debates surrounding whom and what belonged at a ‘real’ Farmers’ Market. In the next two Chapters, I examine how farming participants sold ideas of farming, the country and the farming ‘way of life’ to their city customers.

This Chapter unpacks the ways in which farming was discussed by stallholders, using field encounters both in the public spaces of the markets and the private spaces of their farms, kitchens and homes. Through the stories they told, these stallholders sold farming, the country and the farming ‘way of life’ along with their wares. These stories spoke to particularly Australian constructions of rural and urban living, and painted a picture of farming as both tough, hard work and as an idyllic way of life. Rather than being contradictory, I argue that the juxtaposition of these narratives of farming, as both hardship and idyllic, served not only to connect their participants with the countryside, but also to promote the view that the farming way of life was essential, and needed to be protected and supported by their city customers. Such farming discourses allowed producers to sell ‘the good life’ to their customers and allowed their customers to engage in ‘feel-good’ shopping at the markets.

### The Business of Farming

Before examining stories of farming at the markets, it is important to note the historical and political context in which the farmers at the market were situated. Agriculture in Australia has been influenced by the rise of neoliberalism, globalisation and the productivist ideology of global agribusiness (Andrée et al, 2010: 316). This construction depicts farmers as self-employed business owners who produce a product, traded on the market value of the day, for domestic or international consumers. While this construction could apply to farmers from anywhere within the modern global food system, the particular construction of farming as business is mediated through the history of agriculture in Australia, which, as detailed in Chapter One, is dominated by export-orientated productivist rhetoric (Pritchard, 2005a:11; Davison, 2005:39) and free market philosophies (Alston 2004:38; DFAT, 2013:1; Pritchard, 2005a: 2-12, Lockie & Goodman, 2006:95-117). In this narrative, ‘good’ businesses expand, ideally into profitable monoculture crops for export (Andrée et al, 2010: 316), whereas ‘poorly performing’ farms close (Barr, 2005:5).

Social geographers Andrée, Harris, Dibdin and Cocklin argued that the dominance of neoliberal rhetoric in Australian agricultural policies has created a political-economic environment of “competitive productionism” for farmers (Andrée et al, 2010: 307-322), where an export-orientated economy and neoliberal political agenda strongly encouraged the expansion of farms to compete in a global marketplace. According to Pritchard and Burch, this environment led to a form of “enforced individualism” (Pritchard & Burch, 2003:95-157), where farmers were required to negotiate with

buyers as individuals, shifting the balance of power significantly towards large buyers such as Coles and Woolworths (Richards et al, 2013:236-237), and away from producers, particularly small or medium sized producers (Smith, 2004:305). However, there has been little research into how farmers operate within such a policy environment (Andrée et al, 2010: 307; Chalmers et al, 2009:320).

Through discussions with farming participants, I explored the ways that farmers adopted or resisted such neoliberal productivist values. The economic rhetoric of the market was clearly evident when farmers talked about their farms as businesses. I observed this when I introduced myself to a farming stallholder and explained my research for the first time:

“Why are we here [at the Farmers’ Market]? To make money, why else?! [Laughing] That’s all you need to know.”

However, this was not as straight-forward as top-down analyses of Australian farming suggest, for discussions of their farming businesses, while articulated through the economic language of business, suggested a view of farming as something more than just a way to make money. Rather, participants saw it as a way of life. As Joanne, an organic asparagus producer from Gippsland remarked to me on her farm one afternoon, a sentiment I heard many times on many different farms:

“You have to love it, don’t you? No one would do this for the money. There’s no money. What you make just goes back into it [the farm], you know?”

Stories of farming revolved around the hardships faced by farmers, which were experienced either through the ‘unfairness’ of the wholesale system or the harsh Australian climate. The message that stallholders wanted me to convey through my research was that farming was Hard Work, markets were more Hard Work, and if the ‘system’ supported farmers better, then they would not need to sell their wares directly at the city’s Farmers’ Markets. Stories of the Hard Work of farming, and the markets, were not only told to me, but to customers at the markets. These hardship stories were sold along with the spoils of that hard work.

## **Educating Customers**

‘Farmers’ Market branding promotes direct access to primary producers, to allow customers to connect the produce sold at the market to how and where it is grown, a connection that is perceived to have been lost in recent years (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:286). As such, markets are conceived as spaces for education, where customer can learn about ‘real food’ from ‘real farmers’. Built into this branding is the assumption that customers are currently unaware or disconnected from such production processes, and that there is value in ‘knowing’ the origins of the foods we consume (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005:360).





Figure 11: Signs from the markets.

In Kneafsey et al's qualitative study of direct producer-to-consumer alternative food movements in the United Kingdom, a need to educate customers was repetitively emphasised by producer participants (Kneafsey et al, 2008: 103). This education, they argued, served not only to inform customers of how their food was produced, but also to produce the "right" kind of customers that could appreciate the farmer's hard work:

"In other words, it is necessary to, in a sense, 'produce' newly knowledgeable consumers, so that they become the 'right' type of consumer to participate appropriately in a given project ... such consumers may need to be 'made' through their interaction with the producer and the scheme. As such, what our producers are producing is not simply food, but subjectivities, connections and relationships." (Kneafsey et al, 2008: 103)

At Melbourne's Farmers' Markets, producers consistently referred to their role at the market as one of education. Customers needed to be 'taught' what farming was 'really like', and where their food 'really' came from. While Farmers' Markets globally aim to reconnect producers to consumers (Chalmers et al, 2009:320), at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets, this 'reconnection' provided a platform for producers to 'educate' customers on the 'reality' of Australian farming, which was constantly at the mercy of the elements and an unforgiving land. Similarly, customers needed to be educated on the reality of the current wholesale market, epitomised in the dominance of the 'big two' supermarket chains, which producers referred to as "against farmers". Customers could also be educated on the 'dangers' of buying "old", "unknown" or "unfair" fresh foods from supermarkets.

For example, Frank and Eve, an elderly dairy farming couple whose son made cheeses in an on-dairy cheese factory to sell at the markets, spoke at length about their chats to customers, both adults and children, where they sought to educate them on “how food gets made”, noting that many customers “have no idea, especially the young ones!”. The couple provided pamphlets at their markets, which invited their customers to visit their on-farm cheese factory. Chatting on their farm, Frank remarked:

“Some are surprised; they’ve got no idea what a farm is. Absolutely no idea. Well, our farms actually quite modern ... We had one lot [visitors] that were absolutely convinced that we’d sit down on a stool and milk cows like that! ... I don’t know where they got that from. They said ‘don’t you milk cows by hand?’ And we explained no by machines, and there were kids with them so we showed them...”

Such education was interwoven with the ways in which goods were sold at the market. By informing customers of the ‘hard work’ that was required to produce fresh goods, as well as the dangers of buying food from the supermarket, stallholders could promote loyalty among their customers. However, it would be too simplistic to suggest that this need to educate customer was just about selling their wares, although that purpose was quite clear. Rather, this focus on ‘educating’ customers highlighted an understanding shared by many stallholders that it was necessary to challenge the understandings of food and food production assumed to be held by city customers, and to redefine farming in the public eye through interactions at the markets. This was deemed necessary not only to their farms in particular, but also to the survival of the rural Australian way of life in general.<sup>36</sup>

While providing some insight into the everyday lived experience of farming, the ways that farmers spoke about farming also revealed their expectations of their city customers. These stories encompassed two at first seemingly contradictory versions of the farming way of life. One painted the picture of farming as hardship, and the other, as idyllic. Or, as Frank described to me at a market one morning, “farming is the best and worst job in the world!” The ‘good life’ of farming and food production was constructed as simultaneously tough and uncomplicated, burdensome and fulfilling. Just as these stories were demonstrated to me on my farm visits, they were performed for their city customers at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets. These stories were presented differently to different audiences at different markets, constantly evolving as meanings of farming and the farming way of life were negotiated over time, incorporating news stories and popular foodie trends. Farmers at the market were therefore not only producing the ‘right’ kind of customers’ through educating them on the ‘reality’ of farming, but were also attempting to be seen as the ‘right’ kind of producer, that is, the kind of farmer that matched their various customers’ expectations.

It is important to note that these stories of farming were not taken as ‘absolute truth’. Exaggerations were frequently employed by participants in their story-telling. The narratives employed by participants, both in public spaces such as the markets and in private spaces such as in their own

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<sup>36</sup> Prior to the advent of Farmers’ Markets, advocacy for farmers was seen to be carried out by organisations such as the National Farmers Federation and the political party The National Party. However, disenchantment with both organisations was expressed by many of my farmer participants, who felt that there was no longer “any voice” for “the country” in Australia. Consequently, it was up to them to educate their customers. The historical need for farmers to teach urban populations the “reality” of “life on the land” is further explored in Chapter Six.

homes highlighted the ways in which participants wished to be seen by other Farmers' Market participants, including me, as a researcher.

For instance, at the edge of Melbourne's north eastern suburbs in the Yarra Valley, I visited a farm that produced a seasonal crop of garlic that they sold, along with strawberries, tomatoes and capsicum, at urban markets during spring and summer. The property was owned by an elderly Italian couple, whose son, Matthew, helped them to sell their wares, though he also worked elsewhere. Packing tomatoes with Lucia, the mother, in their packing shed, we weighed groups of tomatoes, and then rolled out mesh from large reels, cutting and tying each end to fit the bundles before placing them in boxes to take to the markets. Lucia explained to me how packaging costs were a burden to farmers, saying "oh they make all the money. That's where the money is. You know if we got those as bags [already made], it cost us 10 cents each! We can't make nothing on that." Later on, sitting down to lunch with her son and husband, Matthew asked me about packing tomatoes with his mother, commenting "oh yeah so did she tell you about the bags? 2 cents each they were. Just crazy. Packaging, that's where the money is."

In this story, the 'truth' of the actual expense of packaging was not as important as the message that they wanted to convey. Other conversations that day revolved around the unpredictability of Melbourne weather and how a big rain could ruin the garlic crop "overnight"; and how it they found it impossible to "compete with cheap Chinese imports" and "couldn't sell Australian garlic" to the wholesale market prior to their first Farmers' Market nine years ago. The story of packaging costs, while exaggerated, demonstrated that farmers' had to "put up with a lot", as Matthew stated, which emphasised such expenses as only one element outside of the farmers' control.

Further, while the 'truth' of such stories was not the most important element, stories themselves illuminated both customer expectations of farming and farmer's expectations of their customers. These stories were not a one-way process, as farming stallholders responded to and incorporated customer stories and expectations. Through this, such interactions produced, to use Kneafsey et al's words, not only the 'right' kind of customers (Kneafsey et al, 2008:103), but also the 'right' kind of producers, for Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.

It is also important to note that the ethnographic examples utilised in this chapter are not taken to be indicative of all stories of farming at the markets, or to suggest that the stories told were identical for all farmers. Rather, the stories chosen are seen more as "brief events" (Pedersen, 2008:58-59), moments in time that serve to highlight taken-for-granted assumptions of farming at the markets. For Pedersen, focussing on a "brief event" that was "saturated with qualities of immediacy, abruptness and the faltering of expectations" (ibid, 58) allowed him, through examination of its broader historical, political and cultural context, to examine how value was interpreted differently by participants interacting within complex multi-national relations (ibid, 70-74). Therefore, 'brief events' of observed tension or misunderstanding, as well as moments where participants sought to educate others, including myself, yielded important insights into how farming was defined, and valued, by participants at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.

## Stories from the Farms

### Evolving and Surviving

After a couple of months of fieldwork at the markets, I began to spend time with stallholders on their farms and at their homes. My first overnight visit to a farm started on a cold winter's morning. It was dark as I drove up the highway out of the city, the frost and fog getting worse as the road climbed to reach my destination. According to the radio, it was barely 4 degrees, and this changed little through the day.

Jack and Eliza, a married couple with three young children, ran an organic farm on the outskirts of a large regional town. When we first met at the weekly market, they enthusiastically encouraged me to visit their farm. "Someone's gotta show you what farming's really like" Jack joked, "you gotta get out there."

Veering from the main road, the suburban landscape quickly gave way to a patchwork of fields and roads over an undulating landscape. Following my printed map, I found a large shed, with a few white cars and utility vehicles parked outside in the thick, dark mud. As the sun started to rise it had little effect on the temperature, with the sky maintaining its damp chill. Tentatively, I peeked into the shed door, where Jack greeted me at the door and looked down at my hiking boots. "Don't you have gum boots?" I had left them at home. Not a good start to the day. I mused that I must have looked terribly naive at this point, but at least I had brought my own gloves.

We entered the large, cavernous packing shed and Jack showed me to a rack of gumboots, overall waterproof pants and jackets that were for the labourers that worked on the farm, trying to find the smallest size on the rack. "We don't get many girls here, unfortunately", Jack admitted, explaining how he had hired a few in the past "but they never stay long. The boys will like having you around" he joked. The rest of the workers had already started for the day.

After picking a few heads of celeriac in a nearby field for a phone order, we got into an old red utility truck that had clearly spent more time recently in paddocks than on the road. On the back of the truck sat a large cage containing a small pile of oversized turnips with wilted leaves. We drove down some country roads, stopping at a corner to throw the turnips into a field to feed some cows. "You see these [turnips]? They're a bit too old, so we feed'm to the cows. But before the markets, they got all the really big ones" Jack explained, as there was no demand for such large vegetables wholesale. We then proceeded up that road to the farmhouse.

We arrived at a recently built modern house surrounded by fields of dark, damp mud, mostly covered with messy rows of leaves of various size and colours. For a moment, it all looked like weeds to me, though on closer inspection, I could see many of the plants familiar to me from their market stall rising out of the weeds. Red beetroot leaves were barely visible amongst a sea of long, green leaves. In my own mind, this scene was already associated with a spray-free 'organic' notion of farming that had been often discussed, and promoted, at the markets.



**Figure 12: Broccoli 'protected' by weeds on Jack and Eliza's organic farm**

We spent the day in the fields. Part of the day was spent with Jack's wife, Eliza, and their young children, picking a few items for a value-add stallholder's order, finding beetroot plants amongst the weeds. At other times, I joined Jack and his paid workers, picking at a furious pace, cutting heads of lettuce and broccoli, bunching kale leaves off of overgrown palm-tree shaped plants, and trying but failing to pull gigantic multi-coloured carrots from the dark, damp earth that held them firmly in place. The day was long, and the work physically exhausting. The farmer and the workers were quite bemused at my presence, wondering "why on earth" I would work for free. "Don't you worry, I'll get you something to take home, a couple of boxes of veggies" the farmer reassured me, to my own bemusement. "Though I still don't know why you do all that work at the markets for nothing."

After a large dinner of roast beef and several different types of roast vegetables with the family, we returned to the packing shed to wash and sort parsnips, immersing them into freezing cold water before packing them into crates for the wholesale market. The farmer keenly used this opportunity to illustrate the wasteful nature of the wholesale food system, as he remarked when reviewing the crate of unusually shaped, mostly oversized, parsnips destined for the weekend's Farmers' Market: "look at that [crate of parsnips]. Wholesale they'd all get rejected ... nothing wrong with'm! ... Customers love the shapes too - the ruder the better."

Exhausted after a long day, Jack, Eliza and I sat around the kitchen table, with my recorder, and we chatted about the markets, their farm, their family, and their experiences on the land.

This fieldnote excerpt illustrates the way that farmers such as Jack and Eliza demonstrated the ‘farming life’ to me on my visits to their farms. As I came to this farm, underprepared, Jack and Eliza sought to educate me on what farming was ‘really like’. The beautiful landscape I viewed initially masked the ‘hard work’ of weeding, picking and planting. Each activity was accompanied by stories of how long the produce takes to grow, of the continual need to plant and replant, and of everything that can go wrong, such as a dramatic change in weather that could destroy all their hard work, and income, in a moment. Sorting and packing parsnips provided an opportunity to illuminate the ‘waste’ of the wholesale system, a system that they went to great lengths to point out was geared against farmers and towards big business and “middle men”. Sitting at their table at the end of the day, Jack and Eliza told me the story of their farming business; a story of expansion, debt, destitution, and redemption via Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets. At the same time, both exalted farming as a way of life, and marvelled at how privileged they were to be able to raise their children “on the land”.

For Jack and Eliza, their decision to sell vegetables at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets was framed initially as a necessary business decision, one that they were forced to make due to the conditions of the current wholesale market. This move was described as just one of many changes that they had to make over time for their business to remain viable:

Jack: Oh years ago, when we started growing in [19]93, I was still working, Eliza was still working, we started doing the Ballarat Trash Market<sup>37</sup>. We stayed there for 5 or 6 years. We gave that away when we started doing wholesale because it was *better*. Everyone wanted our produce and we were getting bigger and bigger. And all of a sudden, just nothing.

Eliza: All this big stuff in the ground, and they decided ‘nope’.

Jack: One year they just didn’t want anything.

...

Jack: Only been doing it [Farmers’ Markets] since December, mid-December 2009 ... we, I ‘spose Will [best friend, fellow organic vegetable grower and stallholder] was telling us to do them, and we sort of had an inkling to do them, and then ‘oh yeah we’ll give it a go’, and then more or less from the first few markets we thought ‘well this is the way to go’. We’re getting a better price, money wise, better price for our stuff, and just the appreciation we get, that we don’t get from our wholesalers. When they ring up there’s always a complaint, or we lost this or that, there’s never a ‘thanks for bringing us good stuff’ or something. And yeah it was almost the end of us, ‘cause we were nearly thinking of selling everything up ...

Eliza: We were forced to change the business, weren’t we?

Jack: Well yeah, we were forced to do something different or we would not be here, just how the wholesale industry was going it was just no good.

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<sup>37</sup> ‘Trash market’ and ‘junk market’ were derogatory terms used by some producers to describe non-Farmers’ Market markets. Such markets sold food as well as non-food items, often including ‘resellers’, and included craft and community markets.

...

Jack: But, the thing is too, the bigger you get, and we've been there, the more cracks that'll appear in that business. More things get shoddy; more things don't get done properly. And we've been there, where employees don't do what you want them to. And they do it half-heartedly and they do a half-assed job of it.

...

Jack: We used to have 20 people working for us. Y'know. And now we're down to four or five. Umm, and [hesitates] ... But when you're big and that, things don't go, y'know, and all you've got to do is have one little stuff up, on a big scale – a little stuff up, on a big scale – that costs thousands. But Coles and Safeway [Woolworths] are gonna find the same thing. They're on a big scale, and there's cracks all over the place. You just look at the produce. People don't want to buy that [makes a face]. People who come to the Farmers' Market, like, they don't buy their vegetables at Coles and stuff because they don't want to because they know it's shit. It's crap. It's 3 weeks old. And you look at it, you look at it and you think 'god', [gestures] you get this little tuff of [makes a face] limp silverbeet in a little plastic tub. And they want 4 dollars for a little plastic tub. And I'm selling a big bunch of it for 3 bucks. So, yeah ...

Eliza: Well, we've still got huge debts, don't we? To pay off, We've still got to pay off the land, still got a big overdraft to try to crunch down. Tractors and everything to pay off.

Jack: [quietly] Oh well, but we'll be good.

Eliza: Yeah, we'll get there.

Here, Jack and Eliza described the way that they initially embraced the 'go big or go home' approach to farming as promoted in Australian agricultural policies. However, elements out of their control, such as a fickle wholesale market, left them with accumulating debt. Farmers' Markets, then, were described as the saviour of their business, allowing them to continue to farm without working 'elsewhere'. At this time, the markets were only a proportion of their business. However, in 2014 post-research, Jack and Eliza informed me proudly that they were able to stop wholesale sales completely, being able to support their farm by planting for and selling exclusively at urban and regional Farmers' Markets. "Our bank balance is looking pretty good" said Eliza at a January market "usually at this time of the year we have huge debts after planting the summer and autumn crops".

In many ways, Jack and Eliza's description of their farm business echoed the productivist rhetoric of individualised, competitive productionism. As they discussed their struggles with the wholesale market and increased competition from new organic producers, they focussed on their individual experiences of success and failure. At first, the story of their farm had followed the assumed 'correct' course for a business, for they had started small, found a niche in organics, and then expanded, in line with market demand. While they had started catering only for a very local market, they were soon regularly sending produce as far as Queensland. This experience fits with Andree et al's notion of 'competitive productionism', which assumes that conventional supply chains are "the most – if not the only – legitimate way of improving farm viability" (Andrée et al, 2010:316-317).

However, their story deviated from the expected path when wholesale demand for their product simply "stopped", and their business "went back to being small". Such a path does not correspond to

the 'bigger is better' narrative promoted in Australian agricultural policies (Pritchard, 2005). Nevertheless, Jack and Eliza's description of the reorientation of their business continued to utilise the economic rhetoric of the market. When structural influences outside of their control, namely the dominance of supermarkets and a rise in the number of organic producers, had impacted their business, they still articulated their predicament using the same neoliberal economic rhetoric. The system had changed, and so they needed to "evolve". In the spirit of individualism, the farmers expressed little sympathy for those that were unable to "adapt" and "survive" in the new market reality. This was evident when our conversation about the dominance of "the big two" supermarkets moved on to green grocers who were unable to compete with the supermarket chains. Encountering such sellers within the wholesale market, Jack was concerned but unsympathetic:

Jack: At Melbourne market [wholesale], you used to get 6 or 7 hundred green grocers. Now you don't get more than a hundred. I reckon there's not more than a hundred now, cause of Safeways [Woolworths] and Coles. They just put them out of business ... they don't care 'cause they're making the money.

...

Eliza: You see it at the Coles in Ballarat. There's one with a green grocer across the road, and you see that shops got different prices to the other Coles. As soon as they [the green grocer] put the bananas out the front, you go into Coles and you can guarantee they've put their prices down. It's just so obvious, yeah.

...

Jack: But the worlds gotta evolve, and if you're a shop keeper, you've got to evolve with it. All these people, you know, having a bit of a sook about it, 'oh no we're not doing so well', you've got to evolve. If you don't evolve, get out. It's like us [farmers] ... Say there's a new grower that comes into the market. What am I going to do, have a go at them? It's their business, and if they're making a dollar out of it, well, good on them. And if I can't make a dollar out of it, I've got to change and do something different. And that's what we're doing. We're changing. We're evolving. You know, we started off with a small trash market, then we went big. Now we're going back to being small again. You don't have the overheads, and all the costs, and all that.

Jack and Eliza's story illustrated how economic rhetoric was utilised by participants, encompassing notions of innovation, competition, and expansion. Jack and Eliza demonstrated how they had been 'good' business owners in the terms set by the current system, through expanding their operations, acquiring neighbouring land, focussing on key crops to maximise their returns, and value-adding by applying for organic accreditation. However, this approach left them in a position they described as "frustrating" and "hopeless", epitomised in the exclamation "we had a turnover [a large sum] a year ... [yet] we were making a loss ... debt kept piling up ... we thought of packing it in [quitting]."

This example highlights a conundrum vocalised repetitively by farming participants. On the one hand, they described themselves as good business people. They were 'successful', in the sense that they had 'survived' while many of their neighbours had failed. The view held by these participants, that small farms were under pressure, mirrored current research on Australia's agricultural sector. While Australia has shown net increases in agricultural production in recent years (DAFF, 2012:1), the gap between a small number of large successful producers and smaller producers has grown significantly, with the majority of farms requiring non-farm income to ensure financial survival (Alston 2004:41), a trend that was reiterated constantly by Farmers' Market participants. Regardless, some participants were quick to judge other farmers who had demonstrated poor business skills,



highlighting an “enforced individualism” (Pritchard & Burch, 2003:95-157) arguably facilitated through Australian agricultural policies. For example, a dairy stallholder that had diversified his farming business following the deregulation of the dairy industry in the late 1990s described how “all the small farms were closing, most my neighbours” at the time, but that he had “been better, smarter”, and so had survived while his neighbours “walked off the land”.

So how had some farmers survived when their neighbours had ‘failed’? In our on-farm discussions, some participants emphasised the ways in which they had farmed “smarter”, such as by avoiding the pitfalls of constant farm expansion, or had reorientated their businesses, or had invested in innovations at the right time, or had simply been adaptable to a changing wholesale climate, which allowed their businesses to survive over recent years.

Brian and Jenny, for example, were conventional market gardeners that had been growing vegetables in Gippsland for over 40 years. The couple, both coming from farming families, had recently decided to retire from both farming and the markets. At their kitchen table, surrounded by bare fields, they described how the area had changed over time, noting that the majority of neighbouring farms had closed “over the years”. While Brian started by stating that “Farmers’ Markets saved our business seven years ago”, he went on to describe how their decision to remain a “small farm” played a central role in their farm’s survival prior to the arrival of Farmers’ Markets:

Brian: “Well, when we first started farming for ourselves, we used to go to the café and have breakfast, and all that sort of thing, and I remember sitting in the café this one time and there was another farmer there, and he said ‘oh you only work seven acres, you small farmers should wake up to yourself and get out because us big blokes are going to take over’ [pause]. And - funnily enough - 5 years later I went to his clearance sale [smiling]. And my Dad always said, yes, if you’re farming for yourself, ok, at some stage things will be that quiet, where you will make no money, you won’t even make [your own] wages. But with the big farms, they employ people; they actually *have* to make money, to pay their wages. So they are no more competitive than we are. In fact we, the little farmers, can actually give them a bit of a run for their money.” [Smiles, leans forward]

Jenny: “A lot of the big farmers actually rely on the little farmers these days to supply them [Brian: “yeah, I was gonna say that”]. To keep up their supply. Like [a large neighbouring farm], he grows a little bit but he has eight growers on his books that all supply him, so that he can supply Safeways [Woolworths].”

Brian: “So he can have a constant supply, he doesn’t run out at all. So yeah, but in saying that over the years as the market place has changed, and it’s basically a lot of wholesaling and that, smaller farms are, have closed up and dropped out, but that’s not the reason we’re doing it [closing].”

While this story could be viewed as a critique of the dominant productivist narrative of farming that encouraged farm expansion, these participants did not appear to view it that way. Rather, they saw their success for the last forty years as indicative of their business ‘smarts’. As Brian later commented, with a slight smile “we worked the system, stayed small though they all told us ... go big or get out.”

Farming 'smarter' was a consistent theme of my discussions with farming stallholders. While visiting farms, farmers demonstrated their own ingenuity by showcasing their different inventions. A scrap metal frame that was attached to the back of a tractor to harvest rows of leeks simultaneously without causing damage on one farm, another created their own homemade systems of water and conveyor belts to ease the washing and sorting of produce. Farmers demonstrated their own solutions to the problems of harvesting, feeding and protecting their crops or livestock. These demonstrations were referred to as 'making do with what you've got', and such ingenuity in times of hardship has been seen as part of rural ideology in Australia (Gray & Phillips, 2001:54). This perception of tough, clever people surviving in a tough landscape is further analysed in Chapter Six.

On the other hand, farmers consistently emphasised how their businesses were at the mercy of elements that they had no control over, both to me in our discussions as well as in stories told to their Farmers' Market customers. External pressures were seen to place farmers under 'unfair' stress, caused by everything from the wholesale system, to supermarkets, to cheap imported goods, to petrol prices. Farming was seen as expensive, a sacrifice, something that "only a fool" would volunteer for, unless they "really loved it". Farmers were therefore seen as victims of a system that was stacked against them. Through such stories, reinforced by Farmers' Market branding, customers were presented with an image of hard-working farmers persecuted by 'the system', in the form of government regulations or supermarkets, which were in need of help. The help that customers could provide then was to support these farmers through rejecting cheaper goods at supermarkets, to choose to buy direct and spend their money at a Farmers' Market.

### Farming in a Land of Extremes

At the markets, farmers told stories of the 'hard life' of farming and the hardships they faced in an unpredictable country. This was particularly evident through extreme weather events such as drought<sup>38</sup>, floods<sup>39</sup>, plagues<sup>40</sup> and bushfires<sup>41</sup>, all of which affected stallholders during field research. These stories align with historical constructions of the Australian 'bush', or 'outback', as tough, unforgiving and unpredictable (Gray & Phillips, 2001:54; Stehlik, 2001:30-41; Green, 2001:61-71), thereby making people 'of the land' equally formidable. This sentiment was epitomised in the classic Australian poem titled "My Country", by Dorothea Mackellar (1908). Written after she witnessed the breaking of a long drought in regional New South Wales<sup>42</sup>, it is often referenced in public discourses surrounding farming and the Australian 'character' (Robinson & Tout, 2012:171). The poem is particularly known for this verse:

"I love a sunburnt country,  
A land of sweeping plains,  
Of ragged mountain ranges,

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<sup>38</sup> Until 2010, Victoria was experiencing a record-breaking drought. For news coverage of the drought, see:

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/the-drought-breaks/story-fn59niix-1225952583089>

<sup>39</sup> In the summer of late 2010 / early 2011, western Victoria experienced severe flooding. See:

[http://adl.brs.gov.au/data/warehouse/pe\\_abares99001773/Floods\\_on\\_commodities\\_2011\\_REPORT.pdf](http://adl.brs.gov.au/data/warehouse/pe_abares99001773/Floods_on_commodities_2011_REPORT.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> In 2010, a locust plague affected large areas of regional Victoria, particularly along the northern NSW-Victorian border. See:

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/farmer-fears-as-plague-of-locusts-sweeping-across-victoria/story-e6frf7jo-1225856682022>

<sup>41</sup> The most significant and devastating bushfires in recent years occurred on Black Saturday, on the 7<sup>th</sup> February 2009. See:

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/bushfires>

<sup>42</sup> For more information, see <http://www.dorotheamackellar.com.au/history.html>

Of droughts and flooding rains.  
I love her far horizons,  
I love her jewel-sea,  
Her beauty and her terror -  
The wide brown land for me!”

This poem painted a picture of Australia as a harsh but beautiful, unpredictable land of extremes. Another, more satirical, bush ballad<sup>43</sup> of the time by Thomas Spencer, “How M'Dougal Topped the Score” (1906)<sup>44</sup>, succinctly summarised the Australian farming conundrum:

“The struggle with the elements is everlasting war.  
We plough, and sow, and harrow – then sit down and pray for rain;  
Then we all get flooded out and have to start again.”

A tough land needed tough farmers, and the construction of farmers as tough survivors corresponds with historical constructions of Australian rural life as unpredictable and extreme (Green, 2001:61-71), as further discussed in Chapter Six. While extreme weather events plagued Victoria during field research, day-to-day weather was discussed in as much detail at the markets, for whether it was hot, cool, dry, wet or windy, unpredictable weather affected all primary producers.

For example, at Collingwood Farmers’ Market late one summer morning, as customer numbers dwindled, a stallholder that sold heirloom organic produce chatted with another stallholder who had meandered over to her stall after selling out for the day. The two women were discussing a shed that the organic producer had purchased last spring. While she had bought the shed “thinking all would be good” and that they would have “a good season”, though she lamented that with unexpected summer rainfall, the soil had “been trashed by the rain”, leaving them “out of pocket”. “We’re so behind” she commented. The other stallholder sympathised, and then laughed “[farming] it’s a lifestyle choice!” Both laughed, and then the organic producer whispered to me “so that’s why we don’t grow those illegal tomatoes [marijuana] ... we’d be better off if we did!” We all laughed at this little joke, while her companion continued, musing “ah but remember, it’s a privilege to live in the country.” From here, the conversation quickly became more serious, as the organic producer continued “... but we’re behind the eight ball ... still catching up ... it takes 10 years just to get back ... seriously over it.” In response, the other stallholder retorted “drought was so much easier; all you needed was money to pay for the water!” “Yeah, I’d rather that than too much rain!” came the reply. There was a pause, as both looked down at the dry ground. “At least we’re not in Queensland!” remarked the other stallholder, a sentiment met with muted laughter and nods of agreement, as they mused over the impact of widespread summer flooding on their northern counterparts.

While industrialised agriculture treated food as a commodity, which could be produced and distributed with regularity, these stories brought to light difficulties faced by producers operating within such a system. “People need to realise ... this [food] doesn’t come out of a factory ... it comes from the ground”, protested one stallholder. Another lamented, “we’re at the mercy of the weather;

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<sup>43</sup> A ‘bush ballad’ is defined as “an old Australian bush poem in a ballad metre dealing with aspects of life and characters in the bush”, see <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/bush-ballad>

<sup>44</sup> For more information, see <http://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poems-book/how-mcdougall-topped-the-score-0018000>

nothing's changed, all these years hey?" Nevertheless, the notion that farmers were "privileged" and "lucky" to live in the country was also celebrated, even in jest as in the example above, by these farming participants.

### **Farming as Isolating**

While stories of farming as unpredictable, underappreciated hard work were discussed widely at the markets, other stories were only revealed privately, through discussions with producers at their houses or farms, rather than at the markets. Stories of farming as a stressful, isolating life emerged during many discussions with farmers. These arose while I worked with them on their land, or sat down to a meal at their homes, or chatted at their kitchen tables. Visiting Chad and Sarah on their family's organic vegetable farm, I talked to them about their decision to sell at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets. When Sarah spoke of her husband's initial reluctance to join the Farmers' Markets, at first she emphasised how farming just for the wholesale market was unviable, situating the markets as a necessary alternative for their business:

"You sell to the wholesalers, and by the time you've paid your expenses, your transport, boxes, you labour, everything, planting - you're left with virtually, absolutely nothing and then you see what the wholesalers sell it for, and you think 'what!' It's just wrong, it's so wrong'. The farmers do so much work and get very little back ... because you just don't make anything from wholesale. And then, if you send a whole heap of stuff, probably interstate, and it is rejected, you're chasing your tails to get that money back. You've lost your boxes, you've lost everything. It doesn't happen very often, but if it does - it sets you back, you're just chasing yourself."

However, after lunch, when Chad had returned to their packing shed, she spoke about the experience of farming before the markets, describing how it had been both isolating and depressing for her and her husband:

"See Chad was asked [to join a Farmers' Market] 10 years ago. He was mad [crazy]. He said no. Need to be on the farm. The first market we did, he held my t-shirt like this [made a fist] the whole time. He was so nervous. But after that, he really liked it, because he was getting all this positive feedback. He's really shy. But it was so good for him. Because he was having a really tough time, he was working so hard for nothing, but then [at the markets] he was getting all this good feedback, he was just loving it again."

Sarah's story of an unappreciative wholesale market was repeated many times by many farming stallholders. Farmers' Market customers were "grateful", and they could be 'educated' to appreciate the 'hard work' that it takes to produce their food, whereas operators within the wholesale market benefitted from "talking down" the value of farmed goods in order to get the lowest price from the farmer. Such stories emphasised the role of Farmers' Markets as saviour of their farming businesses, as reiterated in conversations with customers at the markets, and as promoted to me as a researcher.



**Figure 13: Seedlings on Sarah and Chad's organic farm**

However, some stories of farming life went further. While the appreciative audience of the markets could not only be the saviour of farming businesses and a farmer's sanity, it could also be seen to revive a 'sense of community' that had been lost in the modern world of farming. Farmers did not view their farms, or the farming 'way of life', in isolation, but as part of wider rural communities. These communities were often described as under threat. As neighbouring farms closed, small towns were "dying", with lower populations and fewer children willing to stay and live the "hard life" on the land, a phenomena that was referred to as "the brain drain" by one citrus producer participant.<sup>45</sup> The 'sense of community' that once filled rural towns was seen as under threat, though some participants hinted that it could possibly be revived, reversed or somewhat replaced by the urban market experience.

At Collingwood Farmers' Market, I met Mike, an organic blueberry producer from the Gippsland ranges. He invited me to his farm after chatting at a VFMA meeting. Leading up to our encounter, I had spoken to him about the location of his farm. While the name was proudly utilised in the branding of his produce, the place itself was no longer a town, merely a locality, with only a few houses remaining of what was once a thriving country town.

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<sup>45</sup> For analysis of such phenomena in rural Australian communities, see: Larsen et al, 2008; Campbell, 2008; Richards et al, 2013.

Despite being within two hours' drive from Melbourne, the farm's mountainous location felt very remote. The farm was spread out along a steep mountain slope. No other houses, or man-made structures besides the farm, could be seen from this location. To me, the sight was breathtakingly beautiful, the very picture of frontier living, surrounded as it was by native bushland. However, when the farmer viewed the same landscape, his story was one of loss.

When talking about his farm, Mike discussed the loss of the local community since he had moved here decades ago, making passing references to being "alone up here" and by himself "during the week once the workers leave for the day". He recounted other local farms that had "disappeared" in recent years, leaving only a few houses at the locale, where there once stood a thriving school that his, now adult, children attended in their youth. Our conversation about the markets led him to discuss how he liked to socialise with other stallholders, commenting that he saw the first Farmers' Markets as an alternative to the small country towns, like his old town, which had "disappeared". He described stallholder's relationships as similar to "neighbourly" relationships in a street or small town, for while people might not know or meet up with all of their neighbours, they recognised them, and some they chose to socialise with, visiting their farms and establishing informal, small scale trade-type relationships with each other. This social outlet was incredibly important to an otherwise isolating lifestyle as a farmer for this participant. That said, as a seasonal producer, he admitted that he did not attend every market, having his adult children 'fill in' when the trip to Melbourne was inconvenient.

Similar to stories of loss associated with the modern wholesale food distribution system, this farmers' story painted the Farmers' Markets as his, and his farms, saviour. This sentiment, while not always told through such a personal story, was reiterated in many conversations, where the markets were portrayed as a space to meet like-minded producers from around the state. In this way, by saving small-scale farms through supporting the markets, city customers could also 'save' small country towns from dying or disappearing. In doing so, such stories also appealed to an imagined past, where small-scale farming was both viable and rewarding, and customers understood the nature of farming and were grateful. This was contrasted with a present where farmers were victims of the modern food system, under pressure from the wholesale system and forgotten by customers. Appealing to such an idealised past, a better future for farmers, customers and the country alike could be imagined. This romanticisation of rural life is further analysed in Chapter Six, as it contributes to the rural idyll and the image of 'good life' bought and sold through Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.

## **Stories of Farming at the Markets**

So far, this Chapter has focussed on farming stories revealed strategically to me as a researcher as I travelled to various farms and kitchens throughout regional Victoria. This section now focuses on the ways in which farming was presented, discussed and sold to customers at the markets.

In the previous Chapter, analysing stallholder and market manager discourses revealed notions of legitimacy at the markets. Farming and farmers were held up as the most legitimate stalls at the markets; with others attracting customers to further provide support for farming stallholders. So

how did farmers, and non-farming stallholders, construct farming for their urban customers? Farming was promoted explicitly through signage proclaiming the origin of goods, photographs of fields and contented animals. However, most promotions of farming occurred through everyday interactions at the markets. Seasonal changes in fresh produce marked out the passage of time, connecting customers to the growing cycles of their producers. Dirt stuck to carrots told of the soil in which it had grown, with dampness or dryness indicating excess or limited rainfall. Green leaves indicated immediacy, showing that the produce had been “just pulled out of the ground”, as Jack the vegetable grower proclaimed. These conversations served to educate customers on the ‘realities’ of food production, thereby producing “newly knowledgeable consumers” (Kneafsey et al, 2008: 103).



Figure 14: ‘Rude’ carrots sold at an organic vegetable stall.

While Farmers’ Market organisers promoted a general need to support farmers, the presentation of stalls was highly individual. For Farmers’ Market customers, views of the market included a variety of tents in different colours, shapes and sizes. Each stall displayed their wares differently and used different signage to varying degrees of professionalism. This presentation reinforced the sense of the farming stalls as individual businesses, promoted in the same way as the individual branding of value-add stalls. Farmers at the markets, while “all in it together”, as Frank the dairy farmer noted, were also competitors. Therefore, each stall promoted the notion of farming, and the farming way of life, differently to their city customers.

Nevertheless, through observing interactions between customers and stallholders, recurring themes in the discourses of farming at the markets were evident. Again, using “brief events” (Pedersen, 2008:58-59) to highlight these different themes, an overriding view of farming as both essential and threatened emerges. These discourses then situate the markets as necessary for the survival of both stallholder farms and the farming way of life in Australia, providing a ‘feel-good’ shopping experience for their urban customers.

## Farming as Essential

While farmers spoke to me about their farming businesses surviving through selling at the markets, inside the market space conversations of survival were broadened to include not only the farms but all Australians, evoking nationalistic sentiments. In this context, food production was conceived as different to all other businesses, as something essential that should not be treated simply as any other commodity.

Such assertions were in line with Farmers' Market branding that clearly emphasised (re)connecting customers to primary producers, that is, those that directly grow, rear or cook the foods they consume (VFMA, 2009:1). This branding not only implied that customers were disconnected from producers in the current food distribution system, it also assumed that it is only through connecting directly with producers that consumers would be able to truly appreciate how their food was produced. These assumptions were evident in the promotional materials developed by the VFMA and other farmers' market organisations.



Figure 15: VFMA promotional bumper stickers.<sup>46</sup>

Such branding implied that farming was essential and *must* be supported by city customers. This was particularly evident at inner-city VFMA Accredited markets and country markets. For example, signs at the Showgrounds Farmers' Market emphasised a need to support farmers through supporting Farmers' Markets:

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<sup>46</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/120417488380/photos/pb.120417488380.2207520000.1435705355./10150569650028381/?type=3&theater>



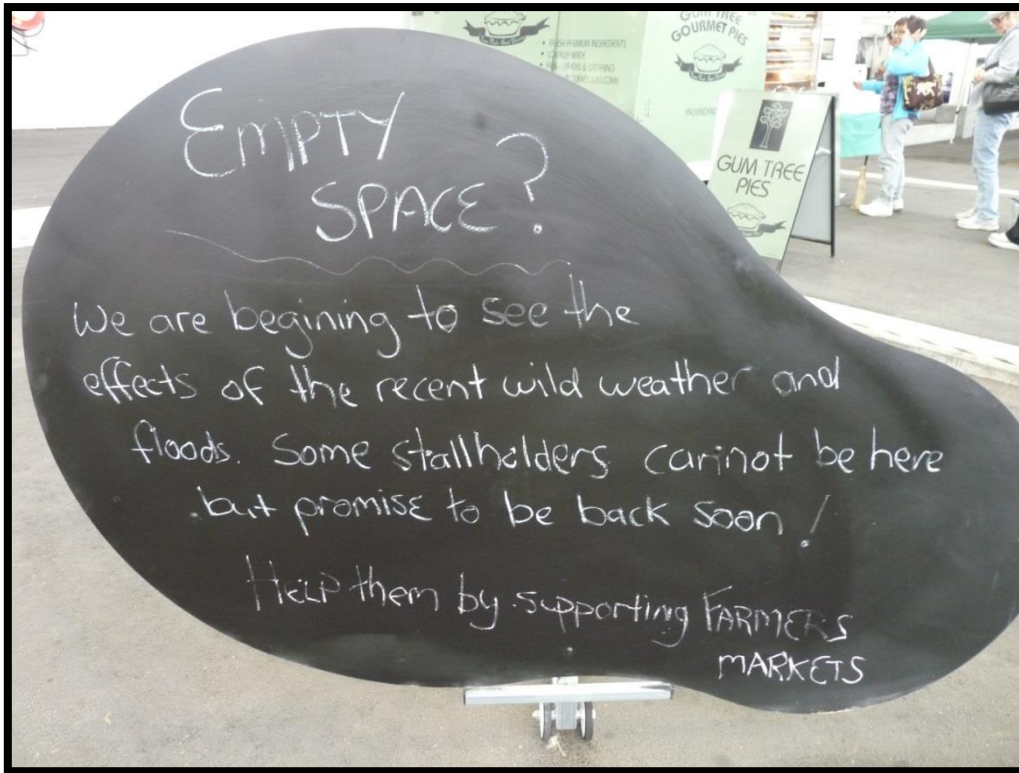


Figure 16: Sign from Showgrounds Farmers' Market.

However, the farming narrative was noticeably downplayed at commercially operated Farmers' Markets, particularly those with less primary producer stallholders and more 'value-add', or prepared food products, as well as 'resellers'. Rather, as these images from Bundoora Farmers' Market show, these markets emphasised local food, and the importance of supporting local producers generally:



Figure 17: Signs at Bundoora Farmers' Market.

Customers frequently reiterated the assertion that farmers needed their support, both during interviews and in their interactions with stallholders, although many also admitted that buying directly from producers was not their only reason for shopping at the markets, emphasising instead the social and festive elements of the market experience. Nevertheless, such sentiments were volunteered by participants frequently, for example Donna, a young regular customer at the Showgrounds Farmers' Markets, explained to me just how vital it was to support local producers, stating "you feel like you're making a difference, even on a minute level...you try to make a conscious effort ... you *need* to support them [small producers] to be successful. It's important."

## **Farming as Threatened**

Inherent in stories of small-scale farming as essential was a sense that farming, farmers and the country in general were under threat. This narrative not only portrayed farming as threatened, but also situated Farmers' Markets as central to their survival. Small-scale local farming was seen to be under threat from the current conventional wholesale food distribution system, as dual pressures from cheap imported foods and the market dominance of supermarkets reduced the price that farmers received for their produce. Furthermore, issues as diverse as expanding urbanisation onto prime farming land; unpredictable weather events; petrol prices; foreign land ownership; the high Australian dollar; the supermarket 'milk wars' that had reduced the price of milk to one dollar per litre; 'dying' country towns; and environmental degradation due to drought, limited access to water, large-scale farming and the threat of genetically modified crops; were all framed as threats to farming by stallholders at the markets.

However, these perceived threats to farming were shared differently with city customers at different locations, indicating that the sharing of such stories could be strategic, and part of the selling of their wares and appealing to an image of farming that they felt their customers wanted to hear. For example, I found many farming participants wanted to raise their concerns with me about foreign ownership of Australian farmlands. These conversations occurred away from customers, either at the farmers homes or while setting up market stalls in the early morning prior to the arrival of customers. Brian, the conventional vegetable grower, saw the 'threat' of cheap imported fresh produce from China as a threat to all farmers, telling me that "all growers in Australia are gonna suffer from that." Another farmer, Dwayne, commented to me that "foreigners" were "buying up our land", because "we [Australians] don't know what we've got ... then it'll all be gone what'll we do then hey." For Dwayne, public support of Australian farms and farmers was vital to the future food security of Australia, as he retorted "Well where else are they gonna get their veggies from, China? [Laughing] Without us, no one's got a chance!"

This rhetoric, however, was not repeated to his inner-city, multicultural customers. Nevertheless, such reactionary, nationalistic sentiments indicate a darker side to the 'feel good' positive experience of supporting local farmers. The traditions of farming that were being upheld were of a predominately white, colonial Australia. That these sentiments were not openly shared with inner-city customers in multicultural Melbourne, but were discussed at some country markets I visited in regional Victoria, reflect, as Holloway and Kneafsey found in their study of Farmers' Markets in the United Kingdom, that Farmers' Markets could be the site of both progressive and conservative

ideals, reflecting “a conservative celebration of the local as the supposed repository of specific values and meanings” (2000:294). This further situated the markets as elite white spaces, as Slocum found in her study of Farmers’ Markets in the United States (Slocum, 2008:849), although reflecting particularly Australian conservative concerns regarding ‘our northern neighbours’. Furthermore, the ‘saving’ of farms from threats, specifically from Asia, further highlights an appeal to European images of food and farming as the home of ‘real’, good food, as will be discussed in Chapter Six.

While I did not observe the ‘threat’ of foreign ownership being discussed with customers at the markets, other ‘threats’ to Australian farming were discussed openly. Customers needed to be educated on these threats, in order to protect and sustain Australian farms into the future.

The assertion that Australians *should* protect and support the *right kind* of farming was prevalent at the markets. Particularly, this was articulated in an understanding that farming communities were at the mercy of urban populations both through decision-making governments and the consumption habits of city populations. This was particularly evident in discussions surrounding the Goulburn Valley region.

Throughout my research, media attention surrounded the plight of fruit growers from the Goulburn Valley in central Victoria (Dixon & Isaacs, 2013:287-296; Hattersley et al, 2013:226-231). The Goulburn Valley region was home to SPC Ardmona; an iconic Australian company now owned by Coca-Cola Amatil that specialised in preserved fruit, jams and tinned vegetables. A large number of local farms supplied pears, peaches, tomatoes, and other produce to their large processing plant in Shepparton (Dixon & Isaacs, 2013:283-297). However, in recent years, the volume of produce purchased by the company had steadily declined, with the processor citing loss of shelf space in supermarkets and competition from home-brand products that used cheaper imported produce (Hattersley et al, 2013:226; Dixon & Isaacs, 2013:285; Burch et al, 2013:221).

The Goulburn Valley ‘situation’ was a frequent topic of conversation at the markets, and many farmers cited the ‘issues’ that farmers were facing in the Goulburn Valley as evidence of the hardships caused by the big two supermarkets. However, this association went further, as customers were encouraged to buy Australian-made. As one stallholder noted at a market one day, it was “city peoples” responsibility to support Australian growers, “cause if they don’t its gone forever”. This attitude was particularly evident in the stories of stallholders who saw their role as one of education. City customers *needed* to be educated, so that they were aware of how their consumer decisions affect regional areas, such as the Goulburn Valley.

The idea that the country needed to be protected from the city was evident in frequent discussions at the market concerning the spread of Melbourne’s ‘urban sprawl’ (Woodcock et al, 2010:94-104). Most vegetable producers farmed on productive land just outside Melbourne’s outer suburbs. These “green wedges”, as such areas were labelled by the Victorian government in 2002 to prevent excessive expansion (Woodcock et al, 2010:94; DPCD, 2013:1-8), have been increasingly re-zoned in recent years, expanding existing suburbs or developed into new suburbs (Woodcock et al, 2010:95-97; DPTLI, 2014:1). For many participants, this encroachment represented a real danger not only to food security, “eroding our local food bowl” as “the best land in the country gets covered in concrete”, but was also seen to destroy the locales “beauty”, “spirit”, “soul”, “community” or sense

of “country living”. Will, a vegetable grower from the Mornington Peninsula, lamented about the urbanisation of that region, exclaiming: “That land, it was the best in the country [for growing vegetables] ... marine micro-climate, good soil.” His wife, Trish, commented sadly that “they’re farming houses now.”

The image of rural land being lost to urban sprawl was visible to those that knew the area, or those that had travelled frequently by car out of Melbourne in any direction, particularly when travelling along the Monash Highway towards Gippsland or the Mornington Peninsula. This visceral experience was mentioned frequently in conversations with customers at markets throughout Melbourne and neighbouring regions, as one customer exclaimed “something just has to be done about it! We can’t let that [land] be lost forever! ... It’s just so depressing, driving that way, seeing all those new places ... Those poor farmers.”

At the markets, the story of urban sprawl subsuming prime farmland also referred particularly to the aesthetics of the land, and the beauty being lost under the urban developers. Petitions to ‘protect Melbourne’s green wedge’ were seen at Collingwood Farmers’ Market on a number of occasions. This petition, and conversations with producers from these areas, constructed this ‘problem’ as one that customers could actively fight against through their consumption choices, particularly through shopping at Farmers’ Markets.

The flat, damp, swampland of West Gippsland at the outskirts of Melbourne was home to the asparagus industry in Victoria. Joanne, an organic asparagus grower who “was born and bred” in the region, described her sorrow at the decision to rezone her home town for suburban housing. On large signs placed along the Monash Highway, the region was being advertised as a new suburb, despite its distance from the city, frequent flooding, and being, according to Joanne, “one of the only places in Oz [Australia] where asparagus grows.” “It’s just greedy and stupid to build houses on a flood plain” she laughed, explaining how seasonal flooding was a regular occurrence in the region to her customers at Collingwood. However, when I visited her at home, she also expressed sympathy for farmers who sold had their land to housing developers, “I can understand why they do it [sell their land] ... if we weren’t making what we’re making [growing organic asparagus], we’d probably sell up too.”

As Joanne justified the economic inevitability of farmers’ selling their land “when it [farming] is so tough”, she expressed a sense of hopelessness at the sight of permanently lost prime productive farming land to housing developments. This farmer did not blame her neighbours for being ‘good business people’ and selling their land. Rather, she placed blame more generally in the food ‘system’ that offered the farmers such a low price for their produce that their business was unviable, thereby ‘forcing’ them to “sell up”. She blamed “greedy” councils and “the government” for failing to see the “true value” of the land that was essential to the survival of the Australian asparagus industry, and by extension, ‘fed’ the city itself. Through a focus on ‘unfair’ market conditions for farmers, particularly caused by the supermarkets and their “nasty cheap imports”, disappearing farmland could be linked directly with urban customers’ consumer choices. Supporting such producers, then, through Farmers’ Markets, “making it worth their [the farmers] while” could directly be linked to the “saving” of these important areas.

## Farming as Hard Work

Just like the stories farmers told on my visits to their properties, farming stories at the markets implied that farming was hard work, and by extension, that farmers were tough, hard-working people. “You know, it can be pretty tough being a farmer...” commented John, a fruit producer, early one morning while discussing the impossibility of keeping the birds away from his cherry trees with a regular customer. In some market interactions, there was a sense that knowledge of the hardships faced by those ‘on the land’, once common place in Australia, was in danger of being forgotten by the current generation. Nicole, a lamb producer, laughed with her customer one day while discussing her pre-dawn five hour drive to get to the markets after packing ‘til midnight’ the night before, commenting “You don’t do this sort of thing for fun, I’ll tell you that!”

Talking to Jack and Eliza after spending the day working in the field, Jack emphasised the role of the Farmers’ Markets in bringing an understanding of the hard work of farming to city customers:

“You tell these people, how about you get up before the sun every day ... they don’t realise what goes into growing veg. You might grow one head of broccoli in your back yard, but then what do you do? ... It keeps going ... You can see, can’t you? It’s bloody hard work ... if they [customers] don’t appreciate it, we’ll go under, and people aren’t gonna know ... they’re gonna have all their veg come from China, and who knows what they’ll get then.”

In this discussion, Jack indicated that educating customers on the ‘reality’ of farming was essential, not only to let them know “where food comes from”, but also to ensure that they chose to support farmers through their food consumption choices. The urgency implied in this sentiment that customers’ choices could lead to the end of substantial food production in Australia, emphasised the narrative of farming as under threat. Only a change in ‘the system’, in this case through purchasing food at Farmers’ Markets, could save such small-scale farming enterprises. For Jack, it was for city customer’s “own good” that they be reconnected with this “reality”, before it was “too late” to save Australian farming. The need for customers to *know* that farmers ‘had it tough’ in order to make the ‘right’ consumption choices was a powerful narrative at the markets, emphasised as stallholders spoke of the need to educate their customers on the ‘reality’ of farming. This sentiment was supported by market organisations in their promotional material, as can be seen in the image below.

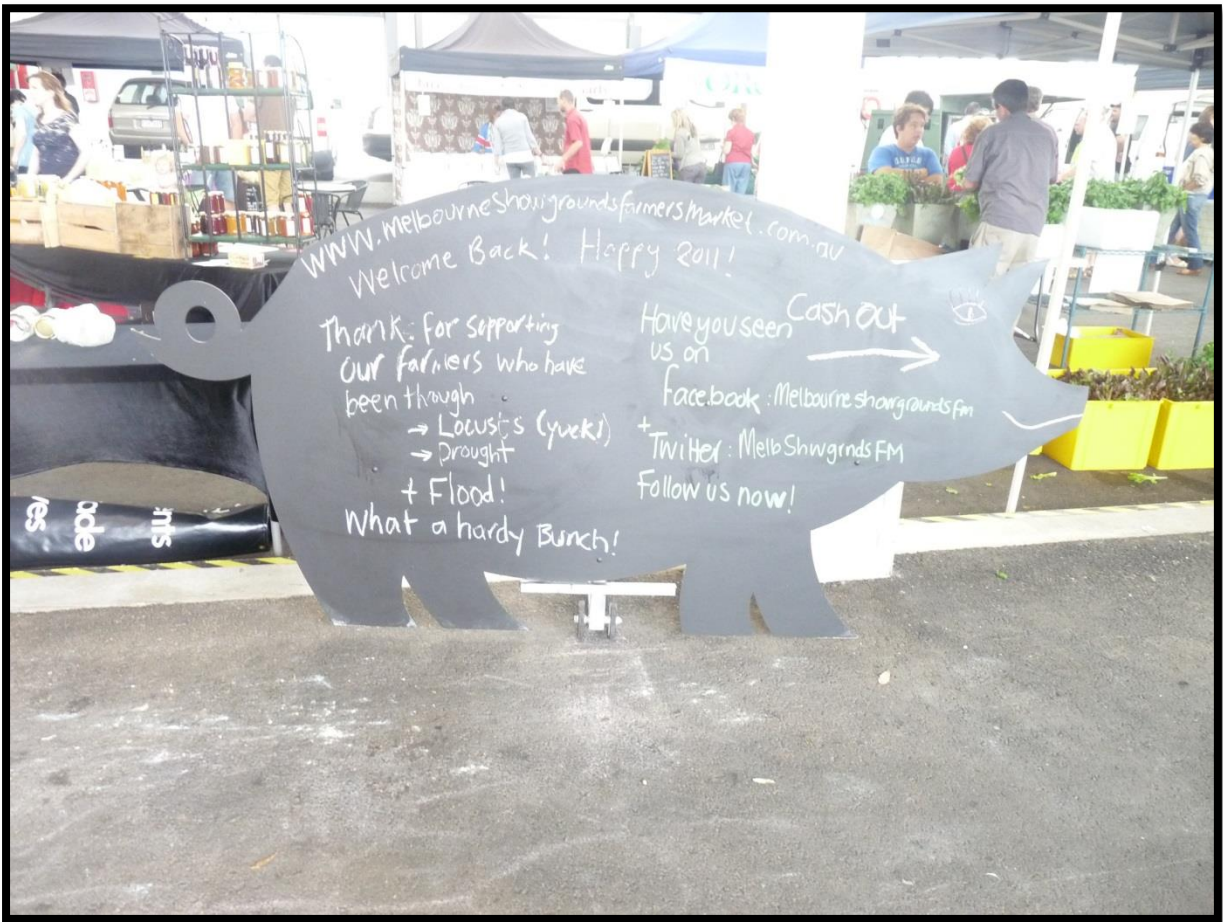


Figure 18: Sign from the Showgrounds Farmers' Market.

### Farming as Sacrifice

The farming as a hard work narrative was taken further, as the act of farming itself was constructed as personal sacrifice. When farming stallholders spoke of their 'jobs', they often joked about how 'mad' anyone would be to get into farming as a business. "It's not a way to make money, I can tell you that now" remarked a potato grower on our first encounter. This narrative framed the act of farming as a service, one for which the customers should be grateful. Explaining to a customer how they needed to continuously plant and sow their vegetable crops for the market, a vegetable grower quipped "It's a 7-day-a-week job. Not many people here [in the city] 'd put up with that." Similarly, a free range pork producer, Beth, talked about her small-scale approach to farming when a customer questioned the price of her products, finally adding "I don't get paid! It all just goes back [into the business]."

Some customers embraced such stories, and frequently expressed their gratitude to stallholders for their efforts. Producing food was framed as a service, for which they are underappreciated by the current food system, and for which the customer should be grateful. "Look at all of this" remarked a middle aged woman at an inner city market "... how lucky are we, they do this all for us!" Following summer flooding, a customer was overjoyed to see her "favourite" pork producer at the market,

commenting to me as I stood by their stall: “I can’t believe it, they have those floods up there but they still come down! I wasn’t going to buy any [pork] this week, but I will now!” An elderly couple at Bundoora Farmers’ Market spoke about the “awe” they had for “farmers that bring all of this to the market” each month, noting that “as it’s their [the farmers] income, we don’t mind paying more.”

While not always explicit, the notion that customers needed to support local farms, and that they *should* be grateful for the farmers ‘hard work’, formed an underlying assumption implicit in the Farmers’ Market brand, namely, that such farms were under threat and in need of both protection and support from city customers.

The idea that this sacrifice went unnoticed in the mainstream food system, particularly by supermarkets, was often repeated and re-emphasised at the markets, by participants on both sides of the stalls. Supermarkets, the government, private regulatory bodies such as organic certification companies, competition from export, petrol prices, the loss of country communities and services, and the ‘tyranny of distance’, all featured negatively in narratives of farming at the markets, though ‘the big two’ supermarkets dominated discussions, as will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

### **Farming as Uncertainty**

Conversations regarding ‘unfair’ supermarkets were just one of the ways that stallholders educated their customers on the many uncertainties faced by food producers. Market interactions allowed the seasonality of products to be ‘learnt’, the growing cycle visible through the availability of goods throughout the year. Educating customers through telling the story of the produce involved not only stories of the where goods came from but how they were grown or reared and the difficulties faced getting the produce ‘from paddock to plate’. Farming stallholders emphasised how unpredictable weather and the harshness of the Australian land affected their businesses. For farming stallholders, changes in the weather could determine the value of their goods from one day to the next. For example, sudden summer flooding in 2011 meant that Georgia and Jim, a farming couple from north-west Victoria, lost their entire crop of pistachios in one day, almost half of their annual income. Regular customers, when told of this predicament, sympathised. I observed that this sympathy led to some increased sales, for example, Beth, a middle-aged woman who was a regular customer at their stall, responded by buying a box of oranges instead of a just few for the week. She later commented to me “well you’ve got to support them ... they do it tough.”

However, if the weather was favourable, other elements out of the farmer’s control, mostly to do with conditions in the wholesale market, could be the cause of frustrations told to their customers. Later in the same year, Jim mentioned that they had just had their “best citrus crops in years”, with close to ideal growing conditions. He lamented to me that, because everyone had similar conditions, the wholesale value of his fruit was at “an all-time low”. Consequently, good fruit had been “left on the trees to waste” as he claimed that it was not economically viable to pay workers to pick the fruit.

This complaint, however, was not observably passed onto customers in full. Rather, comments revolved generally around the ‘unfair’ price they received from the wholesale market. “The price of produce hasn’t gone up in 20 years” claimed the citrus grower as he chatted with a customer “it’s

getting tougher and tougher to stay on the land.” Customers sympathised with such stories, and discussions at the markets frequently included remarks over cheap imports, and most commonly, complaints of the dominance of ‘the big two’ supermarket chains. Georgia commented to me that, if it wasn’t for the Farmers’ Market, much of the fruit would have simply gone to waste, meaning that their ‘hard work’ through the year would have been “wasted”. Instead, Farmers’ Markets allowed them to continue to sell their fruit at a consistent retail price that was not dependent on the “whims” of the wholesale market.

Nevertheless, if wholesale market conditions were more favourable, Georgia and Jim did not abandon the market. In 2012, the demand for blood oranges via the wholesale market was such that they were able “to get a better price selling wholesale” than at the markets. Georgia explained that they “really shouldn’t be bringing bloods [oranges] to the markets” but felt that they “should” because they “didn’t want to let down” their regular customers. Nevertheless, the amount brought to the market was limited, not advertised, and reserved only for regular customers whom they “knew” well. At one market, Georgia secretly filled up a bottle of blood orange juice as I approached her stall, with the comment “better put this in your bag before someone sees ... they’ll all want some”, indicating that I “better hide it quick” so that other, non-regular customers “don’t see it”. Another regular customer, gleefully in on the secret, motioned to me quietly, saying “Oooh, I had some too! It’s so good but there’s not much of it! Better put it in your bag quick!”

Therefore, while unpredictability in farming was often associated with the weather, it was equally applied to other forces outside of the stallholder’s control, and these stories were shared strategically with customers at the markets. Such forces could include downward pressure on prices from supermarkets, competition for sales with cheap imported foods, or even the price received for exported goods. These uncertainties strengthened discourses of farming as both essential and threatened, and therefore in need of the customer’s support.

Stories of farming as hard work, unpredictable and as undervalued cumulated in a perception that farming, and Australian rural life in general, was under threat. These stories emphasised the notion that something essential and irreplaceable was being lost, rapidly, and therefore that something ‘should be done about it’. This construction situated Farmers’ Markets as something that was necessary for the survival of the farms. Customers could then ‘feel good’ that they were ‘doing their bit’ to help farmers, and preserve the farming ‘way of life’, for the good of Australia. As James, a value-add stallholder that specialised in pork products, commented one day, “Farmers’ Markets, they’re do or die for the farmers, right ... it’s not all airy fairy.”

However, it is interesting to note here what was absent from these stories of farming at the markets. While international research has positioned Farmers’ Market stallholders as campaigners against large scale agribusiness (Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007:218; Alkon & Agyeman, 2011:1-20), collective food justice narratives were absent at Melbourne’s markets. Rather, educating customers on the ‘hard work’ of farming emphasised the need for customers to support the ‘right’ producers hard done by in the current food distribution system without questioning the system itself.



## Conclusion

This chapter has described some of the many discourses of farming that were presented by farming stallholders, both in the private spaces of their homes and the public spaces of the markets. Through selecting “brief events” to highlight story-telling at the markets, this Chapter has demonstrated how farmers could portray farming as both essential and threatened, thereby constructing the markets as necessary, to save the farming ‘way of life’ in Australia, for the good of all. These narratives sat alongside understandings of farming as a business. All of these discourses, of essential and threatened farming life, could then be promoted to customers, providing the ‘feel good’ shopping experience of helping out the farmers by shopping at the markets.

Continuing these themes, the next chapter shifts to a focus on the interactions between customers and stallholders, through arguing that such story-telling seeks to create the image of a rural idyll, where both farming and non-farming stallholders promoted and sold ‘the good life’ through such ‘feel good’ shopping at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets.

## Chapter Six: The Rural Idyll and the Good Life

“‘Country’ and ‘city’ are very powerful words, and this is not surprising when we remember how much they seem to stand for in the experience of human communities. In English, ‘country’ is both a nation and a part of a ‘land’; ‘the country’ can be the whole society or its rural area. In the long history of human settlements, this connection between the land from which directly or indirectly we all get our living and the achievements of human society has been deeply known.” (Williams, 1973:1)

This Chapter examines how ‘the good life’, through an imagining that evokes an agrarian rural idyll, was constructed and consumed by participants at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets. At the markets, the market settings, presentation and branding, as well as interactions between customers and stallholders, produce a particular image of farming and the country, evoking an idyllic vision of rural life, framing the markets as a way to experience ‘the country in the city’. The rural idyll has a long history in Western nations (Williams, 1973:46). It refers to the construction of rurality, often by urban elites, as oppositional to the perceived ‘other’ of the urban, where values such as tradition, honesty, community, simplicity and authenticity are attributed to rural life (Short, 2006:133). These imaginings create a broader picture of ‘the good life’, often deemed a more ‘authentic’ way of living, which was sold along with the good foods available at the markets.

Although such constructions have been linked to a reactionary nostalgia in some international Farmers’ Market research (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:287-299), I argue that, while participants on both sides of the stall attempt to reclaim something lost to the ‘modern world’ through evoking this rural idyll, they did so in reference to a better future, a ‘better way’ that they could experience themselves through purchasing and consuming their market goods. Furthermore, the consumption of goods purchased at the market themselves were seen to contribute to living a ‘good life’ in the present; a more honest, connected life imbued with all the ‘feel good’ characteristics of the idyllic rural landscape in which they came, which will be further explored in Chapter Seven.

In this Chapter, I argue that the agrarian rural idyll in the context of the markets is more about the present than the past and more about the city than the country itself. Further, I argue that this construction is performed, both by customers and stallholders, and as such, is not taken as an absolute ‘truth’ by either group of participants. Similarly, while consumption choices were seen as a way to promote social change, ambivalence demonstrated when making purchasing decisions indicated that such beliefs were also limited and performed, as will be further explored in Chapter Seven. Nevertheless, the temporary nature of the markets allowed the illusion of the good life, constructed around a rural idyll, to be consumed and shared by participants at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets.

## The Rural Idyll

The term 'rural idyll' is often used in popular and academic literature, yet its meaning remains ambiguous, as Little and Austin stated:

“Despite its wide use in the past, the rural idyll as a concept, or set of concepts, has never been adequately unpacked. The term has been used to describe the positive images surrounding many aspects of the rural lifestyle, community and landscape, reinforcing, at its simplest, healthy, peaceful secure and prosperous representations of rurality ... Rural life has long been associated with an uncomplicated, innocent, more genuine society in which 'traditional values' persist and lives are more real. Pastimes, friendships, family relations and even employment are seen as somehow more honest and authentic, unencumbered with the false and insincere trappings of city life or with their associated dubious values.” (Little & Austin, 1996:101-102)

In his book “The Country and the City” (1973), historian Raymond Williams demonstrated how the country and rural life had been imagined throughout the Western world, particularly through England’s literary history (Williams, 1973:2). Through this, he demonstrated how the rural was defined in comparison to an ‘other’, namely, urban or city life, and how these constructions both simplified the realities of rural life and reflected the needs and sentiments of particular times:

“On the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre of learning, communication, light. Powerful hostile associations have also developed: on the city as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition; on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation. A contrast between country and city, as fundamental ways of life, reaches back into classical times.” (Williams, 1973:1)

This polarisation of the country and the city is still observable today, as images of the country remain salient in popular culture (Short, 2006:142-144). Although this dichotomy is incomplete and fails to taken into account the various and ways and places in which people live (Williams 1973:290; Cloke, 2006:447), the construction of the country and the city as ‘polar opposites’ allow actors from each side to use the other as a representation of all that is perceived to be lacking in their own communities, whether it be a perceived lack of progress in the country or a loss of what is perceived as timeless tradition in the city (Edensor, 2006:485-488; Perkins, 2006:253). This supposed timelessness gives power to notions of the rural as a nostalgic place that could provide escape from modernity, as Short described:

“The countryside has become the refuge from modernity ... It is the location of nostalgia, the setting for the simpler lives of our forebears, a people whose existence seems idyllic because they are unencumbered with the immense task of living in the present.” (Short, 1991:34)

This allows multiple interpretations by various actors, with “different forms of social relations ‘naturalized’ within” the rural and the urban shifting over time (Short, 2006:144), despite the boundaries between urban and rural life blurring in recent years (Cloke, 2006a:20). In this way, meanings of rural and urban are multiple and fluid.

## Australia and the Rural Idyll

The Australian agrarian rural idyll draws upon taken-for-granted understandings of country and city life (Share, 1995:8-10). These narratives draw upon both historical Australian constructions of the country, as well as notions of Western rurality exported by colonisers (Botterill, 2006:25). While a rural identity is often glibly attributed to an Australian national identity (Stehlik, 2001:30-41), Australian populations have been concentrated in urban locations since colonisation (Burke & Lockie, 2001:5). While the wild, untamed 'bush' and the tough, white male larrikin 'bushman' has been part of Australian national imagery since colonisation, an agrarian rural idyll has more recently been tied to the national imagery of the "ANZAC legend", which has been seen as pivotal in the construction of modern Australian national identity (Botterill, 2006:26). The First World War was when, as a newly formed federation, Australian soldiers fought under their own flag for the first time, with returning soldiers, known as "diggers", becoming iconic symbols of nationhood over time (Botterill, 2006:26). Many of these returning soldiers were granted farm land through War Service Settlement Schemes, which linked the agrarian way of life to the "potent national image" of the "digger" (Botterill, 2006:26). According to Botterill, this "mixing of the agrarian myth which has been part of Western culture for centuries with the ANZAC legend results in a potent national image which bears little resemblance to the urban lifestyles of the vast majority of modern Australians" (Botterill, 2006:26).

The linking of an Australian identity to 'the bush' (Lockie, 2001:17-29; Liepins, 2000:612-616), or the country, has seen constructions of 'the country' utilised by different interest groups and political parties over time. This is epitomised in the particularly Australian construction of what was known as 'countrymindedness' (Aitkin, 1985:35).<sup>47</sup> 'Countrymindedness' was a political position that considered the protection of the farmer as essential to the wellbeing of the entire nation, thus constructing farming protection as a moral issue (Lockie, 2001:17-19, Pritchard, 2005:3). The federal political party 'The National Party', formerly 'The Country Party', was founded post-World War I on this ideological platform (Green, 2001:61; Gray & Phillips, 2001:52-60). This position also posited a negative power relationship between the city and the country, framing the country as the place that "provides the food and fibre necessary for the larger society", and the city as the place where "decisions affecting their [rural populations] lives are made" (Gray & Phillips, 2001:54). Gray and Phillips argued that 'countrymindedness', combined with an agrarianism that posits rural culture as the ideal "way of life", form a "rural ideology" that continues to be significant in Australia today (Gray & Phillips, 2001:54). While Green argued that the gradual loss of political power of the National Party post-World War II, who then formed a coalition with the conservative Liberal Party

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<sup>47</sup> According to Aitkin, the Country Party's 'countrymindedness' was founded on seven basic assumptions:

- (i) Australia depends on its primary producers for its high standards of living, for only those who produce a physical good add to a country's wealth.
- (ii) Therefore all Australians, from city and country alike, should in their own interest support policies aimed at improving the position of primary industries.
- (iii) Farming and grazing, and rural pursuits generally, are virtuous, ennobling and cooperative; they bring out the best in people.
- (iv) In contrast, city life is competitive and nasty, as well as parasitical.
- (v) The characteristic Australian is a countryman, and the core elements of the national character come from the struggles of country people to tame their environment and make it productive. City people are much the same the world over.
- (vi) For all these reasons, and others like defence, people should be encouraged to settle in the country, not in the city.
- (vii) But power resides in the city, where politics is trapped in a sterile debate about classes. There has to be a separate political party for country people to articulate the true voice of the nation." (Aitkin 1985:35)

that held “an ideological zeal for economic rationalism” (Green, 2001:71), mirrored the rise of neoliberal ideals in the federal political landscape, he argued that the notion of ‘countrymindedness’ still influenced modern rural politics (Green, 2001:61-71).

The label ‘countrymindedness’ has since been used by researchers to describe a variety of discourses that paint the “Australian rural ‘world view’” (Share, 1995:10-15). The particularly Australian construction of the rural idyll and the relationship between the urban and the rural that was epitomised in ‘countrymindedness’ still remains salient today, and has been identified in popular culture, particularly in media constructions of country and city life (Share, 1995:15; Finkelstein and Bourke, 2001:47-51). These are found not only to evoke a particular agrarian rural idyll, but to make others invisible within country Australia, promoting an image of agrarian rural life that is predominately white, masculine, and homogenous (Alston, 2005:139-156; Alston, 2005a:157-171). For example, in their exploration of Australian rural mythologies in television advertising, Finkelstein and Bourke noted that:

“The rural is the site of authenticity, veracity and love, albeit heterosexual and young. It is a repository of unpretentious vitality and honest endeavour. These symbolic messages encompass the values and aspirations that are thought of as shared, even universal, among Australians.” (Finkelstein and Bourke, 2001:51).

However, the rural-urban dichotomy present in the discourse of ‘countrymindedness’ does not always view those in the country so fondly. According to Rofe, a rural dystopia also sits alongside the rural idyll in Australia, as evidenced through the portrayal of dying country towns, uninhabitable expanding desert, dangerously ignorant locals and formidable and uncontrollable native environments in mainstream media (Rofe, 2013:263-265). It is important to note that the presence of an imagined rural dystopia does not conflict with the notion of the rural idyll. Rather, “rural utopias and dystopias coexist, vying for discursive dominance” (Rofe 2013:265). This portrayal of rurality as not only idyllic but also as harsh places the rural in a position where urban actors are needed in order to ‘save’ rural life, even from those that live in the rural landscape (Edensor, 2006:485).

Coinciding with the productivist, export-orientated agricultural practices described in Chapter One, widespread environmental degradation saw the emergence of another narrative of Australian farming since the 1980s, as conventional farming techniques led to soil erosion, acidification and high salinity, polluted or exhausted waterways, and loss of habitat for native wildlife (Howes, 2008; Lawrence et al, 2004; Lockie et al, 2006). Such issues contributed to portrayals of Australian farmers as destructive, greedy “destroyers of nature”, particularly in regards to environmental issues (Campbell, 2008:3-18), with “land stewardship” by farmers seen as inadequate in light of escalating environmental problems (Lawrence et al, 2004:252-253). Such portrayals place ‘city’ environmentalists in direct opposition to ‘country’ farmers, further emphasising a city and country divide (Campbell, 2008:3-18). Lockie et al also noted that public constructions of farming as damaging corresponded to the rise of neoliberal rhetoric in agricultural policies and political debates, as industrialised farming technologies and techniques contributed to farm expansion and intensification (Lockie et al, 2006:39). While a ‘farming as destructive’ narrative involved a negative association between farmers and the land, it still placed responsibility for ‘saving’ the country in the hands of ‘city’ populations; tasking them even with ‘saving’ the country from irresponsible farmers.

The notion that the country 'needs' to be saved by urban populations not only corresponds to the historically Australian notion of 'countrymindedness', but also to the constructions of rural idylls in Western countries elsewhere. As DuPuis argued, the agrarian rural idyll is particularly poised to be appropriated by urban interest groups that aim to 'save' the countryside, including from those who live and work in these rural landscapes:

"Yet, the balance of the pastoral is as impossible and problematic a goal as the desire for purity ... The rural idyll, as defined by elites, often paints the countryside as a place of leisure rather than as working nature, places of consumption, not production ... Ironically, in these contests over the meaning of rurality in rural places, farmers themselves can become increasingly 'matter out of place' ... as contests by interest groups over the nature of rurality become contests over the right to consume rural landscapes in particular ways." (DuPuis, 2006:126-127)

The notion that Australians *should* protect and support the *right kind* of farming was prevalent both at the markets, and in private discussions with market managers, customers and both farming and non-farming stallholders. For example, Gareth, a young male customer who bought only organic produce, saw it as his "duty" to support and encourage the "right kind" of farmers through the markets, as he argued "if we can tell these people [farmers] we want better, then they have to do better". This quote indicated a need to change perceived negative behaviours of farmers into something that fit with the customers' notion of the 'right' kind of farming practices.

While protecting and supporting the 'right' farmers was not explicitly attributed to the historical political ideal of 'countrymindedness', the sentiment that the country, farmers 'doing the right thing' in particular, required the support of the city for their survival was prominent at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets. Furthermore, the notion that farming communities were at the mercy of urban populations both through decision-making governments and the consumption habits of city populations, echoed the 'countrymindedness' construction of the Australian agrarian rural idyll.

## **A European Rural Idyll?**

Heller argued that, following the rise of industrial agriculture and the dominance of neoliberalism, developed nations have entered a period of post-industrial agriculture, in which small-scale farmers "live in an era when industrial agriculture attempts to render their services obsolete" (Heller, 2013:5). Small scale farms, therefore, need to become multifunctional in order to survive, and do so through promoting "farm-made, local, or organic foodstuffs" associated with "pre-industrial wholesomeness", which reify "traditional agricultural lifestyles and values" (Heller, 2013:12). In France, where Heller conducted ethnographic fieldwork with smallholders opposed to the introduction of genetically modified crops, she observed that farmers were encouraged to recreate images of pre-industrial agriculture for the tourism industry. She argued that:

"Such agro-tourism strategies signal smallholders' attempts to establish a niche for themselves in the postindustrial agricultural landscape... Smallholders ... thus become quaint symbols of an increasingly romanticised, Disney-fied, and culturally diminished rural world." (Heller, 2013:12-13)

This “Disney-fied” version of rurality romanticises the countryside, connecting small scale farming to an imagined pre-industrial rural idyll that links farming to nature, thus separating such farming practices from the products of the industrial food system found in supermarkets.

In Australia, which as discussed in Chapter One embraced industrialised agriculture and neoliberal agricultural policies with fervour unparalleled in other developed economies (Lockie et al, 2006:33-34), small and medium scale farmers can be said to be engaged in post-industrial agricultural practices as described by Heller, particularly at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets. Mirroring Heller’s observations in France, small and medium-scale farmers in Australia recreate images of idyllic, natural, wholesome and traditional farming to promote niche products to inner-city, middle class or elite clientele.



Figure 19: European influences at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Market stalls.

Left: second generation Italian pasta makers. Right: non-Italian pasta makers evoking European ideas of traditional good food.

However, as also described in Chapter One, Australia since colonisation has always had a ‘modern’ productivist food system, without a strong producer-to-consumer market tradition (Andrée et al, 2010:307-311) and with “the rural conceived... as little more than a quarry and a farm” (Lockie et al, 2006:29). This brings to question exactly what pre-industrial vision of agriculture is being produced and represented by Australian farmers at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets. When speaking to customers at inner city markets, it was clear that, while a uniquely Australian view of the country was evident, the agrarian rural idyll promoted at the markets was found to be a particularly European idyll, particularly at wealthy inner-city locales. In interviews at inner-city Farmers’ Markets, many customers shared their experiences of European markets, citing their travels to countries such

as France and Italy as experiences that they sought to recreate in Australia by shopping at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets. In these conversations, European markets were idealised, taken to provide 'authentic', traditional, food experiences:

"We've been on holiday to Europe, around France ... you see these markets, everything's so fresh, you get it that day and you eat it ... it's great to see that sort of thing back home."

"In Italy, you have these villages, and all this food – it's ugly and dirty but so fresh and so tasty ... yeah, like that."

"I can't afford to go to Europe, but I can kinda get that experience right here. Plus, our produce is just so much better."

As an entirely modern phenomenon, such constructions link the markets with an *imagined*, rather than experienced, past, as rurality is imagined and performed by market participants (Edensor, 2006:486-488). Such a euro-centric emphasis, ignoring regional examples of producer markets through Southeast Asia, reflected an idealised association with Europe as the place of 'good food' (Pratt, 2007:289; Ilbery & Kneafsey, 2000a:2207). Such stories link the Australian markets to particularly European constructions of the rural idyll. Furthermore, the focus on imagined European rural idylls also indicates a strong association with the construction of rurality and middle class urban sensibilities (DuPuis, 2006:126-127; Edensor, 2006:485). As others have argued, the European rural idyll evoked through this imagery is one that has been created and sustained by elites:

"That the rural idyll has been created by and for the enjoyment of the wealthy there can be no doubt. Equally certain, it may be argued, is that the images of rural life have been deliberately and specifically constructed to sustain as well as reflect the power relations of class." (Little & Austin, 1996:103)

Similarly, farming stallholders understood that they were marketing their wares to accommodate such middle class sensibilities. Gaining access to these desirable customers made the inner city markets particularly sought after by many stallholders. "You've got to find the right customers" noted Will, a market gardener, as we drove to a local market during my visit to his family farm. "Nothing in the mortgage belt works, they've got too many worries, they care about their plasmas ... It's the ones that don't care what it costs, like Booroondara ... We call it the 'Hawthorn tax'. They'll pay for quality, for what you tell them about it. That's what you want." In this example, the farmer acutely noted that it was the story of the food, and imagery of the rural idyll from which it came, that was purchased by the inner-city Farmers' Market customer, in this case prioritised over almost every other consideration, including cost.

However, the appeal to a European rural idyll goes further, for it situates the home of 'real', good food in a European context, excluding other food and market traditions. European markets and European farming traditions, brought to Australia through colonisation but celebrated as the distant epitome of good food culture, are idealised in this construction of rurality.<sup>48</sup> This further adds to the construction of Farmers' Markets as elite, white consumption spaces.

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<sup>48</sup> In Australia, appeals to England or Europe as places of high culture, and the devaluing of Australian endeavours in comparison, have been referred to as 'the cultural cringe'. This term, first used by Phillips in 1950 (Phillips, 1950) but popularised in the 1990s by then Prime



## Commoditising the Rural Idyll

In the post-industrial rural landscape, the rural idyll is ideally placed for commodification (Bell, 2006:156). Ambiguity allows the rural to represent many things that are deemed lacking in fast-paced urban life (Share, 1995:6), and in doing so, rurality has become a desirable commodity for urban consumers (Edensor, 2006:485-486), transforming the rural landscape from a place of production to one of consumption (Rofe, 2013:262). Consumer goods, including food, can appropriate the sentiments associated with rurality, as “the object for sale and the image have been elided, and the rural idyll is blatantly packaged and commodified” (Short, 2006:144).

The commoditisation of the agrarian rural idyll reflects not only urban but also middle class and elite sensibilities, as it can render invisible the reality of rural life for those living in rural locales (Clope, 2006b:379-380; Little & Austin, 1996:102). As Short noted of the British rural idyll, the appeal of the agrarian rural idyll is particularly salient in today’s globalised, Western societies:

“Clearly the rural idyll remains seriously commercial at the start of the twenty-first century, all the more so since it clearly straddles ‘high’ and ‘popular’ culture. Downshifting as one of the processes behind counter-urbanization is particularly relevant here, and is frequently inspired by perceptions of the ‘good life’ in a more remote countryside ... It must be stressed that this is a relatively recent idea; this is a post-industrial view of the relative merits of the country and the city — and it became strongly commercial in the twentieth century.” (Short, 2006:143)

In this post-industrial landscape, the transforming of agrarian rurality from a place of production to one of consumption can be seen clearly in the phenomena of Farmers’ Markets, which have become commonplace in urban locations in Western countries throughout the world (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000: 287). While this is a global phenomenon, how the rural idyll is presented and commoditised in such settings differs greatly in different contexts (see Alkon, 2008; Black, 2005; Chalmers et al, 2009; Connell et al, 2008; Feagan et al, 2004; Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000; Lawson et al, 2008; Slocum, 2007; Smithers & Joseph, 2009; Tiemann, 2008). The next section reveals how the rural idyll was produced, exchanged and consumed by participants at Melbourne’s Farmers Markets in a particularly Australian context.

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Minister Paul Keating, has been linked to historical perceptions of Australia by European colonisers as being at the end of the world, removed from civilization, as demonstrated in Geoffrey Blainley’s concept of the “tyranny of distance” (Blainley, 1968).

## The Rural Idyll at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets

### Bringing the Country to the City

Farmers' Markets throughout Melbourne were located in picturesque locales, alongside waterways or at landmark locations, surrounded by trees and gardens, in school playgrounds or public parks. In these idyllic settings that evoke a rural idyll, they separated customers from their everyday urban lives. As weekly or monthly occurrences, Melbourne's Farmers' Markets also stood apart from everyday consumption experiences in the city where supermarkets, convenience stores and places to eat out were available seven days a week, some 24 hours per day. Several customers referred to the markets as a break from "the 'real' world", particularly at monthly markets, which were viewed as a "special treat", an "event", or "like a festival", thus shifting food shopping from a mundane 'chore' to a leisure activity (see De Solier, 2013:95).

Viewed in this way, the markets could be seen as social spaces where the country and the city intersect and meanings were produced by participants, spatially and temporally separated from the everyday. The concept of 'social space' has been attributed to French social theorist Henri Lefebvre (Merrifield, 2013:104). He argued that the spaces where people interact imprint meaning and social context, and that such meanings are produced and reproduced constantly, thereby assigning meaning through strategies of 'negotiation and struggle' (Lefebvre, 1991:68-71). Often, these social spaces are constructed as dualisms, such as work and home, and inside and outside (de Certeau, 1985:122), or the country and the city. The concept of third space, alternatively, attempts to go beyond conventional divisions, where social spaces are sites of convergence, hybridity, contestation, resistance or marginality (Bhabha, 1990:207-211; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992:11). Third spaces are often seen as a consequence of late modernity and part of the 'postmodern condition' (Harvey, 1989:284-307), situating the recent rise of urban Farmers' Markets with the advent of post-industrial agriculture and the commodification of rurality for urban consumers dissatisfied with the limits of modern urban life (Short, 2006:143).

Holloway and Kneafsey argued that Farmers' Markets are "alternative spaces" or third spaces, in-between dominant production and consumption spaces (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:287). Through this, they are seen as both reactionary, nostalgic spaces of exclusion, and as progressive alternative spaces for environmental and social change at the "marginal sites of modernity" (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:287-299). Thomas Tiemann, in his study of a growers-only market in Seattle, illustrated how this market was constructed as a 'third space', a place for "informal association" and "ritualised revelry", where individuals could engage with a "shared fellowship" and conversation with "diverse others" (Tiemann, 2008:471-478). This construction of Farmers' Markets as 'third spaces', he argued, led participants to develop a shared identity and political consciousness, in his case, to protect the growers-only, local-only identity of the market (Tiemann, 2008:478).

The branding of Melbourne's Farmers' Markets also constructed them as 'third spaces', places where customers could escape the urban and experience 'real' country food and meet 'real' country farmers. Lindholm described the marketing of 'third spaces' as personalised, friendly, social places that are "neither work nor home", where individuals could experience "a sense of community and

the good things that flow from community, like mutual recognition, participation, belonging, and identity” (Lindholm, 2008:62). The imagery of the rural associated the markets with, as a market manager described to me one market morning, “good old country values ... you know, talking to people, a real sense of community ... making everywhere feel like a country town!”

Stallholders and customers alike emphasised how important ‘beautiful locations’ were to the success of a market. This was particularly true of Collingwood Farmers’ Market, which was often described as an escape from the city, akin to “being in the country”. Conversely, the Showgrounds Farmers’ Market, with its concrete ‘barn’ located behind a large steel fence and accessible only through a large dirt car park was criticised by customers for lacking any connection with the land. “It just doesn’t feel right, I mean, the only grass is Astroturf! I’ve spent ages lining up for the car park too [due to an event held at the Showgrounds on the same day], then they wanted to charge me for it would you believe ... that’s not very Farmers’ Market, is it?” commented a disgruntled customer one morning. “I want to support the farmers, but it’s so miserable here” commented another. For these customers, some connection to nature was needed to make a market ‘feel’ like a Farmers’ Market, whether it was a beautiful urban park or simply the sparse trees and grass of an oval at a local primary school.

As this example shows, the imagery of the rural not only serves to distinguish the market space from other consumption experiences, but also serves to reinforce the distinction between the urban and the rural:

“Indeed it is the very sustainability of the ‘images’ and ‘myths’ of rural life that ensure their importance not simply as a reflection of people’s views and beliefs about rurality but also as a force in the recreation of ‘place’ and associated socio-spatial relations.” (Little & Austin, 1996:102)

In this case, the imagery of the urban was unavoidable, and it invaded the Farmers’ Market site, disrupting the ‘feel good’ escapism that the customer sought out by shopping at the Farmers’ Market. Furthermore, by insinuating that to charge for parking was “not very Farmers’ Market”, the customer was also placing such behaviours in the everyday, urban domain, and her annoyance suggested that as such they were ‘out of place’ within the market experience. The commercial business of the Showgrounds also separated it from markets where local community or charitable organisations, such as the Abbotsford Convent, Children’s Farm or local primary schools, used parking or door fees as ‘fundraisers’, which fit better with the Farmers’ Market ‘community’ brand.

However, the location of the market did not necessarily have to reflect a rural idyll for that idyll to be present. Picturesque imagery that connected customers to nature and to an agrarian rural idyll was also seen in the presentation of goods at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets. Stallholders performed rurality for their customers, as could be seen at Jack and Eliza’s organic vegetable stall. For Jack and Eliza, the appearance of their stall and their own appearance at the market was vital to the selling of their wares.



**Figure 20: Jack and Eliza's organic vegetable stall.**

The stall consisted of a series of three to four trestle tables, covered with mounds of oversized, colourful, organic produce. Vegetable varieties included common vegetables, such as broccoli, as well as heirloom vegetable varieties, with many coming in unusual shapes, colours and sizes. Celeriac, kohlrabi, varieties of kale and a wide range of coloured pumpkins of all shapes and sizes, rainbow chard and spaghetti marrow lined the tables during their seasons. Even the more ordinary varieties of leeks, turnips, parsnips and swedes were over-sized, and looked unlike anything that could be purchased at a green grocer or supermarket. Hand-written, laminated signs on coloured paper were taped to the table edges at the front of the stall, clearly displaying a very simple pricing system of either two, three, four or five dollars per item or bunch of items. A whiteboard leant against the table legs, with their name written in black marker, with a laminated copy of their organic certification and VFMA accreditation certificates taped to the sides of the board.

What stood out on this stall was the colour. Carrots were purple, yellow, orange and white, kohlrabi was purple or green, and beetroot was either a golden yellow, cut to reveal red and white candy-stripes, or various shades of red. Rainbow chard, with stalks of bright red and yellow, sat next to green and white silverbeet and dark black-green kale. Leaves were left on almost all produce as an indication of freshness, as long green leaves topped bunches of oversized carrots and celery-looking stalks protruded from gnarled celeriac roots, making the table display seem abundant and fresh,.

Yet nothing about this stall was polished, with visible dirt on root vegetables and no containers to hold or plastic containers to delineate the produce, no table coverings and no tent to protect the stall from the elements. Rubber bands were used to hold together bunches of items such as parsley, and only a few loose items such as brussel sprouts or green beans were ever sold in plastic bags. Behind the stall a dirt-covered utility truck held large black crates, from which the farming couple continuously refilled the tables as their three young children played or helped out around them.

Customers often remarked that this stall and the stallholders looked 'genuine', or "like proper farmers", as one elderly woman described. The couple wore work boots, jeans and plain cotton tops and broad brim hats. During my visit to their farm, Jack explained how he felt it was important to "look the part":

"You see Will [another stallholder, his friend]; he makes everything all neat, like a shop. But customers, they want to see a real farmer. It's gotta look all ... you know ... A bit of dirt on the veg, nothing too fancy ... wear what you'd wear on the farm, you know ... they love that ... People want to see a real farmer ... that's what they pay for."

The rustic presentation of both Jack and his stall provided customers with a direct link to the land, and to how food was grown. Many other stallholders supported the idea that customers wanted simplicity, often equated to 'honesty', when shopping at their Farmers' Markets. "I let the goods speak for themselves" commented one stallholder. "It's more honest ... just [the product], dirt and all ... no need to dress it up". As such, the produce was constructed as 'real food' from a 'real place', grown or reared by 'real people'. "This is the way food should be, the way it used to be", commented Simon, a regular customer at Showgrounds Farmers' Market one day while we were both shopping at Jack's stall.

However, this was a performed rurality, and many of the stallholders were acutely aware of their appeal to urban customers. "We don't sell this stuff at our local market" commented another market gardener one morning, gesturing towards a large pile of kohlrabi "no one in the country eats that stuff. They wouldn't buy it. I don't even know what you're meant to do with it. But geez they love it here."

For Jack as well as other stallholders, the appearance of the stalls was not only about promoting the freshness of the produce sold at the market, but was also used to convey authenticity. He was a 'real' hard working farmer, and his stall needed to "look the part". This link to the farm, and to the countryside, was not only about promoting beautiful fresh produce. Rather, participants linked such imagery to values associated with farming or the country; namely, simplicity, honesty and hard work. Real food came from 'real places', and these places could be accessed by shopping at a Farmers' Market.

## Connecting to the Country

While, as Alkon described, the markets connected customers to beautiful places (2008:277); a focus on farming and the countryside at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets indicated that the 'country values' promoted by stallholders were also of importance to customers. Many customers demonstrated a desire to connect to the countryside through the markets. This sentiment has been noted in research on local food movements in post-industrial nations elsewhere (see Pratt, 2007:290; Zukin, 2008:735; Slocum, 2007:529). At Melbourne's markets, this was heightened by popular constructions of 'the bush' and 'Australianness' and the toughness of country life (Lockie, 2001:17-29; Liepins, 2000:612-616). Customers, stallholders and market managers described the Australian countryside as a place of simple living close to nature, the home of community values and a connected way of life unattainable in the city. Other Research has observed constructions of Australian farmers as hard-working and plain speaking, toughened by a harsh landscape and an extreme climate (Lockie, 2001:17-29; Liepins, 2000:612-616). At the markets, to be connected to the country was to be identified as a 'country person', as someone who was 'tough', and who could understand "what it is like" in the country.

Many customers would, unprompted, tell stallholders and other customers their own connections to the country, describing the markets as a reconnection with that past. For example, they might have explained to a stallholder how they had grown up in a country area, or had a country relative they visited as a child, while purchasing their produce. At the Showgrounds Farmers' Market, an elderly man spoke regularly and at length with a dairy stallholder, explaining multiple times how he had sourced milk straight from a local dairy in his youth. While not a universal sentiment, the occurrence of customers identifying themselves as 'country' and sharing such 'country' experiences was common enough for Melanie, a free range chicken producer, to remark to me one day "it's like it's only country people stuck in the city that shop at the markets!"

The stallholder's sentiments at the time, stated after I had spent nearly 12 months visiting that particular market, caused me to reflect on the stories I had heard in the field. I realised that I had heard countless customers, stallholders and market managers connect themselves with the country,<sup>49</sup> and I had even utilised my own connections to the country to establish my legitimacy at the markets. As Pini found in her ethnography of farmers in far north Queensland, being seen as a "nice country girl" (Pini, 2004:169) by my participants gave my position at the market legitimacy, as I could traverse the worlds of both customers and stallholders simultaneously. In many of the stories being told, while some customers had lived in country towns, the links to the countryside for others were tenuous. For example, customers with no direct experience of living in the country often recounted recent journeys to country areas to stallholders, or attributed 'country values' to their way of life. For example, one woman told a stallholder one day that she preferred to "live simply, no nonsense", and that made her "more of a country girl at heart".

For customers, stallholders could connect them to the country through sharing stories of farm life and origin story-telling of their produce. For example, Eve, an elderly dairy farmer who sold cheese at the market remarked to a group of customers at Bundoora one day:

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49 For example, market organisation websites included "About" statements that described market managers' connections to the country. See: <http://www.inseasonmarkets.com.au/AboutUs.html>, <http://www.rfm.net.au/index.php>, <http://mfm.com.au/>

“Yeah we make it all ourselves ... our cows are just out the door... The milk goes from [gestures] here to here – that’s it... They’re happy too, they get a good feed and then it’s back out in the field. What a life hey ... don’t give us much chance to sleep in.”

This imagery paints a picture of rural life for their customers, evoking an agrarian rural idyll that is both hard work and rewarding. Conversely, when customers shared their connection to the country with stallholders, they could be viewed as responding to stallholder desires to educate customers on what farming was ‘really like’, as demonstrated in Chapter Five. However, many of these conversations were volunteered by customers, unprompted by stallholder interventions. For example, at the Showgrounds Farmers’ Market one morning, a mother and her young daughter were making their purchases at an organic vegetable stall where I was helping out. Happy to see various colourful beetroot on display, she commented that she used to grow beetroot “as a kid” but not “for years, since I moved to the big smoke, gosh, forever ago!” As we continued to chat about her childhood in Tasmania, she added:

“I bring my kids here ... it’s important to me to show her what we’ve lost, you know, those food skills ... we used to know about these things ... I don’t want them growing up thinking that food comes from the supermarket ... A whole generation out there not knowing ... I didn’t grow up like that and I don’t want her to grow up like that!”

So while, as Alkon described, the markets connected customers to beautiful places (Alkon, 2008a:277), something else was evident. Clearly, connecting to the countryside held some meaning for these individuals. According to Edensor, urban people who “perform rurality” can be seen to be “seeking an ‘authentic’ self in the ‘authentic’ realm of the rural” (Edensor, 2006:488). The examples above indicated that some customers needed to state their connections to the country, to show that they weren’t simply “city folk” (Edensor, 2006:486) taken in by the illusion of the rural idyll; but rather that they had some stake in the struggles of the land, that they ‘knew’ what it meant to be a ‘country’ person. Furthermore, by associating themselves with popular constructions of country people and farmers as ‘tough’, customers could connect themselves to both nature and to intimate knowledge of ‘real’ food production, thereby sharing in the hardships faced by farmers under threat from supermarkets, industrial agriculture, and modern life, placing themselves on the farmers’ side in the urban rural divide.

### **Reclaiming the Past or Imagining the Future?**

Farmers’ Markets were experienced as places where customers could not only enjoy good food, but also connect with the past and an idealised image of small-scale farming, through their consumption choices (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:287-299). However, Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets are an entirely modern phenomenon, and so such narratives link the markets with an *imagined*, rather than experienced, past. The linking of farming and rurality with a romanticised past was evident in my dealings with participants at the markets in a variety of ways. Customers would speak of the past when they referred to the way that they interacted directly with the stallholders. “This is the way it used to be like”, one customer noted as she filled her bag with fresh produce, clearly too young to remember the days that she was describing.

Stalls that sold heritage or rare breed meats used pictures, information boards and pamphlets to appeal to an imagined past, painting a picture of idyllic free range, small-scale, old-fashioned farming. Particular “traditional” breeds of farm animals such as pigs, cows, and sheep are considered heritage or ‘rare breed’ when they are no longer bred for modern large-scale food production (Chambers, 2004:7-9). As ‘slow grow’ animals, they require more time, more space and hence more commitment of resources from the farmer, and so have fallen out of favour with the rise of industrial agriculture (Evans & Yarwood, 2000:232-234). Though purchasing an old-fashioned breed of animal, customers could purchase an old-fashioned, slower, way of producing food, and hence an imagined slower, rural, way of life. A middle-aged male customer at a free range pork stall made this observation one day:

“It’s real meat, you know ... tastes better ... those [commercial] breeds ... grow too quick, get fat and die ... no taste that way ... But these were bred for taste! ... We are *meant* to eat them ... Before the machine got to it and made a profit ... put [conventional] pigs outside they burn, that’s just not right ... not natural...”

In this example, not only does the customer show disdain of modern intensive agriculture, but he also places himself, through consumption of such meats, in an imagined past. By suggesting that “we” were *meant* to eat these black, hairy pigs, as opposed to the commercial variety that in his opinion can only live indoors, he is placing the ‘system’, or modern farming, against the ‘natural’, or traditional small-scale farming. His sentiments appealed to a past ‘natural’ state, although he admitted that he had only ever previously eaten “the same as everyone else ... and I still do sometimes, you know, when I’m out and about”. This imagined past had somehow been taken *from* him, although he never experienced it directly prior to the markets. Despite admitting that eating pork from heritage breed pig breeds was a new experience for him, he clearly placed this new experience in an imagined past.

The selling of rare breed pork products played on such imaginings of traditional, small-scale farming in idyllic locations. For example, on her website, a stallholder who sold pork from the Large Black Pig breed drew links between the breed’s origin and “the Old English Hog” and argued that this breed was ideally suited to Australian conditions. It was commonly farmed, she claimed, until “the 1960’s, the trend towards intensive farming ... led to a rapid decline in the Large Black breed ... As a result this breed, once prized for its succulent, tasty meat fell foul [sic] of the whims of farming fashion and has now been placed on the ‘critical’ list by rare breeds organisations the world over.”<sup>50</sup> This stallholder proudly displayed the same information at the markets, surrounded by pictures of large black pigs in beautiful green fields. It is interesting to note that the pigs displayed were photographed at a distance, for as another pork producer pointed out “you can’t show them any piglets or cute faces. If they think they’re adorable they won’t buy the meat!” The images, then, emphasised an idyllic countryside, and a particular construction of traditional, small-scale farming. Even the language used by this producer was poetic and old-fashioned; bringing forth an image of a

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50 The stallholder’s website also contains other ethical and environmental claims, on topics including: “Carbon Footprint”; becoming a “locavore”; and the danger of buying “Bred Free Range” instead of “genuinely Free Range” pork products. The website states what the pigs are fed, where the pigs are slaughtered, how they are transported, and where they are processed. See: <http://www.largeblackpigs.com.au/>



way of life that, she claimed, was close to disappearing under the tyranny of modern life, and so was in need of saving by her customers.



Figure 21: Free range ethical producers promoting their wares.

However, it is important to note that this association with tradition, or an imagined past, was not associated solely with a sense of 'nostalgia' (Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000:294), or a conservative attempt to reclaim that past. Rather, customers and stallholders framed such 'traditions' as an ideal to aspire *towards*, as an alternative version of the 'future of farming' or the future of food (Goodman, DuPuis & Goodman, 2012:105-128). For example, on her website, this stallholder evoked the notion of a more sustainable future to strengthen her argument for free-range, rare breed pork production. In this, she appealed not only to ethical concerns over animal welfare, but also to environmental concerns for the future of the planet:

"As the planet struggles to cope with Global warming, ask yourself what part you can play to assist. One way is to Buy [sic] local food. The embodied energy (food miles) in food that has travelled long distance to its point of sale is simply not sustainable. Doing our part, we believe in not only farming sustainably but selling sustainably also ... giving people the chance to support a local farmer and reduce their impact on the earths dwindling resources."

This desire to improve the *future* of farming and food production in Australia was evident both in market branding and in observed market interactions.



Figure 22: Stallholder signs promoting 'real' food.

As these images demonstrate, looking back through an agrarian rural idyll in order to improve the future corresponds to the traditional city and country divide that posits the urban as the saviour of the rural. However, looking towards a better future was about the immediacy of the experience rather than something that could only be aspired to. The foods bought at the market were consumed quickly, and through that consumption customers could experience this 'alternative', this rural idyll, for themselves, 'making a difference' through their enjoyment of good food purchased directly from the producer at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.

## Farmers versus Supermarkets

If Farmers' Markets were the home of real food from real places, where customers could connect to the countryside, then supermarkets were viewed as their polar opposite. When stallholders talked to customers, when customers spoke to each other, and when customers spoke to me, comparisons with supermarkets were made continuously. Conversations with customers were saturated with references of comparison to the 'big two' supermarket chains, either in terms of availability, freshness, wholesomeness or fairness for 'Aussie farmers'. Many linked their decision to shop at the markets immediately with a desire to support 'struggling' local producers, seeing their custom as a privilege or duty, as they could afford to make "the right choice". As Mark, a retiree and regular customer, explained at Showgrounds Market one morning:

"... to support local farmers you can't just pay what you pay in Coles or Woollies [Woolworths] – those guys treat farmers like, I mean, they sell for less than it costs to grow! I don't mind paying a few dollars more ... not everyone can."

Every customer interviewed mentioned at least one of the two large supermarket chains when asked why they chose to shop at the Farmers' Market. "Look at these carrots, so fresh – no like those droopy non-carrots they try to flog you in the supermarket" commented one woman to her friend as they shopped together at the Showgrounds Farmers' Market. "I know I could get this [vegetables] from Coles up the road, but really, it doesn't compare, does it? And it's about the same price" noted a man shopping with his wife and children at Bundoora Farmers' Market. At the same

market, I observed a woman enter the market and quickly race across the lawn to her favourite beef and lamb stall. Later, she commented to me at the neighbouring coffee stall “this beef, have you tried it? The flavour is amazing. People line up for ages. It’s not like that bright coloured watered down garbage you get from Woolies [Woolworths]. You gotta get in quick though, buy up for the month. I know I really should order – I hate to miss out.”

At the Farmers’ Markets, complaints of the ‘unfair’ wholesale system by stallholders were directed almost exclusively towards supermarkets. “So many people make money off the backs of farmers” commented Melanie, a Free Range Chicken producer at the Showgrounds Market one morning to a group of middle aged women, explaining to them the ‘terrible’ conditions that “supermarket chickens must be kept in” to “make the meat that cheap”. “They force farmers to do that ... they don’t want to ... [the public] just want them cheaper, what can they do? ... Free range isn’t even really free range [at supermarkets], you can’t really do free range for that price.” “Really? It’s just criminal!” agreed one of the customers, who proceeded to purchase a whole chicken at over double the price of a ‘supermarket chicken’. As this example demonstrated, farming stallholders frequently used such ‘educative’ story-telling to differentiate themselves from supermarkets, and in the process framed supermarkets as responsible for many of their woes.

The dichotomy established through comparisons between Farmers’ Markets and supermarkets reflected the market dominance of supermarkets in the food consumption landscape in Australia. The supermarkets were constructed as the all-powerful enemy of the markets, despite both producers and customers shopping at those same supermarkets regularly. Furthermore, such comparisons created a common enemy, a place that customers and stallholders alike could hold accountable for placing small-scale farming under threat and disconnecting urban customers from ‘real’ fresh food. In this way, supermarkets were framed within ‘modernity’ and all the troubles of modern life, whereas Farmers’ Markets were placed within an imagined past, and a preferable potential way of life that differed to the one of fast living and convenience promoted by supermarkets. In this way, market versus supermarket discourse reflected the oppositional construction of the urban and the rural, epitomising the rural idyll.

### **The ‘Milk Wars’ and the Markets**

So far, this Chapter has looked at how notions of the countryside, evoking a rural idyll that attributed positive attributes to goods exchanged the markets, framed many market interactions. I have demonstrated that, while these attributes could be seen as an attempt to regain something ‘lost’ in the current modern world (Short, 1991:34), they are also aspirational, highlighting a romanticised ‘alternative’ present and future that can be performed and experienced through ‘feel good’ shopping at the markets.

As demonstrated in Chapter Five, the ways that farmers spoke about farming, both in the privacy of their homes and in the public space of the markets, went beyond food production as simply a business, framing it as essential, as something that *should* be supported by their city customers. These stories were situated within the historical and political context of Australian agriculture, as well as a consumption landscape dominated by a supermarket duopoly.

To understand how the supermarkets came to stand in opposition to the Farmers' Market movement, and how many customers and stallholders fiercely framed the markets as pro-farmer and the supermarkets as anti-farmer, it is important to situate such sentiments in their historical, social and political context. Chapter One provided an insight into the historical and political context that led a neoliberal ideology to gain prominence in agricultural policies in Australia. This process, while incomplete, provided the context for my field research at Victoria's Farmers' Markets. Examination of such context was necessary as many participants were either directly affected by the consequences of changes to the politics or policies of agriculture, or alternatively, framed their participation at Farmers' Markets around resistance to perceived consequences of such 'unfair' processes. These circumstances provide the background for key events that occurred during my fieldwork. This was epitomised during fieldwork through participants reactions to an ongoing 'milk war' conducted by the two largest supermarket chains in Australia.

Woolworths and Coles combined control approximately 70% of the grocery retail sector as well as chains of petrol stations, liquor stores, and hardware stores that dominate the consumption landscape in Australia (ACCC, 2008:xii-xxv). Competition between these two businesses to secure and maintain market dominance has led to what the Australian media refer to as a "price war" between "the big two" (Hattersley et al, 2013:225-233). Starting in the mid-2000s, the supermarket chains systematically introduced discounted private label goods in almost every grocery category (Chapman et al, 2013:894), removing many other brands from their shelves and placing pricing pressure on remaining brands and suppliers down the food production chain (Hattersley et al, 2013:225-233; Richards et al, 2013:236-237). The benefit of such moves for customers has been seen as negligible by some commentators,<sup>51</sup> with particular concerns raised over the loss of competition in the grocery sector in the long term.<sup>52</sup> The 'Milk Wars', a colloquial term used by Australian media, described a key event within the 'Price Wars', when in 2010 both supermarkets introduced their own "private label" home brand milks, and then reduced their price for these items to \$1 per litre, a price significantly lower than other brands sold at the supermarkets or available elsewhere (Cullen, 2013:1; Woolrich, 2013:1; Dibdin & Cocklin, 2010: 416; Richards et al, 2013:239-240). While both supermarket chains claimed that this move would not reduce 'farm gate' prices for fresh milk suppliers, it was seen by many in the Australian media as a 'step too far'<sup>53</sup> and a move that would unfairly hurt Australian farmers.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> The consumer advocacy organisation Choice conducted some store-by-store checks of grocery prices from 2009 and 2010 and found minimal savings for customers on basic grocery items over this time. See [http://www.choice.com.au/?getCustomerId=true&url=http://www.choice.com.au/sitecore/content/Choice%20SuperMarket/~/\\_link.aspx?id=ECBE4701974A410EA45B6E70A37B3446&z=z](http://www.choice.com.au/?getCustomerId=true&url=http://www.choice.com.au/sitecore/content/Choice%20SuperMarket/~/_link.aspx?id=ECBE4701974A410EA45B6E70A37B3446&z=z)

<sup>52</sup> For example, see <http://theconversation.com/milk-wars-pointing-the-finger-at-coles-and-woolworths-529>

<sup>53</sup> For example, see <http://www.smh.com.au/business/the-high-cost-of-cheap-milk-20130328-2gxb4.html>

<sup>54</sup> There have been countless reports of the supermarket price war in the Australian media over the last decade. While I cannot mention them all, this article provides a brief history of the two companies, their 'price war' and media coverage at the time, including the years that I was engaged in ethnographic fieldwork at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets. See <http://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2014/august/1406815200/malcolm-knox/supermarket-monsters>

## The Hidden Milk Wars: Deregulation of the Australian Dairy Industry

However, while the ‘milk wars’ brought the issue of farm gate milk prices to the public’s attention, deregulation had already transformed the Victorian dairy industry over a decade earlier, placing downward pressure on farm gate prices (Hogan et al, 2005:29-30; Whitehead, 2013:1). Prior to deregulation, Victorian dairy producers sold their milk via cooperatives, that is, collectives of share-holding dairy farmers that collected and processed milk from farms around Victoria, selling on the value-added products to retailers as well as domestic and foreign wholesale businesses (Dibdin & Cocklin, 2010:414). According to Dibdin and Cocklin, Victoria’s dominance in export milk production, and the favourable position of Australia in the global dairy product market in the late 1990s, led to a belief that Victorian dairy producers, or at least the ‘most’ efficient ones, would benefit from deregulation (Dibdin & Cocklin, 2010: 414). Negotiations surrounding deregulation of Australia’s dairy industry, one of the nation’s biggest rural industries (ADIC, 2012:2), in the late 1990s epitomised the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideology. At the time, the peak body for dairy farmers, along with several dairy cooperatives, strongly advocated to the Federal Government for deregulation of their industry, with the Australian Dairy Farmers Federation stating that:

“The commercial culture . . . The shift in focus to running the farm as a business will cause the farmer to make informed investment decisions on choices that compete for their capital.” (Australian Dairy Farmers Federation, 1999:8 *in* Anderson, 2004:269)

When the dairy industry was deregulated on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2000 (Jacenko & Gunasekera, 2005:3), many Victorian co-operatives were initially unaffected or performed well (Dibdin & Cocklin, 2010: 416), although other states industries suffered immediately (Anderson, 2004:269). However, this did not last, as drought conditions affected production, inputs prices increased, and export conditions worsened (Hogan et al, 2005:10; Dibdin & Cocklin, 2010:416). Local dairy cooperatives could not out-compete international dairy companies that had now entered the domestic market, and many dairy cooperatives collapsed or were ‘bought out’ by large international companies, including New Zealand’s ‘Fonterra’, the Italian giant ‘Parmalat’, and Japan’s ‘National Foods’; who now, along with the giant Australian cooperative ‘Murray Goulburn’, dominated the Victorian milk industry (Dibdin & Cocklin, 2010: 416-418; Hogan et al, 2005:29-30; Anderson, 2004:273). Many Victorian dairy producers have struggled since deregulation and nearly half ceased production, with the number of dairy farms in Victoria falling to from over 12,000 to approximately 6,700 in the last decade (Hogan et al, 2005:29-30; Whitehead, 2013:1). Government assistance was provided in the early 2000s, however reportedly many chose to utilise the government’s “Dairy Structural Adjustment Program” to pay off debts and ‘walk off the land’ (Dibdin & Cocklin, 2010: 418-420; Whitehead, 2013:1), as many of the dairy farming stallholders lamented during my visits to their farms. Frank, an elderly dairy farmer whose family had been “in the dairy business for generations”, explained on a visit to his farm: “It used to be dairies all round here, now it’s just us. The others got out when they could, when times got tough. But we’re mad, we stuck it out” he reminisced as we arrived at the family’s small on-farm cheese making factory “this way we kept our head above water you see ... still sell to the big guys, yeah, but that don’t pay the bills no more [laughing]!”

As deregulation removed price controls, and initially disallowed dairy producers from collective bargaining, the balance of negotiating power shifted significantly to retailers (Campbell, 2008:122),

and farmers saw the price they received per litre fall significantly (Hogan et al, 2005:6; Dibdin & Cocklin, 2010:416). Following deregulation, the “milk wars” further drove down prices for fresh milk suppliers (Cullen, 2013:1; Woolrich, 2013:1; Dibdin & Cocklin, 2010: 416; Richards et al, 2013:239-240).

The deregulation of the dairy industry was very significant to many participants at Victoria’s Farmers’ markets. A significant number of stallholders at the Farmers’ Markets were dairy farmers, or former dairy farmers. The first Victorian Farmers’ Markets began as deregulation was introduced, in the heart of one of the state’s biggest dairy producing regions, Gippsland. Many stallholders I spoke to became involved at the markets when the price of milk fell, or when their dairy cooperative collapsed or was bought out. Most of these producers chose not to ‘leave the land’, and many continued milking and supplying one of the large dairy businesses, but they sought to supplement their income by ‘value-adding’ to their land. Other off-farm income sources further supplemented the farming income. Two dairy producers at the markets were large enough to start their own milk labels, which they sold at Farmers’ Markets as well as at specialist food stores.

There were a significant number of farmer-stallholders that were dairy farmers who had diversified their land to go to the markets. Some produced cheeses, ice cream or yoghurt, often on their farm in small factories. Others diversified by introducing other herds, such as geese, rare breed or mix breed pigs, sheep, or market gardens, and one stallholder sold the superfluous male dairy calves as veal. These extra industries were often, but not always, geared specifically and solely to the Farmers’ Market audience. Cheese producers were an exception, as some also aimed to supply specialty stores, or even supermarkets, with one claiming that they aspired to be able to ‘achieve’ export status, viewed by this farmer as the pinnacle of success.

### The Milk Wars at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets

Despite the impact of deregulation on farm gate prices since 2000, it was the ‘milk wars’ that captured the Australian public’s attention. This distinction is significant, for rather than placing ‘the blame’ on the government, on the farmers’ federation, on the farmers themselves, or on competition or global agribusiness, the blame for the ‘struggling farmers’ could be placed solely with the supermarket duopoly.

When farmers spoke to customers at the markets, many blamed the ‘big two’ supermarkets, and their ‘price war’ that reduced the price of milk to \$1 a litre, for their need to seek extra income outside of milk production, which helped continue a narrative of farming as threatened. Continuous media coverage of the “milk war” during fieldwork strengthened the perception that dairy farmers were struggling (Cullen, 2013:1). In my farm visits, many farmers also discussed the consolidation and purchase of milk wholesalers by foreign companies as a contributing factor to the low ‘farm-gate’ price of milk; however, almost all dairy farming participants I spoke to maintained their contracts with these milk distributors.

The deregulation of the dairy industry, with its impact on producer stallholders, also had an impact on public perception. For customers, the ‘unfair’ treatment of dairy farmers at the hands of

wholesalers, specifically “the big two” supermarkets, was a rallying call for the need to ‘support local producers’, proof that they were ‘under threat’. This was epitomised through the “milk price wars” (Cullen, 2013:1) that received much media coverage during my fieldwork. This provided an on-going narrative that permeated the markets during my field research. The perceived ‘unfair’ treatment of dairy farmers epitomised in the ‘home brand’ \$1 milk offered at the ‘big two’ supermarkets reinforced the perception that all farmers were under threat from the supermarket duopoly.

Discourses of farmers facing pressure from the supermarkets, while epitomised in the ‘milk war’, was not isolated to dairy farmers. Many farmers that did own dairies but sold other goods, such as free range pork or eggs, did not frequently mention to customers that they were also dairy farmers. Rather, the ‘milk wars’ were taken to be representative of how ‘the big two’ treated all farmers; this was, after all, just one more front in their ongoing ‘price war’. Comparing the Farmers’ Markets to supermarkets, some customers justified higher prices in these terms, citing the “fairness” of markets compared to the “dodgy”, “rip off”, “sneaky tactics” and “immoral” behaviour of the supermarkets:

“These guys [stallholders] have to sell a whole lot just to make it worth their while. I don’t mind paying more; it goes in their pockets and not to those others [supermarkets, middle men].”

“It takes a lot to grow good food. It costs a lot. Why not pay for it? Nothing costs what it’s meant to cost, if you know what I mean ... at Woolies [Woolworths] and Coles and all that.”

Outrage expressed at markets towards the supermarkets, sometimes cited specifically when customers were asked why they shopped at Farmers’ Markets, could be viewed as a Polanyian double-movement, that is, a pulling back to re-embed farming back into the community after being disembedded and reduced to market economics by ‘big business’ (Dale, 2012:3-5). However, as Dibden and Cocklin pointed out, the mechanisms utilised to show dissatisfaction with ‘the big two’ supermarkets did not necessarily threaten or question the system that led to such a situation, for as Dibden and Cocklin noted, “most of these protest actions have called on government or retailers to ameliorate the situation of farmers rather than seeking to challenge the conventional agri-food system” (Dibdin & Cocklin, 2010: 418).

Rather, the market, quite literally, was seen as the only mechanism in which customers could show their dissatisfaction, and so create change in the system. The logic of the free market, consumer choice and consumer power was seen as the mechanism for change (Miller, 2001:277), reinforcing the notion of the rational customer, the market and the city itself as the ultimate determiner of the farmers’ fate (Lawrence et al, 2012:1-10).

Furthermore, discussions at the markets surrounding dairy farming and ‘the price wars’ were partial in the way that they romanticised farming through their focus on an idealised hard-working farmer struggling at the hands of big business, epitomising the rural idyll in the values attributed to this ‘simple’ country life: the modern, global supermarket against the traditional country farmer, with the urban customer positioned as both the problem and the solution to the country’s woes. In my observations, there was no mention of the industrial nature of Victorian milk production or processed milk products produced for the domestic and export market. Rather, the negative aspect

of 'big business' was moralised by constructions of large cooperation's 'tainting' what was a pure, wholesome, 'real' food product.

This was epitomised in discussions and constructions of the un-healthiness of 'permeate' at the markets. Stories of permeate; referred to in some stories as 'cheese waste', being added to milk by commercial operators began appearing in Australian media in 2012.<sup>55</sup> Permeate is the substance that milk and milk products such as cheese are transformed into once milk is passed through a filtration system and all fat and protein is removed. The protein and fat is then returned to the milk. This process ensures consistent levels of fat and protein for labelling, and allows for the addition of additives such as omega 3 or vitamin D (FSANZ, 2012:1). Some market participants claimed such processing of milk "makes you gain more fat", and others claimed it to be the reason why "more people are supposedly lactose intolerant". The 'danger' of permeate was emphasised by a dairy producer, Jake, one day at the market. This producer, who owned a series of dairies across Victoria and South Australia, had the capacity to process and package his own milk, and so came to the markets to promote his 'small' brand. One market morning, he explained to me and another customer why 'permeate-free' milk was so vital:

"When milk goes through those permeation micro-filters, it turns the fat into smaller particles ... and your body absorbs them easier ... Our non-homogenised milk, it's more natural. Your body doesn't absorb the fat as easy as in permeate ... Really, the [full fat] non-homogenised milk is much better for you than the skim milk, I don't know why people keep buying that red [label] one [skim milk] 'cause the green one [non-homogenised] is much better for'm! Crazy ... People don't know these things, you see, you gotta tell'm."

All homogenised milk products, including all bar one of the range this producer sold at the markets, were standardised through similar processes (FSANZ, 2012:1). The 'unnaturalness' of permeate, which was to be found in milk purchased from the supermarket, as opposed to 'real' milk that could be purchased at the Farmers' Market, was also parroted by dairy stallholders at the markets that sold the majority of their milk to companies such as Parmalat, Fonterra, Murray Goulburn or National Foods. Such constructions of permeate, relating to milk purchased elsewhere, as unhealthy, unnatural or impure served two purposes. Firstly and most simply, it gave the farmers that sold milk at the markets a 'point-of-difference', a marketable quality that justified the higher prices of their product. However, the use of this argument also served a broader purpose, as it continued the narrative of struggling farmers bringing 'good real honest food' to the markets, with tainted or 'unnatural', risky, 'unknown' processed foods purchased elsewhere, particularly supermarkets. The country and city divide was thus epitomised in the association of processed, modern foodstuff as tainted and mechanical, far removed from the 'pure, natural' product found on farms, evoking a rural idyll. As more and more supermarket brands, including home brand milk,<sup>56</sup> were marketed as "permeate free" (Scholes, 2012:25), concerned customers argued defensively against this perceived appropriation and commoditisation of their concerns. "You know they all say permeate free now, even the horrible processed flavoured stuff, it just drives me mad!" claimed a woman shopping with her young children at the Showgrounds Market one morning while I chatted to her and two of her friends, all mothers of young children. "They just take our words, they take our

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<sup>55</sup> <http://www.goodfood.com.au/lifestyle/cuisine/cheese-waste-in-up-to-16-of-milk-20120416-1x3sq.html>

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.theage.com.au/national/milk-to-be-permeatefree-food-chains-20120716-226j3.html>



words and they try to sell them back to us, like idiots” added her friend “well we aren’t that stupid. We know the difference.”

### Raw Milk, Permeate and ‘Real Milk’

The discourse of natural, ‘real’ milk was seen at its most extreme in the availability of “raw milk” at some inner city and outer suburban Farmers’ Markets. Some stallholders sold a product that was labelled “bath milk”, but was known to customers as raw milk. While originally stallholders that also sold other farm-based dairy products including pasteurised milk provided raw milk to customers, soon other dairy farming stallholders who had diversified and sold free range pork, eggs, lamb or beef at the markets began to bring ‘bath milk’ as a lucrative additional specialty item to sell at their stalls. Raw milk is milk that has not been pasteurised, as required by Australian food safety laws (FSANZ, 2009). Though illegal to sell for consumption in Australia, unpasteurised milk was labelled “bath milk” and “not for human consumption” to avoid prosecution. However, as it was presented in standard plastic milk bottles and was sold for a higher price than pasteurised milk, there was no doubt that it was intended for consumption. Milk producers could bottle this “non-food” product themselves, and so avoid adhering to government health and safety regulations. Despite the risks that might be associated with illegally processed foodstuffs, raw milk was constructed as more natural, pure, “what we should be drinking” at the markets in which it was sold, and was embraced by many customers and promoted by market managers at inner city and some suburban markets.

When I asked customers why they chose to purchase raw milk, many spoke of the perceived dangers of permeate, rather than pasteurisation itself. “This is what we’re meant to drink, it’s what our grandparents drank for goodness sake” claimed one impassioned customer when speaking of raw milk. Although the process of treating milk through pasteurisation was also seen by this customer as a ‘risk’, as he believed that heating the milk “spoils the essence of the stuff”, this was rarely mentioned by other advocates of raw milk. Therefore, despite health and safety regulations requiring pasteurisation to prevent illness from contamination and to extend the shelf life of milk (FSANZ, 2009: ii), these customers saw the ‘risk’ of trusting large-scale agribusiness to outweigh the risk of consuming ‘natural’ unpasteurised milk purchased directly from the farmer. Frequent descriptors such as “natural”, “untainted”, “pure”, or “wholesome” were teamed with raw milk that was seen as “creamy”, “delicious” and tasting “like milk’s meant to”, attributing idyllic values to these raw milk products.

While purchasing milk and other farm-based products at Farmers’ Markets was seen by some customers as a response to the ‘milk wars’ and the ‘unfair’ treatment of farmers, the supposed health ‘benefits’ of raw milk were often framed as part of a larger, global ‘real food’ movement. Additionally, the desire for raw milk was not isolated to an Australian context. Rather, some inner-city customers and stallholders cited France and Italy, “the true home of real good local food” as one customer described, and their allowance of traditional raw milk cheeses, some that could be imported into Australia, but were not able to be manufactured, by law, by Australian cheese makers, as evidence that Australia should allow consumers to purchase raw milk.<sup>57</sup> Some stallholders asked

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<sup>57</sup> <http://www.foodsafety.asn.au/resources/unpasteurised-milk-and-cheese/>

the VFMA to act as an advocate for raw dairy products in Australia. For example, at the annual general meeting I attended, a stallholder told the committee that they should “get the government” to allow “real” raw cheese to be manufactured in Australia. While this sentiment was quickly dismissed by the committee chair as “not possible”, several others in the room voiced their agreement and support. However, this issue was not limited to stallholder-only forums, as the same debate was raised at inner-city markets on a number of occasions, particularly by dairy producers. “It’s just crazy. I mean, we’re allowed to import these fancy Italian raw milk cheeses but we can’t make ‘em ourselves! That just isn’t fair I reckon” complained one dairy based cheese-making stallholder to an inner-city customer one day, when she mentioned her love of “real” Italian cheeses. “No that’s just insane! Totally unfair to you guys!” replied the young female customer.

These examples illustrated how uncertainty and mistrust of mainstream agribusiness contributed to the popularity of alternative agriculture and local food movements, assisting the construction of Farmers’ Markets as ‘good food’ places, where products can be purchased that are outside of what is available in conventional consumption spaces. The expansion into ‘raw milk’ by egg and meat producers also indicated how food fashions and trends were capitalised on by stallholders. Furthermore, through appealing not only to more “natural” or “traditional” foods but also to modern trends and desirable gourmet products from Italy and France, debates surrounding raw milk and raw cheese situated the markets in the rural idyll, allowing customers to reconnect with the countryside and withdraw from the uncertainty of the modern world, as well as fulfil a desire to engage with a modern, new, globalised world of good food. It also placed Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets within a particularly European, elite, rural idyll.

## Conclusion

As this chapter demonstrated, the rural idyll was performed and purchased at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets by participants on both sides of the market stall. By evoking a particularly Western, European rural idyll, the markets were intricately connected to an imagined ‘good life’ that could be participated in through purchasing and consuming foods from the markets. This ‘good life’ was not only located in the present, but aspired towards future that was preferable to the woes attributed to fast-paced, modern life. In this way, the rural idyll was located firmly within the urban, created for and consumed by urban elites.

Customer reactions to both the ‘milk wars’ and the market dominance of the supermarket duopoly could be seen as a form of resistance by customers and stallholders alike (see DuPuis & Goodman, 2005:359). However, discourses surrounding the markets and the supermarkets were not so straightforward. Every customer interviewed at urban markets admitted that they still “had to” shop at either Coles or Woolworths for “essentials”, but negotiated with themselves as to what was and was not acceptable to purchase at these shops. This negotiation painted a more complex picture of such values, disrupting a simplistic ‘us and them’ dichotomy. The next chapter will explore how the ‘country values’ evoked at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets, imagined through an agrarian rural idyll, were produced, exchanged, consumed and negotiated through these interactions at the markets.

## Chapter Seven: (The Limits of) Feel-Good Shopping

In previous chapters, I demonstrated how understandings of local food, farmers, and the countryside were presented and negotiated by stallholders and customers at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets. In international Farmers' Market research, markets are often portrayed as homogenous, 'feel good' experiences where customers seek out good food choices that correspond to their values (Zukin, 2008:724). This chapter questions this assumption by highlighting how, rather than seeing the markets as homogenous, customers and stallholders viewed the markets as places where good and bad co-existed. Through the interplay between market interactions, values, ambivalence and financial considerations, trust could be gained or lost, loyalty confirmed or questioned, and markets could fall in and out of favour as a shopping destination.



Figure 23: Promotional board display at the Showgrounds Farmers' Market

## Shopping at “My Market”

Susan and Leanne<sup>58</sup> described themselves as ‘old friends’. Both middle aged and married with children in high school, they were some of the first customers to attend the new Melbourne Showgrounds Farmers’ Market. Overjoyed at the concept of a weekly market on their side of the city, Susan and Leanne’s Sunday shopping trips quickly became their “weekly ‘catch up’ ritual”. As Susan described:

“This is our time! Let them [the family] look after themselves for once. I’m in no rush to get back [laughing]!”

One sunny Sunday morning in November, both women arrived, separately, at the very start of the market, fifteen minutes before the market’s official starting time of 9am. Meeting at the market shed entrance; Susan grabbed a loaf of sourdough bread before they entered the pavilion together. With a wave to me and the market manager, the women stopped to say a quick hello to Max at the barbeque breakfast stall, promising that they would return soon for breakfast. As Harry was at the market with his “beautiful” hydroponic herbs that week, his stall was the first stop for Leanne for the day. As she commented to me, “oh he just has the most wonderful greens ... he sells out, so you’ve got to get in quick. [To Susan] Luckily we’re the first ones!”

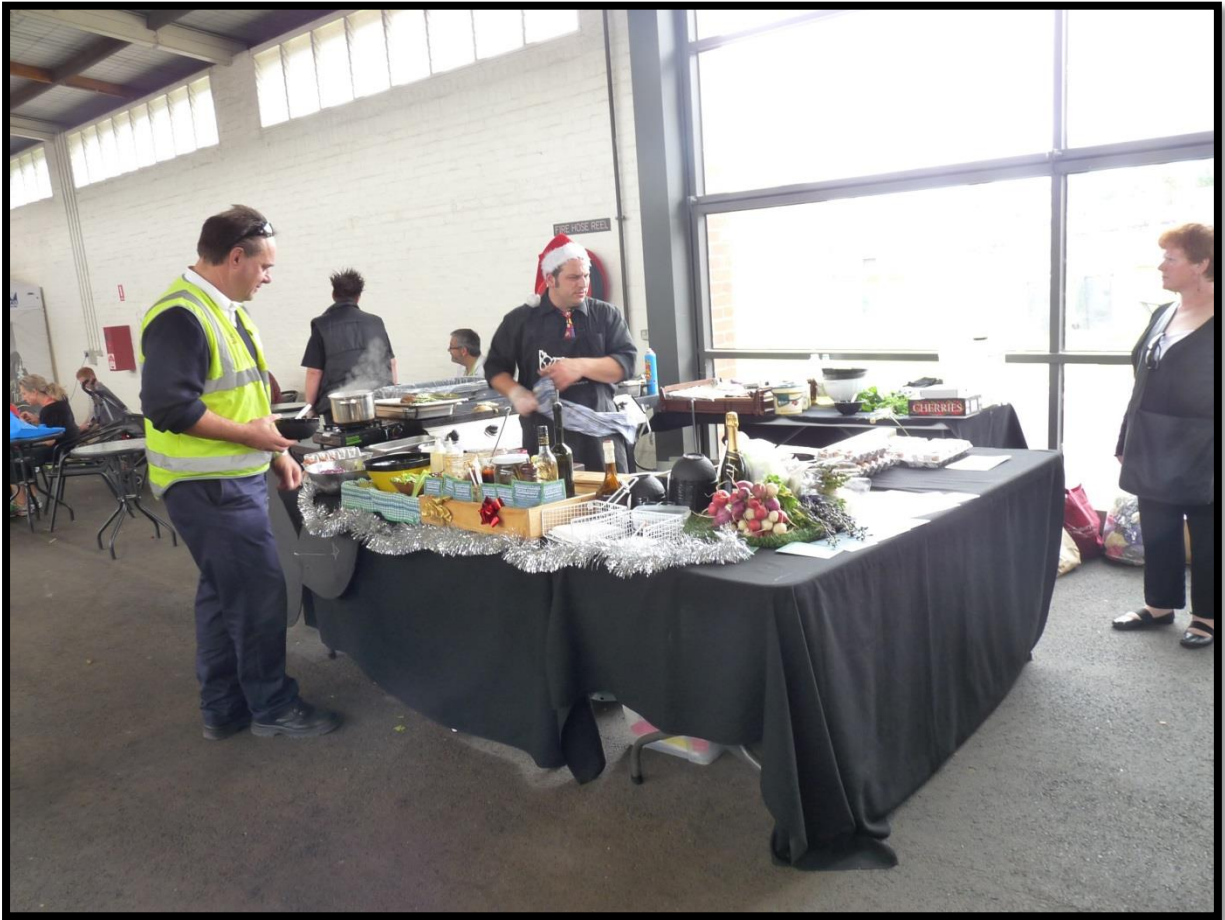
Both equipped with a two-wheeled cloth shopping trolley loaded with reusable shopping bags, Susan and Leanne made their way around the market. They headed for the organic vegetables at the far end of the hall, placing orders with two meat stalls on their way. Susan picked up some coloured beetroot, and feeling the leaves she asked Lisa, the stallholder, if they would be fresh and young enough for a salad. Meanwhile, Leanne sorted through piles of colourful carrots, finding the best for the week. The pair made their way to the next vegetable stall to add broccoli and spinach to their carts, with a favourite seasonal stall providing asparagus on the way.

Heading straight to the other end of the market space, skipping the stalls in-between, both women stopped and chatted for a while with Georgia at her citrus stall. While fresh juice was squeezed and Leanne placed mandarins picked out of a box into her shopping bag, they found out how hot it was on the farm that week and were updated on Georgia’s son’s Queensland adventures, chiming in with updates on their own children’s lives. There was a quick joke and laugh with Jim at the next stall as they picked through spotted pears and apples, filling brown paper bags. After this they moved on to collect eggs, then over to Misty Springs for a chat with Rose. Neither bought anything from Rose that day, as jams and preserves were not needed every week, but they stopped and chatted nonetheless. Olive oil, delicate little cakes, cheeses, gourmet butter and other ‘special treats’ were occasionally sampled and purchased along the way, but today, only Susan bought a little cake to take home to her husband, though they joked that they might share it themselves after breakfast, for “he’d never know”. Both lamented the absence, yet again, of a vegetarian tart stall that also brought along sheep milk yoghurt, a relished treat. Milk used to be a staple on both shopping lists, and after the milk stall’s departure from the market, the women told me that they kept purchasing the same milk from the green grocers down the road, but lamented its absence, and the absence of a decent

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<sup>58</sup> Pseudonyms have been utilised for all customer participants.

explanation from the market manager. They also resented that they now had to make an extra trip to the shops after each market.



**Figure 24: Breakfast at the Showground Farmers' Market**

When all shopping tasks were completed, orders were placed with Max as they joined in with his gentle teasing, laughing as he prepared 'breakfast burgers' filled with homemade sauces and salads prepared from produce collected from the other stalls. The smell of the barbeque filled the hall as coffee, poured into reusable 'Keep Cups', was purchased at the next stall along as the barista, Simon, joined in with Max's entertaining banter. Being a nice day, they sat down outside at one of the small round tables set up by the market organisers. Here, they chatted and ate their meal, soaking up the atmosphere of 'their market'. Orders from meat producers were picked up after breakfast before they waved goodbye to their stallholders and each other, both heading separately to the car park, returning to the "craziness" of their families, their work and their home, until next week's market.

I saw Leanne and Susan at the market almost every Sunday morning. When other plans intervened and a market visit was cut short, or only one was able to make it to the market or time was limited for either, only 'necessary' stalls were visited to collect bread, vegetables, fruit, meat and eggs, usually after a few words of explanation were offered to the breakfast stall staff. "Bit of a rush this morning" remarked Susan to Max one morning. "Just me today, sorry!" chirped Leanne on another.

Early into my research, Susan and Leanne noticed my presence at the market. Initially identifying me as a “market helper”, we chatted easily, and I interviewed them one morning as they sat down to enjoy their breakfast. After this initial encounter, we continued to chat regularly, often joined by regular stallholders and market staff. Throughout this time, Susan and Leanne commented on the issues faced by “their market”, such as car park logistics, unreliable stalls and unpredictable customer numbers, and were deeply concerned about the market’s future and the livelihoods of their favourite producers as numbers declined. “This is our market, we hate to see it suffer” lamented Susan one day, when the future of the market looked uncertain.

Susan and Leanne’s story illustrates how customers created their own market experiences. Having selected their favourite stalls early on, they approached the markets in a similar pattern every week, stopping to chat to the same stallholders and making their regular purchases. They only deviated if new stalls caught their attention or regular stallholders were absent.

Regular customers at the larger Bundoora and Collingwood markets followed similar patterns. I observed, and customers described, visiting the stalls they considered ‘theirs’; “my herb man”, “my pasta lady”, “my orange people”, “our bread guy”, “my pork person”, “the best dip girl”, “my olive people”, “my veggie guy”, “the coffee boys at my coffee stall”, “my tomato lady”, “my favourite beef people”, “my pie man”, “the best curry guy”, “my egg man”, “my cake lady”, “my apple man”, “my goat people” and so on. At every market, I observed customers crossing the market spaces to their favourite stalls, engaging in conversations with the same stallholders as they made their way around the market space, blindly passing other stalls as they went, indicating that “what producers are selling to consumers at farmers’ markets is, in part, the aura of personal relations and social connection” (Hinrichs, 2000: 299). As both of these larger markets had been running for several years, some of these patterns seemed well worn, with some customers incorporating new stalls with new products more readily than others. However, it is important not to overstate the personal nature of these relationships, as while the stallholders were referred to as favourites, very few were known by name. Similarly, stallholders reported that they knew many regular customers by sight but not by name. Rather, the labelling of “my” stalls seemed to, as Hinrichs described, create an “aura” of personal relationships rather than anything that extended beyond the market space for most, but not all, customers and stallholders.

Nevertheless, these well-worn patterns were an important part of the market experience for many customers. For example, at Bundoora Farmers’ Market one morning a value-add stallholder stood in front of his stall, offering samples to customers as they passed by. A group of women, whom I had seen at the market before, stopped to sample the chilli chocolate product on offer. One woman, seeming surprised, began a conversation with the stallholder:

Customer: “Thank you [taking sample]. Oh, are you new to the market?”

Stallholder: “Nah, been here about three years, more or less.”

Customer: “Really? Really? My gosh I thought I knew my market. I’ve been coming here since the beginning and I swear this is the first time I saw you [eating sample]. This is really nice. Perhaps next time [walked away].”

While a few customers may have been 'blind' to stalls that they did not visit regularly, more often I observed that distinctions between different stalls were made deliberately, in the context of past experiences or 'insider information' garnered from their interactions with other stallholders. For example, I overheard a man tell his shopping companion knowingly at Bundoora Farmers' Market, "well my egg man told me to look out for this guy. Said they were big business." Another woman told her friend who was visiting the Showgrounds Farmers' Market for the first time as she passed a beef producer, "oh no we don't go here; we go to my beef people."

Loyalty to particular stalls was coupled with distrust of others. Leanne and Susan, while maintaining a positive view of 'their' market, avoided a "grumpy" egg producer, because other stallholders had told them that he was a "big operator". When the market first opened, they were warned by an organic producer not to purchase vegetables from a large conventional grower that set up at the entrance of the market "because they didn't seem like growers they were more like a shop." These comments, like many others heard over the course of fieldwork, indicated that regular customers could see themselves as insiders in the market sphere, as privileged shoppers 'in the know' on the good and bad of the market experience. Their own experiences indicated which stalls were affordable and pleasant to shop at, and which ones were "not as friendly", or as another customer referred, "a bit of a rip off". Having been 'educated' by their favourite stallholders, customers could 'know' which stalls corresponded to their own values, as they decided which stories held greater salience, creating their own market experience.

In this way, at every market there was not one homogenous market experience, but a heterogeneous accumulation of market experiences. For Leanne and Susan, the market was their weekly 'ritual'. The experiences of "their market" transformed the mundane chore of shopping for weekly supplies into an enjoyable, sociable event. Furthermore, both Leanne and Susan described the market as taking "time out", as a place that they could escape the everyday and spend some time, and a place that they could "belong". Their market experience was saturated with interactions, as they chatted to regular stallholders and asked new stallholders questions, embracing some new stalls into their market experience, such as a new gourmet cultured butter producer, but giving no more time to others, such as a new meat stall deemed "a bit too shiny" and "too expensive" to "really belong" at their Farmers' Market.

### **Shopping as Productive**

When consumption is viewed, as Miller argued, as a way in which identities can be formed and contested, then the market experience can be seen as an important aspect of that identity (Miller, 1995:277). De Solier, through her ethnographic research with Melbourne 'foodies', argued that shopping in the alternative consumption space of the Farmers' Market, rather than being viewed as a passive process of consumption, should instead be viewed as a productive experience, as through cooking the produce and actively engaging with producers at the markets, customers produced their own food experiences. De Solier saw this process as integral to the 'making of the self' that her participants engaged in through food (De Solier, 2013:95-114). Translating Farmers' Market purchases into healthy home cooked meals allowed purchases to shift from the realm of consumption to that of production, which she argued is attributed a higher moral value (De Solier,

2013:16). Viewing shopping at Farmers' Market as productive, rather than solely an act of consumption, demonstrates "how people negotiate anxieties over the moral status of consumption" (De Solier, 2013:16). When I spoke to Leanne and Susan, they not only expressed a passion for the experience of the market itself, but also the produce they bought during their excursions. The goods purchased at the market, later turned into "healthy meals" to be consumed by their family, were inseparable from the stories of the producers.

In the same way, the act of shopping at the markets was in itself seen as an act of production by these customers. While they frequently engaged in other, more convenient shopping options, coming to the market was an effort that they made deliberately and passionately. Their role at the market was an active one, for they were there to support 'their' producers, building relationships, spending "me time", as Leanne called it, "catching up" with their friend. The market, then, not only provided sustenance, but contributed towards a 'good life' both for these women and their families.

Learning about produce at the Farmers' Market, establishing relationships with stallholders and creating homemade foods out of purchases allowed customers such as Leanne and Susan to identify as "Farmers' Market people". As with many regular customers, they did not see themselves as passive consumers. Rather, they saw themselves as part of the market, expressing to me their feelings of guilt at missing a market, and their need to support and "give back" to their favourite producers through maintaining loyalty and recruiting new customers. New customers could be recruited through advocacy to family and friends as well as offering "helpful advice" to other customers as they contemplated their purchases at the stalls. As Susan commented to a new customer at Jim's apple stall one day:

"Oh are you looking for cooking apples? I'd recommend Pippins. They are just divine – I made a cake just the other day, didn't I? [To Jim, the stallholder] They are the best cooking apples, aren't they?"

Hearing customers advocate on behalf of favourite stallholders was a regular occurrence at the markets, and my fieldnotes are full of exchanges between customers describing products to others, sharing recipes, offering advice and encouraging others to purchase and try their favourite things, for example:

"I just love her butter. Have you tried the flavoured ones? Unbelievable."

"You know what I do with the honey? I make a cake [to the stallholder] want me to give you the recipe? You can sell it to others, it's really good."

"Just amazing aren't they ... I use the dips in my cooking all week, especially the carrot one. Get all of them, they're great!"

"The ham and bacon are great. Have you tried his smoked trout too? Just amazing. Amazing."

"You don't get better than this I reckon!"

"Oh my god isn't this the greatest cheese you've ever tasted or what?"



Regular customers were actively involved in the promotion of their 'favourite' products and stalls at the market. The enthusiasm shown by the regular customers quoted above was heard constantly throughout fieldwork. I saw this time and again, and after months spent with stallholders at the markets I noticed that I, too, partook in such 'recruitment'. Customers volunteered their hints, advice on taste, recipes, and much more information, to others. This information was given enthusiastically, willingly, and without hesitation. One such example occurred at the Showgrounds Market one morning as I stood at an organic vegetable stall purchasing a red cabbage. Another customer, unprompted, engaged me in a conversation. She was a woman in her mid-thirties, shopping with a trolley and an armful of green bags. I had not met her before, though I had seen her previously from a distance at the market:

Woman: "Aren't they just amazing? I've been buying them every week. Oh they are just delicious aren't they?"

Me: "Yes I know, I love them, they are so tasty."

Woman: "Do you know what I do with them? I don't cook them down too much. My mum always used to cook them down, you know, reduce them"

Me: "Yeah that's what my family does too, except we add apple. It's a Dutch thing I think to add apple with your vegetables"

Woman: "Oh you're Dutch too! Yeah it's a Dutch thing, my family do that too. But we cook it down with some lemon; make it a bit like sauerkraut but not so much, you know what I mean"

Me: "Yes I do that too, though I tend to use wine instead of lemon now..."

This exchange, which went for some time, continued to grow as another customer joined in with her own family recipe. The interaction ended with the purchasing of our vegetables, a smile and a wave. This exchange, one of many similar exchanges I experienced in my time at the markets, illustrated the ways in which some customers interacted at the markets. It also illustrated how the markets were used by these customers as places where they could connect to their own family history through food, and share their passion and love for food with like-minded individuals at the markets.

However, such loyalty to stallholders depended on more than just the quality of the goods that they sold. Several customers noted that they would avoid visiting stalls where a stallholder looked disinterested, as one declared:

"I'm not going to them if they don't smile. If they don't need my business then why should I bother?"

If a customer felt needed, welcomed, and could ask questions, they were more likely to engage with that producer and continue to visit them every market. Those that were seen as generous, either with their time or with their products, particularly attracted customer loyalty:

“Georgia makes me feel so welcome. She always chucks a few extra mandies [mandarins] in for the kids ... it’s so nice ... makes you feel special.”

“Well we always get a loaf of bread from her [stallholder at Bundoora]. It’s pretty expensive but she’s so nice! She makes the bread in her own wood oven at home, its sourdough and its rustic and y’know ... [pauses]. We have a chat and I get my bread, but nowadays she’s a bit too busy for a long chat.”

“We fill our freezer every market [with a stallholder’s pasta]. At first I thought ‘yeah it’s alright’ but now we can’t get enough of it. They make it with love ... and the girls [the stallholder’s daughters] are growing up so much, they’re almost the same age as my little ones!”

These examples indicate how regular customers saw themselves as active participants, part of *their* markets, rather than simply customers. Many were committed to their favourite stallholders, dedicated loyal purchasers of their products. This was also evident in the way that some customers would explain or apologise to stallholders when they did not purchase their product. For example, one day at Bundoora Farmers’ Market I observed a woman with a trolley who was walking past a British smallgoods stall. She stopped and approached the table to greet the stallholder. “Hi, how are you ... look you know how I love your pork pies? I just wanted to say that I can’t get any today, I’m in a bit of a rush and I just know I won’t get a chance to enjoy it. Plus I’m meant to be staying away from pies and the like [laughs with the stallholders]. I’ll see you next time, bye!”

At the same market I overheard a couple of women talking, one explaining to the other how they could not “go round the other side” of the market because she was “not buying meat today” and did not want to “disappoint” a certain stallholder. They gave the stall a wide berth, cutting the corner while they made sure the stallholder was occupied before they continued with their shopping.

While Bundoora was only a monthly market, and the stallholders in question may or may not have recognised these particular customers, these customers felt the need to justify their decision not to purchase some of their regular items at the market. The sporadic occurrence of monthly markets did not seem, in my observations, to inhibit how connected some customers felt with their stallholders, with their market, and with the values they attributed to being a “Farmers’ Market customer”. However, some regular customers at the Showgrounds weekly market indicated to me that they did see themselves as distinct from customers at other markets, as one pointed out:

“We come here every week and that’s what we eat. Those bigger markets, well, people talk a lot don’t they, but in reality they’re only getting their stuff what once, twice a month? And making how many meals? Well, I live this market. Every day of the week. I can’t wait a month. I might miss a week ... we really get this whole Farmers’ Market thing over here, not just doing it now and then cause it’s trendy...”

Nevertheless, my observations at monthly markets indicated that some customers were just as dedicated, and more importantly, attached the same ‘feel-good’ values to being a Farmers’ Market customer. For example, some customers followed their favourite stallholders to different inner-city markets in order to shop at Farmers’ Markets on an almost weekly basis. One Saturday, I spoke to a customer I had observed at a market across town the week before shopping with her young family.

She attributed the inconvenience of her travel as small compared to the 'hard work' of the farming stallholder that she had sought out:

“Well they [the stallholders] have to get their goods to as many people they can. You know, they’ve gotta make a living and all or the whole thing just falls down ... We want them to do well ... So we travel a bit but not nearly as far as they do [laughs] I mean think about it! I don’t mind. I get my veg one way or another ... “

These sentiments were expressed in interviews at monthly markets, particularly inner city markets, frequently. Customers suggested that Melbourne was a large place, and that there were not enough farmers to, as one customer remarked “have a market everywhere every week!” The customer above seemed to stress that it was a privilege to be able to get food so fresh, and to have to go out of their way in order to access this good food. This sentiment was promoted by stallholders, painting a picture of farming as hardship as was discussed in Chapter Five.

### **The Cost of Good Food**

The gratefulness customers showed towards stallholders translated, in my observations, to an absence of bartering at the markets. In other types of markets around the world, bartering is a common and sometimes necessary part of the market experience (Heady, 2005:262-272). At Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets, even stalls without price signage did not negotiate on price, and there seemed to be an understanding from customers that they do not try to barter on prices. It was common for stallholders to “throw in” extra products or round down the price for regular customers, part of their selling strategies at the markets, but the prices themselves did not change. This practice was most evident in its absence and most notable when someone was perceived to break the taken-for-granted assumption that bartering was unacceptable. For example, one day at the Showgrounds Farmers’ Market, a man came to the market as stallholders were packing up. He offered to buy a large volume of the remaining produce on an organic vegetable stall at a significantly lower price. The farmer refused, stating that the price was what it was. This customer left empty handed, and I did not see him return. The producer was quite irate, calling to me: “Can you believe that? Did you see that”, before commenting “I can sell it at the Melbourne [wholesale] markets for more than what he was asking ... I bet he owns a stall at Footscray [market] or a restaurant or something ... unbelievable.” A regular customer joined in, gesturing to me in agreement “terrible really, don’t they know this isn’t the Vic [Queen Victoria] Markets?”

That the indignation expressed by the stallholder was reinforced by a nearby customer indicated that it was not just the stallholders who viewed Farmers’ Market as different to other markets. Rather, this customer, and many other customers through their observed willingness to pay whatever a stallholder asked and to not attempt to fetch a better price, indicated that they actively participated in the differentiation of Farmers’ Markets from other types of markets. When I asked Dan, a regular Showgrounds customer about this, he stated that he hadn’t “really thought about it”, then reasoned thus:

“When you’re at the Vic Markets, the farmers already been paid ... you’re just talking profit lines there. This stuff is direct, so I guess .... I guess I want the farmer to get what he thinks is

fair, you know? If it isn't [affordable] then I guess I just wouldn't bother, I'd go somewhere else. Like some of them are a bit too much, you know? But it's better than giving the money to someone else like a supermarket or something right; I mean you know what I mean, yeah, it's better that it goes back out there, yeah."

The sentiment expressed here, that customers were grateful, and *should* be grateful, to the stallholders for producing the foods that they consume and therefore needed to pay the stallholders a 'fair price', clearly differentiated Farmers' Markets from other forms of markets in Melbourne and elsewhere. The notion of thanking someone for producing the food that you purchase and consume, of looking directly at the maker, was one that was celebrated constantly at the markets. This contributed to 'feel good' shopping at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.



Figure 25: Sign at Collingwood Farmers' Market.

However, in practice, customers did not give all stallholders the same privileged position. As Leanne and Susan avoided certain stalls that they considered "too expensive" or "a bit dodgy", so did other customers as they navigated their way through the market space. The good food values attributed to foods sold at the market were negotiated through understandings of value, particularly the cost of purchasing produce at the market compared to goods elsewhere. Perception was important, particularly for new customers. For example, a new customer at Bundoora Farmers' Market, on browsing through fresh produce at a market garden stall, declared:

“I thought the prices would be cheaper. I mean, they grew it themselves, they get it here, it can’t cost them that much.”

Whether food was more expensive at Farmers’ Markets was difficult to verify.<sup>59</sup> However, whether goods were more or less expensive at the markets was not as important as the perception that they were more or less expensive. In interviews, many customers viewed markets as a more expensive, but “ultimately better” or “worth the extra cost”. For some customers, the premium was justified by the values they attributed to the markets:

“Of course you pay a premium – you have to don’t you? You can’t get anything like this anywhere else.”

“These guys have to sell a whole lot just to make it worth their while. I don’t mind paying more; it goes in their pockets and not to those others [supermarkets, companies].”

“It takes a lot to grow good food. It costs a lot. Why not pay for it? Nothing costs what it’s meant to cost, if you know what I mean.”

Customers spoke of a “fair price” for their goods, referring to fair prices for hard work and to the unfair treatment of farmers by “the big two” supermarkets. These sentiments, which often parroted previous discussions with favourite stallholders, were discussed in Chapter Five.

However, that is not to say that customers did not see the question of cost as restrictive and a factor that significantly limited their purchases. Even for those that in interviews gave me several reasons why they should pay more and why paying more was part of the Farmers’ Market experience, many admitted that they did not make all of their fresh produce purchases at the market. Not all groceries needed to be purchased at the market to make the market a ‘feel good’ shopping experience.

The idea that some stallholders were being opportunistic or greedy was raised many times during fieldwork. While only a few interviewees spoke on this topic, my observations indicated that this perception was more prevalent as I walked around the market spaces, as a man commented while shopping at Bundoora Farmers’ Market:

“How much effort does it take to grow mushrooms? Seriously, for that price I could do it myself.”

Another customer, a woman passing a stall that sold only ‘homemade’ sourdough loaves at the same market, retorted:

“\$7 a loaf? What does she think, it’s not like she ground the wheat herself or anything. It’s sourdough I know but still.”

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<sup>59</sup> My comparisons between the Showgrounds Farmers’ Market and a local green grocer found that some items sold at the Farmers’ Market were cheaper when it came to standard seasonal vegetables and a few fruits, depending on the stall visited. However, other specialty items increased the cost of shopping at the markets, though these products were not always available at the local store. Out of season and out of state produce, such as bananas and mangoes, could be bought at the local store quite cheaply, but were not available at the market. Looking at prices in the local supermarket and at the Queen Victorian Market revealed again that there was a mixture of more expensive and cheaper goods available at these locales compared to the local Farmers’ Market.

However, in interviews and observations, these comments were coupled with recommendations of 'good' stallholders that did not 'rip off' their customers. The 'good' stallholders charged a reasonable price for their work, or were even considered a "bargain". These stalls were rewarded for their reliability and 'hard work', although if prices rose or quality declined, then this loyalty could be questioned, as Amy, a woman in her twenties at the Showgrounds Farmers' Market, commented:

"I used to get apples there, but now, I don't know ... it's all just so old ... I know he's got to make a living [by selling all year round] ... I can't believe they're [apples] still the same price too ... I really like them [the stallholders] too, they're real, you know ... I guess I'll go back when the stuff is fresh again."

Therefore, customers negotiated their market experience, finding 'their' stalls that were of suitable value and quality. Those stallholders were supported, as others were encouraged to join in the experience. Goods at the market were purchased as part of the overall market experience, and then transformed at home, making the market experience one of production, not just consumption. But this support was conditional and required the loyalty of customers to be reciprocated by stallholders, though communication, kind acts and maintaining the quality of goods sold.

## **Real Food as Good Food**

According to Coveney, with a plethora of food consumption choices available in Australia, consumers construct a morality around their consumption choices, differentiating foods as 'good' or 'bad' choices (Coveney, 2000:vii-ix; 169-171). Research into Australian food consumption has divided food choices by health considerations, economic value, pleasure, nostalgia, tradition, sociality, risk, or quality (Eden, Bear & Walker, 2008: 1048; Lupton, 2000:206-208; Lupton, 2000a:94). However, it is important to note that these categories are not either/or categories, but rather, are comparative choices negotiated daily, allowing for the risk of dangerous foods, 'guilty pleasures' or shameful consumption (Lupton, 2000:205-217) as well as 'feel good' shopping experiences. As Eden, Bear and Walker noted:

"Information about food is contingently valued in the context of intermediaries, location in time and space and histories of relationships with food providers, both faceless and personally known." (2008: 1054)

Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital" states that consumption, through culturally embedded notions of "taste" and "lifestyle", is often used to establish social status (1984:169-175). Consumption choices allow individuals to display "good" taste to their peers and thus establish their social position (Bourdieu, 1984:169-175). Farmers' Markets are often seen as a part of "foodie culture" (Guthrie et al, 2006:567), and have been criticised for catering only to the "food elite" (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:287), who can afford the 'luxury' of ethical consumption (Hinrichs, 2003:44). Lindholm describes this group as "Bohemian bourgeoisie", who are "elites raised to be opposed to elites", and are a key part of the modern capitalist consumer landscape (2008:64). In short, Farmers' Market customers are those with both the means to shop ethically and the education to 'know' better.

In this context, the construction of what constituted good food at the markets was not only about quality. Rather, participants spoke about 'real food', that is, food that had come from the earth, local foods with a history and a story (see Chalmers et al, 2009:323; Weiss, 2012:623-624). As Lindholm noted, these foods were not considered 'fancy' or elite by participants themselves, but rather were seen as honest and wholesome, epitomising the country values of hard work and just reward as discussed in the previous Chapter. In their study of the Cherry Creek farmers' Market in Denver, USA, Eckstein and Conley argued that the experience of shopping at a Farmers' Market facilitates an association between good food and the markets (2012:172). They argued that Farmers' Markets are experienced, first and foremost, through the senses:

"The difference is rooted in affect...the bumps and shocks of smell, taste, and sound excite conversations and thereby establish new relations between strangers" (Eckstein & Conley, 2012:178).

Eckstein and Conley suggest that it is these sensory pleasures that are then articulated through the good food rhetoric evident at the markets, which they consider "micropolitics", the "rhetorical politics of the everyday" (2012:172):

"Likewise, the farmers' market conditions subjects on how to feel about certain products. On the symbolic level, the market articulates one's affective experience with buzzwords like "fresh", "local", "grass-fed", "pasture-raised", and "sustainable." Each time these words are used, memories of the market are solicited." (Eckstein & Conley, 2012:178)

The experience of being at the market allowed customers to connect, through idyllic settings and conversations with 'real' producers, to a rural idyll, as discussed in the previous Chapter. Further, by becoming a market insider, fostered through reciprocal relationships with particular stallholders, the rhetoric of the markets could be reiterated and shared, making the markets places of good food (Chalmers et al, 2009:323), where good food values could be performed and consumed (Smithers & Joesph, 2009:7), creating a 'feel-good' shopping experience.

These interactions between customers and stallholders reflected not only customer expectations of good food production, but also stallholder assumptions of their customers' expectations. As described in the previous Chapter on the rural idyll, country values were attributed both to the stallholders that sold at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets, and to the goods they sold. "Real food" from "real people" was an often-repeated sentiment at the markets. Different values, some explicitly performed, others assumed or implied, were intricately connected to the buying and selling of goods at the markets, particularly when contrasted to the convenience of the supermarket or weighed up against their economic value. However, I refer to this as 'feel-good' shopping because the ways in which such values were attributed to goods sold at the markets was often ambivalent (Boström & Klintman, 2009:1), for all food purchases did not have to correspond to ones values to 'feel good' about shopping at the markets.

## Dirty Food as Real Food

Farmers' Market produce was attributed the value of being the freshest, healthiest and most wholesome produce available to be purchased in the city. In interviews when customers were asked why they chose to shop at the markets, the majority described the 'freshness' and quality of the produce, which they assumed was picked within days of selling. Stallholders emphasised the freshness of their wares, with "freshly picked" signs, oranges juiced at the market and produce with leaves attached or still on their branches. For example, a stallholder explained that he intentionally kept dirt on his potatoes to show customers that they "just came out of the ground". Vegetable sellers kept the green tops on carrots, celeriac and radishes for the same reason. At the weekly market, customers noted that they "knew" the produce was fresh because the carrots, beetroot, cauliflower and other greens "still have their leaves on". Seasonality, taught by stallholders to their customers, was one of the key attributes placed on Farmers' Markets by my interviewees, particularly when compared to other shopping choices. As one passionate customer explained:

"We can have food when it's at its best, not all year round ... that is so artificial, those supermarkets... it just isn't the same".

Another customer went further, indicating that goods elsewhere were not only inferior but were so unpalatable that they were almost rendered inedible:

"I look at the [fresh] food in supermarkets now and it just disgusts me. It's all so ... neat and uniform. You don't know how old it is really. And it's got that smell about it ... argh. Never again."

For this customer, shopping at Farmers' Markets reflected her mistrust of conventional foods purchased elsewhere. Ulrich Beck argued that the processes of industrial modernisation have led to a "risk society", as individuals are increasingly uncertain of the processes that create the products they consume (2000:213). This uncertainty is framed through acts of 'careful consumption' (Marsden, 1998:285). The notion of risk is evident in public discourse on food production, particularly through an increased awareness of the health and environmental consequences of modern agribusiness practices (Vittersø et al, 2005:1). The notion of risk was apparent in conversations with some customers and stallholders, where the 'risk' of consuming unknown products or unknown ingredients was associated with foods available from supermarkets, as opposed to "natural" or "untainted" products available at the markets.

Stallholders consistently informed customers of seasonality, with remarks such as "no carrots this week, they went to seed", "wrong time of year for coriander" or "kiwi fruit only grow in winter". Staging and performing freshness, through the inclusion of dirt and 'rustic' presentation, placed the stalls and their produce within a rural idyll as discussed in Chapter Six. Learning about seasonality was something that customers attributed to the markets with great enthusiasm:

"I didn't know that nuts had a season! Well you know that they grow at one time [of the year], but you know what I mean. When they're fresh they just taste so much better! I won't buy walnuts from the supermarkets again."



Some customers considered the freshness of produce critically, asking questions of stallholders. For example, a woman at the Showgrounds Farmers' Market questioned Sarah, an organic vegetable producer, about the freshness of her broccoli, asking "what day did you pick it?" as she inspected the plant stem. "Friday, love" Sarah replied before the customer made her purchase.

However, the freshness of products at the market was often taken-for-granted by customers. For example, in December I interviewed Mary, a customer at the weekly market. Mary claimed repetitively that she would always buy her produce at Farmers' Markets because it was "as fresh as you can get really". During the interview, she referred to apples at the market, stating that "they had to be fresh" because they "have bumps and spots and stuff", indicating that they were picked by the stallholder and not shop-bought. Later during that market, I observed her buying apples and pears from this stallholder. While I knew that that apples and pears are seasonal fruits, and that the stallholder stored his produce in a cool room on his farm in order to sell produce at the markets all year round, the customer bought the produce gladly, without question. Despite the fruit being long out of season, this customer was still clearly able to enjoy her shopping experience at the Farmers' Market, seeing the produce as fresher due to her proximity to the producer. Imperfections on the fruit only heightened her perception that the food was fresh and local.

These examples indicate the ways in which the produce at Farmers' Markets was presented as 'real food'. 'Real food' had bumps and scars, showed evidence of contact with the earth, and was presented to look 'rustic' in wooden crates or in piled on tables from boxes on the back of trucks. This differentiated the goods sold at the market from the clean, neat, ordered and plastic wrapped 'fake food' found in supermarkets. The dirt and leaves and bumps and scratches connected the produce, and the producers, to the land, and hence to the values associated with a rural idyll, and therefore with honesty, simplicity and trustworthiness.

Learning about 'real' food and seasonality was referred to over and over again by customers as a benefit of shopping at the markets, particularly those with young children. I spoke to young mothers and fathers who expressed a need to show their children "where food comes from" or "what real food is".

Nevertheless, in my observations, customers still picked through the crates of apples and pears or the piles of vegetables to find the most unblemished, clean varieties. The presence of spot and dirt and marks may have indicated that all the goods sold were 'real food' from a 'real farmer' that had come "straight from the ground", but the aesthetic of ideal-looking produce familiar in other settings, free from risk (Lupton, 2000:210), was not erased by the market shopping experience. Similarly, the presence of heirloom or heritage varieties of goods was appreciated and celebrated at the markets, and yet I observed that most customers purchased common varieties when they were available over the unknown. As Jim, a grower of heritage apples and pears lamented to me: "we have all these varieties but people go for what they know ... pink lady, golden delicious ... they like to look at them [heritage varieties] but that's what they buy!"

Despite the strength of 'real food' rhetoric at the market, the purchasing of heritage, misshapen, organic or free range foods was not necessarily required in order to 'feel good' about their presence at the market. Similarly, out of season goods could happily be purchased at a local store, which

indicated that the purview of fresh, local good food was not exclusively isolated to the Farmers' Market, although participants I interviewed would argue fervently that they would "never, ever" buy fresh produce from the supermarket. In this way, the markets could still be places of 'feel-good' shopping, even if the 'real food' options available were not fully embraced when purchasing choices were made.

## Real Food as Healthy Food

The 'real food' sold by 'real people' available at the markets was not only seen as fresher than goods found elsewhere, but was also assumed to be healthier, more wholesome and "better for you" when purchased at a Farmers' Market. However, it was not just fresh produce such as fruit and vegetables that was taken to be healthier at Farmers' Markets. Rather, items that outside of the market could be seen as 'unhealthy' or risky purchases by customers, such as animal fats, butter, bakery goods and specialty items such as cakes, were imbued with healthy, wholesome characteristics. Some participants would talk about 'healthy fat' or 'good fat' when they looked at fatty pieces of pork, full cream non-homogenised milk, marbled steaks or home-made style cakes. "Its real food" I heard many times at the Markets. This 'real' food, close to "natural" and "nature" and "how it should be", was seen as better for you, despite the fat or carbohydrates that could be perceived as unhealthy or a risk in similar products purchased elsewhere (Lupton, 2000:210-212).

This was particularly evident in the way that customers distinguished the foods purchased at the market from food elsewhere. While products that were made, as opposed to grown, were not necessarily seen as unambiguously healthy as fresh produce, they were still often seen as healthier than comparable products elsewhere because one could "know" how they were made, who made them and what ingredients were used. A clear example of this was in the purchasing of sourdough bread. Sourdough breads were found at every market I visited throughout my research, and were often the only choice of baked goods available. Stallholders that sold sourdough preached its benefits to their customers, with one baker declaring to a group of customers one day that "this [sourdough] is real bread! It's what bread was before we had microscopes ... it's natural ... better for you." One of her customers, speaking to me later, reiterated this sentiment:

"I don't eat a lot of wheat, but this sourdough is good for your gut, it's better for you, you know, more natural. My body can handle it. I can't handle the bread from supermarkets."

This romantic view of sourdough could be seen as indicative of a nostalgia that, while involving a completely new product and one that had only recently appeared on the Melbourne food landscape, was linked to a more 'natural', honest, old-fashioned existence, epitomising the country values of the rural idyll as discussed in the previous Chapter. To say that humans were *meant* to eat sourdough, as opposed to breads made with packaged yeast, was a remarkable claim. Nevertheless, coming from the market the bread could be endowed with healthy characteristics and could be seen as less of a 'risk' than similar foods purchased elsewhere (Lupton, 2000:211), therefore contributing to 'feel-good' shopping at the market for this customer.

Attributing healthy and natural values onto breads and other made foods connected such goods to other Farmers' Market ideals (Eckstein & Conley, 2012:178), placing them in the category of good food that was thereby not as 'risky' as foods purchased elsewhere (Lupton, 2000:211). When it came to cakes and savouries, *knowing* what was *in* the food was often repeated, both to me and in overheard conversations, as justification for indulgent purchases. In some cases, even when the ingredients were not listed, just knowing the producer was enough of a reassurance, as one customer remarked: "just knowing the person who made it ... they wouldn't put bad stuff in ... it's as close to home made as you can get". Therefore, even foods considered unhealthy elsewhere were often imbued with healthy, good food characteristics at Farmers' Markets.

### **Just Like Home Made?**

Many customers referred to value added or made goods at the market as 'home-made'. Even though they had not made the products themselves, customers reported in interviews that they received similar satisfaction from take-home dinners and easy to prepare foods at the markets as they did when they cooked meals from scratch themselves. Customers related the 'home-made' characteristics of the food to their enjoyment. Furthermore, they saw these convenience items as a way to embrace the 'slow food' philosophy without spending hours in the kitchen themselves:

"I'm busy all the time. So if I buy veg it just goes bad, you know? But here, I can get soups and pastas and go 'they've taken that [pointing at a vegetable stall] and put it in that [pointing to a pasta stall]. It's still homemade, just in somebody else's kitchen, and that's alright, right? [Laughing]"

"These cakes are just divine, have you tried them? Do you know she puts beetroot in the chocolate cake? She does! Makes them so lush... I get one every market. I wish mine were as good, I really do, but really who has the time nowadays..."

These examples illustrate how good food values, and the higher moral status of production (De Solier, 2013:16), could be placed on the purchase of value-added goods at the markets. However, not all value-add products were necessarily imbued with the same 'feel-good' shopping sentiments. As previously stated, such good food values were not attributed homogenously or universally. As with Leanne and Susan, customers navigated their way through the markets, endowing some products with good food values and marking others as places to avoid. Many value-add products were significantly more expensive than similar products that could be purchased elsewhere, and this could be a cause for caution, as an elderly woman at Bundoora Farmers' Market retorted when looking at an artisan cake makers stall:

"A cake for \$7! That's outrageous. I can just make it myself."

The association of 'home-made' goods was not only applied to value-add products, but also to some fresh produce. Not only would some customers admire the skill required to grow or make certain dishes, but many felt it necessary to explain why they had not done so themselves, placing a higher moral value on production (De Solier, 2013:16). For example:

"Such lovely tomatoes! I'd love to grow them myself, but I've got such little room. There's no way I could get them as nice as this though, ever!"

“I know I could grow lettuce on my balcony at home, but I’d kill it I’m sure. I don’t know how you get it so nice.”

“Well we do have a back yard and everything, but the dogs take up most of the space and the kids the rest ... we grow our own herbs but I just don’t have time to do anything else. You think the rest [of the family] would help but they really don’t.”

“So I did try and everything to grow some of my own tomatoes, thanks for the advice by the way, but I think it’s just too cold here in Melbourne, not enough sun gets through.”

“I don’t think that there’s any way to really grow veg in the city, not where I am anyway. You need bees, right? I don’t think I’ve ever seen a bee round mine! I love what you grow, though, these are just amazing ... so full of flavour.”

These examples illustrated the ways in which customers connected themselves with the land, the growing food, and being part of food production; and would lament that direct participation was ‘not possible’. Through purchasing goods at Farmers’ Markets, customers could connect themselves with the countryside and with an idealised version ‘real’ home-grown, homemade and of-the-earth food production that was absent from their urban lifestyles, connecting the market experience to a rural idyll, as discussed in the previous chapter. The rhetoric of the market, emphasised over time through the market experience itself and reciprocal relationships with stallholders, endowed foods purchased with good food values; making the markets a feel-good shopping experience, despite the mix of both good and bad elements at the markets.

### **The Limits of ‘Feel-Good’ Shopping: The Near-Failure of the Showgrounds Farmers’ Market**

Mid-morning on a Sunday in early summer, I was interviewing three middle-aged women, Irene, Angela and Carol at the Showgrounds Farmers’ Market as we sat at a table under a tree eating breakfast. Our conversation led to a discussion of how Farmers’ Markets differed from other markets. Pondering this, Irene stated: “They [stallholders] supposedly are meant to be the producer. I wanted to ask you that. Because I often wonder are they. How can they produce all of that on that stand? Is that really all that person’s stuff?”

As the discussion continued, we started talking about the VFMA Accreditation Program that was advertised on a nearby sign. Asked to explain, I mentioned that this market was VFMA Accredited, whereas the market they visited the day before nearby at Essendon was not. Angela then asked me to explain “this accreditation”. As I gave her the VFMA rules, Irene seemed unconvinced, claiming that some of the produce she’d seen couldn’t be local as it “wasn’t the season”. Her friend, Carol, then commented:

Carol: “Well they can, they have hot houses and things like that don’t they.”

Irene: [Unconvinced] “They have hot houses? Oh that’s where they get them [the produce] then.”

Angela interrupted at this point to exclaim enthusiastically that she could “tell” that this was an accredited market and the other one was not, and then continued:

Angela: “Well walking around the markets you can see the difference. The price is a bit more, but you just know, you know?”

Irene: “I just asked the meat people where they were from, they [their signage] say Koallah but they don’t say exactly where that is. They told me how they rear and slaughter all of it on their farm too and bring it to the market. It’s some kind of town near Corangamite.”

Angela: [Interrupting] “Oh you don’t need to ask, they [the stallholders] offer that information to you. They’re quite proud!”

As we continued to chat, the women spoke about the Essendon Farmers’ Market, the local green grocer, and the Queen Victoria Market, noting that they would get their fresh foods from any of these locations “but never Coles [the local supermarket].” As Carol commented:

“If it’s at the market I don’t buy it from Happy Apple. But there’s stuff like bananas that you just can’t get here – you shouldn’t - but I can’t live without. As much as I’m all for the local I need my bananas!”

However, she also commented that the location of the market, while local, limited it as an option:

Angela: “I’d shop here every week ... but the car park is such a bother ... they shouldn’t charge to do your shopping. Just makes it more of a hassle, you know?”

Irene: [Nodding] “Yeah, I mean look at this place [indicating towards the large metal fences surrounding the market location, the large shed and AstroTurf lawn area] ... not exactly very Farmers’ Market!”

I saw Irene, Angela and Carol at the market sporadically over the next few months, but they, like many others over time, eventually stopped attending the market altogether. Over the next few months’ market attendees dwindled, as unavoidable issues with the Showgrounds as a location were not resolved, and stallholders moved on to other Sunday markets deemed more “worth it”. “We have to go where the money is, this market [market fee] is real expensive and you just don’t make enough, you know?” explained a value-add stallholder, who did not want to be named. “We want to be here for the regulars ... but you just can’t keep losing money ... we’ve got to run a business, they understand that.”

Six months after the market had first opened I spoke to a group of women who were regular customers, as I did on many previous occasions. They indicated that a sense of belonging to the market was a reason why they kept coming back. Kathryn, one of the women, commented:

“I love being a regular ... that they know me and what I like. I can chat here .... They smile, not like those poor checkout chicks [in supermarkets] ... it’s good to belong somewhere, you know?”

Similar sentiments were repeated in interviews with other customers at this market:

“It’s why I love this area; it’s part of the whole feel of the place ... why I want to live here.”

“I feel guilty if I miss a market! I think ‘what are they [the stallholders] going to do without me?’ Silly really but I do.”

“Well you get to know them, they work hard to make this ... all we have to do is turn up!”

“They bother to turn up, we should too.”

“I couldn’t buy my veg anywhere else. I just couldn’t. I’d feel guilty.”

However, when this loyalty was not seen to be reciprocated and their favourite stallholders were not at the week’s market, these sentiments quickly shifted to disappointment. Stallholders, particularly value-add stallholders, maintained a monthly schedule with their other markets, attending the Showgrounds Market either monthly or fortnightly. As a weekly market, however, this caused some confusion for customers who would come to the market expecting to see their favourite producers. Stallholders confessed to me that there were scheduling and management issues that led to their not attending certain weeks or leaving the markets altogether, finding “too many of the same” stalls, leading to “unfair” competition that made the market “not worth it”.

However, I observed the largest drop in customer numbers after the milk producer stall stopped attending the market. This was a good market for the stallholder; however, as Jake, the stallholder, explained to me, they had only ever intended to attend Farmers’ Markets for a short period of time “for brand promotion ... so people know who we are ... get our name out there.” The stall not only left Showgrounds Market, but also all other Farmers’ Markets, including Bundoora, at the same time. While this had little observable impact on the monthly Bundoora market, the weekly Showgrounds market, as “a place where you get your weekly basics and everything” as one customer described, their absence had a significant impact on many loyal customers:

“We come here expecting milk and there’s no milk. Last week there were no oranges. Honey isn’t available. No potatoes. Why should we bother if they don’t even care [about this market]?”

“Still no milk? Oh and I was so hoping. I’ll have to go to the Happy Apple now.”

The unpredictability of stallholders was brought up in informal conversations with regular customers before I observed that they were no longer attending the market on a regular basis. Some customers that I had already interviewed would rush to me and ask why their favourite stallholders were not around, some with concern and others with frustration:

“What’s going on? Last week there were three beef stalls, this week not one. I have to change my entire menu now.”

“Where’s Hidden Secret? That’s five weeks now and no cheese!”

“Is everything alright? The Orange Lady is always so reliable. Has anything happened?”

“I come here week after week, but I never know what I’m gonna get. There was [olive] oil last week but I didn’t need it last week. Now I do and it’s not here. What am I meant to do? Go to Coles? I don’t think so. ... I guess I just have to wait till next week.”

“When are the chicken people coming back? They are so lovely. This is a bit strange; I’m not used to having to wait for it [food] to grow!”

In countless interactions customers expressed their disappointment when their loyalty to the market was not reciprocated by their stallholders. Customers felt loyal to the market and to its stallholders, and would stop themselves from buying the same goods elsewhere during the week. To feel that this relationship was not reciprocated was taken personally by some regular customers. As one customer, Diane, pointed out, she would not “care” as much if the same products were not available at a supermarket:

“Look if this was a shop and they didn’t have it ... I’d just go somewhere else. But now I’m not gonna have any mandies [mandarins] for the week. That’s it ... I wouldn’t get them elsewhere ... that’s just not fair... I hope that everything is better soon.”

Some Farmers’ Market research has argued that markets, like festivals, have a “novelty” factor, and interest and commitment to a market wanes over time (Hinrichs, 2000:295). While there were some customers who had shopped at the same market for ten years at Collingwood and Bundoora, many more were recent recruits, or had drifted from periods of visiting markets regularly to not attending any and back again over time. The Showgrounds Farmers’ Market, it seemed, was an unexpected development in Melbourne, particularly in the suburb where it was set up. Many attendees did not know that the market was on until months after it had begun, and some that I spoke to did not realise that it was a weekly occurrence.

However, as Irene mentioned in our interview, a significant limitation for this market was its isolation. Inside the Showgrounds complex, the market was difficult to access, with customers, as described in Chapter Three, required to travel up a steep hill to the back of the large Showgrounds complex, walk through a large gravel car park, through tall steel gates, then back down the hill past large brick sheds to an open-sided shed that contained the market, with a patch of synthetic grass and one lone large tree providing the only greenery. The sides of the market were framed by the large steel fences of the Showgrounds complex. This location did not correspond to the rural idyll that was evident at markets such as Collingwood, with its farm setting, or Bundoora, in an open field within expansive parklands.



**Figure 26: The Showgrounds Farmers' Market**

At the conclusion of my field research, the market was struggling but continued to be supported by a group of mostly fresh produce stallholders and dedicated regular customers. However, shortly after my departure, the VFMA handed control of the market to the then market manager, who moved the market to the other side of the suburb, renaming it the Flemington Farmers' Market. Since the market moved, it has become a very different market. There is no physical barrier or great distance separating the market from its surroundings, as it is now at a local high school, in-between a major road and small tree-lined road across from rows of stately terrace houses and larger suburban blocks. The market stalls are out in the open, surrounding a paved area next to a green field on the side of the hill, with a large tree framing one end of the market space. Customers access the market from both directions, with easy access via foot, bike, car or public transport. A wide variety of value-add and specialty produce stalls attend the market on a seasonal, fortnightly or monthly basis with regularity while other primary producers, the majority of which continued from the markets' previous location, attend on a weekly basis. The breakfast stall remained, and new stalls were added regularly to the market mix. Former Showgrounds Farmers' Market stallholders that I have spoken to since the move to the new location describe the new market as a success, noting "good steady business", "lots of new customers, such a relief", and even "we sell out almost every week now!" One stallholder, who did not want to be named, commented to me:

"Look, it is just so much better now. People don't hang around like they used to, but they come and get their shop and they go ... it works for us ... People are FINALLY used to this whole buying every week thing ... They do their weekly shop, we see them the next week ... it works!"

Though this stallholder thought that there were fewer breakfasts and coffees sold at the market as customers "came and went", vegetable, fruit and meat producers reported higher, steadier sales. As another stallholder commented, "it's not trying too hard now ... it's a place to do a weekly shop, have a chat and get on with it."

Stability of stalls has been a key factor in the markets new success. While shopping as a customer, I was greeted by the customer, Kathryn, whom I had known from the Showgrounds Farmers' Market. She gleefully declared her happiness with the new market, commenting "well at least we know what



to expect now. I can get in, get out, say hi to everyone and move on. I get all my goodies and not so much drama!”

While my fieldwork had ended, I noticed that I did not see the same regular customers I used at the Showgrounds, but there were new regular customers that came back week after week. The blackboards were gone, as were children’s activities, the VFMA tent and all other evidence of the market that was. Though the prominent signs that once advertised the VFMA Accreditation Program were now gone, many stalls still displayed their ‘ticks’ behind the counter, and the market remained a VFMA Accredited market. The market that I researched has gone, and another has taken its place a few kilometres away.

The failure of the Showgrounds Farmers’ Market brought many aspects of Melbourne Farmers’ Market movement to light. Firstly, through the absence of an idyllic location, the market illustrated the importance of the rural idyll (Short, 2006:133). Secondly, the connections created between stallholders and customers, negotiated over time, kept some customers and stallholders at the market after it ceased to fulfil their shopping requirements or business needs. A sense of belonging, of community and purpose, while not universally held at the markets, situated the market and the stallholders within the local community. However, when this dedication was perceived to be unreciprocated, customer numbers dwindled. The market no longer provided a ‘feel-good’ shopping experience.

## **Conclusion**

Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets created idyllic spaces outside of the everyday; an idyllic, temporary space where foods sold could be seen to have inherent ‘good’ values. However, as consumption theorists have noted, the meanings that consumers attach to commodities are the primary objects of consumption (Lash & Urry, 1994:3; Miller, 1995:277; Lindholm, 2008:54). At the markets, it was the stories told about the produce, the producers, and the land they came from that were consumed by participants.

Reciprocal relationships between customers and stallholders, developed over time, allowed stories to be implied, told and shared about the market, the producers and the foods bought and consumed, giving them meaning. Story-telling served both to highlight the idyllic nature of country life and the hardships and uncertainties faced by small scale producers. Such stories emphasised the importance of the markets for their very survival. These shared experiences allowed customers to become ‘insiders’ at their market, supporting their stallholders.

This story-telling was not a straight-forward process, and meanings were contested and negotiated constantly as stallholders competed both with other stallholders and other places where good food could be found. The stories told of the produce, the land and the producers were consumed as much as the produce itself, and could promote loyalty or guilt, trust or distrust.

These stories reached outside of the market spaces, as they were incorporated into meals prepared and shared by market participants. The idea promoted through these stories was of a more

wholesome, simple way of life, 'the good life'. Through shopping at Farmers' Markets, they were able to connect themselves with the countryside, and 'feel good' about their consumption practices, even if these products contributed only a small amount to their overall food purchases. However, the temporary nature of the markets allowed such meanings to be held simultaneously and unproblematically alongside other food purchases, while still allowing the markets to provide a 'feel-good' consumption experience.

## Chapter Eight: Values and Value

The previous chapter explored how even the most loyal and dedicated regular customers saw the markets not as homogenous experiences, but rather as places where good and bad co-existed. However, this did not prevent the markets being considered 'feel-good' shopping experiences.

This chapter further examines the phenomena of 'feel-good' shopping through focussing on both interactions between stallholders and customers at the markets, and my own interactions with stallholders away from the markets. Farmers' Market advocates argue that, through direct producer-to-consumer interactions, customers are able to ascertain that the products they purchase align with their ethical, political or environmental values (Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000: 293; King, 2008:111-113). By focusing on two topics frequently discussed at the markets, namely ethical and environmentally friendly consumption, I demonstrate that such 'feel-good' values were negotiated by participants on both sides of the stall, and were often applied ambivalently. Furthermore, such values were taken to mean different things by different participants, and such differences were rarely critiqued. Nevertheless, even when issues did arise, they did not prevent the markets being seen as 'feel-good' consumption experiences, part of a 'good life' that could be consumed, along with the goods purchased, through shopping at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets.

### Shopping for Values

Individuals that express political, ethical or environmental values through their consumption choices are referred to as 'alternative' consumers in sociological literature (Feagan & Morris, 2009:235; Boström & Klintman, 2009:1). Alternative consumption "refers to the idea that many late-modern consumers express non-economic values (for example, concerning human rights, animal rights, global solidarity, and environmental responsibility) through the market arena" (Boström & Klintman, 2009:1). In the Western world, there has been a recent increase in such critical consumption practices:

"Global consequences of environmental problems, particularly climate change, affect both political agendas and people's everyday life. As food consumption forms a significant part of the environmental load of households... the sustainability of what we eat has become a topical question." (Terragni et al, 2009:1)

Heller argued that as a condition of post-industrial agriculture, there has emerged "an explosion of discourses", that is "popular narratives that represent a potent critique of industrial agriculture" (2013:13). Micheletti argued that consumption practices have become a way for individuals to demonstrate their distrust in such systems, viewing consumption as "a political force for change" (2002:218), as they move away from "traditional forms of political participation" and pursue "politics by other means" (2002:226). However, in 'feel-good' consumption spaces such as Farmers' Markets, Boström and Klintman argued that while consumers may attribute such values to their purchases, consumers can be seen as "ambivalent" as they assume the consequences of their choices are positive without further critical examination (2009:1). Halkier draws the conclusion that

“ambivalence is the pervasive feature of consumers’ constructions of their own roles as risk-handlers” (2004:240).

Through a focus on the origin of produce and an increased awareness of the environmental consequences of production, consumers and producers engage in such ‘alternative’ consumption practices (Feagan & Morris, 2009:235). At Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets, direct producer-to-consumer transactions allowed customers to ask questions, and producers to promote their products as not only fresh and local, but also more ethical, better for the environment and better for the country than food products purchased elsewhere. Several customers emphasised this experience as essential to the appeal of Farmers’ Markets, as one commented: “I’m doing the right thing [shopping] here ... if I don’t, who will?” In this way, the markets were seen as not only places to find fresh local ‘good food’ products, but as places where one could engage in alternative consumption.

In this way, Farmers’ Markets promoted consumption experiences that reflected the values of their shoppers, with meanings created, negotiated and maintained by participants on both sides of the market stall (see Zukin, 2008:724). However, I found that the values attributed to farmers’ market goods were not the same for all participants, and on examination, were taken to mean very different things for different participants. While ‘feel-good’ values could be attributed ambivalently to all Farmers’ Market purchases, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ attributes of the markets themselves were negotiated by participants, as stallholders presented customers with what they perceived customers wanted, or ‘educated’ customers on the ‘reality’ of food production. Similarly, while customers could be seen to negotiate their values against economic value, illustrated through the differences between what they said and how they made their purchases, it was clear that for many, it was not necessary to make all of their purchases, nor sometimes to purchase any at all of certain products, in order to ‘feel-good’ about their presence at the market, yet their very presence helped shopping at the market to be considered a ‘feel-good’ shopping experience. This was most evident in how environmental and ethical values were considered by different participants at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets.

### **Environmental Values**

‘Green’ consumers, as they are often called in social science literature, consider the environmental impact of purchases (Boström & Klintman, 2008:28). ‘Green’ consumption was often referred to in international Farmers’ Market research as a primary motivation for shopping at Farmers’ Markets (Chalmers et al, 2009:323; Zukin, 2008:724; Youngs, 2008:499; Prigent-Simonin & Hérault-Fournier, 2005:1). However, as Boström and Klintman argued, this phenomenon is often over-simplified in literature, and “...most existing studies on green consumption say very little about consumers’ thoughts, assumptions, and reflections about green consumerism” (2009:1). While many of Melbourne’s Farmers’ Market customers did espouse green motivations for shopping at the markets, my observations indicated that such considerations were considered ambivalently, as the very presence of a product at a Farmers’ Market imbued such goods with ‘green’ credentials.

Customers showed their desire for more environmentally-friendly shopping in many ways. At all inner-suburban, some outer-suburban and some country markets, most customers carried their own reusable shopping bags; some markets were specifically 'plastic bag free'. Many customers and stallholders utilised 'Keep Cups' for their morning coffee, and coffee stalls sold their own branded versions. Some hot food stalls provided reusable bowls or plates with their foods, and a significant proportion of these were returned. Others provided biodegradable disposable crockery, which was noticed in this conversation I overheard between two young friends at Collingwood Farmers' Market:

"Should you get that [samosa]?"

"Yeah it's alright, its veggo [vegetarian] and look the plate and bowls are bamboo"

Green motivations were expressed explicitly during interviews with customers, particularly in regards to a need to eat locally produced foods. Many interviewees simply stated the term "food miles", with little further examination of its meaning. Particular customers saw it as their duty to support farmers that "do the right thing", as Gareth, a Collingwood Farmers' Market customer in his twenties, argued "if we can tell these people [farmers] we want better, then they have to do better".

Stallholder responded to customers' desire for environmentally friendly products, but just as some customers' were ambivalent in their approach to such values (Boström & Klintman, 2009:1), so to were some stallholders. For example, some stallholders displayed "chemical free" signs on produce, and few customers questioned this statement, even though other stallholders frequently complained, as one remarked: "all farmers use chemicals ... even organics". 'Chemical free' signs were banned at Showgrounds and Collingwood Farmers' Markets as a requirement of the VFMA Accreditation Program.

However, some interviewees admitted that they did not always stick to their 'green' principles. As one young female customer noted, "I like to think I'm green... but I like other stuff too much." Similarly, a few customers claimed to me in interviews that they only purchased environmentally friendly foods, specifically "organic" vegetables, and then I observed them shopping uncritically at conventional growers stalls.

Some products were deemed more important to be environmentally friendly than others. While Kate, an interviewee, refused to buy non-organic vegetables, she happily purchased meat from farms that I discovered in my fieldwork used flood irrigation and regularly sprayed fields with 'ground zero' before planting pasture. In my observations, the environmental impact of meat producing farms at the markets was not questioned nearly as much as those producing fruit or vegetables, focussing instead on the wellbeing of the animals rather than the land. Similarly, dairy farmers selling cheese, milk or ice cream were not regularly held to the same scrutiny on environmental issues as vegetable or fruit producers.

For example, at the Showgrounds Farmers' Market one morning, a young couple, new to the market, approached Sarah's organic vegetable stall. It was a busy morning, with many customers sifting through piles of produce and filling their own bags, waiting for the stallholder to pay for their goods. A young woman stood at the centre of the stall, her male partner standing a distance behind her,

holding empty shopping bags and their shopping from other stalls. Without looking down at the produce, the customer immediately asked “what kind of pesticides” Sarah used on her farm. Sarah explained, as I had heard her explain many times to other customers, that as a certified organic farm, they did not use any pesticides. While this answer was usually enough, this customer continued:

- Customer: “Yeah but some still use pesticides, what pesticides do you use?”
- Sarah: “If you’re organic you can’t use ANY pesticides, there are no pesticides allowed at all. You can get audited at any time so why would anyone risk it? That’s the point of certified organic, no pesticides.”
- Customer: “But don’t you still use some pesticides? ... Aren’t there still chemicals in the land?”
- Sarah: “We’ve been certified for about 20 years! We use seaweed. On our garlic. That’s it!!”
- Customer: “Well you never know, do you?”
- Sarah: “Some people pretend to be organic but aren’t certified, maybe that’s what you mean. People think that Collingwood is all – I told one woman that there’s only 3 certified organic stalls at Collingwood – well, 4 but one is meat – and she got so upset, she thought it was all organic, but they’re conventional, almost all of them!”
- Customer: “I didn’t know that [shocked]. But you still don’t really know...” [At this stage, her partner was getting embarrassed, and he tugged on her sleeve to gesture to leave, looking apologetically at Sarah, while she continued]. It’s terrible what is put on our food nowadays, you just don’t know, do you?”
- Sarah: “No, it’s good to ask and know these things. We’re certified, we were audited a few days ago. No one that’s certified uses anything like that. There are no pesticides in certified organics.”

The customer then nodded in agreement, made her purchases, and left, thanking Sarah for their chat. While this customer was satisfied with Sarah’s explanation, her concern that there were “chemicals” in the land used for growing produce was often-repeated, particularly at inner-suburban markets such as Collingwood and the Showgrounds Farmers’ Markets.

The emphasis on environmental principles for shopping at Farmers’ Markets was not as strongly emphasised in interviews with customers at outer-suburban markets such as Bundoora. For example, when I began to interview Doug, an elderly man, at Bundoora he immediately informed me that he was “not a greenie or anything” before I could ask him any questions. If green motivations were mentioned, they were often taken-for-granted, for example a middle-aged couple I spoke to referred the market as being “a wonderful way to get organics ... better for the environment ... you feel good about that, about shopping here...”. However, there were no certified organic vegetable producers at this market. Again, the green credentials of both value-add and primary producers were taken-for-granted by customers, indicating the strength of the Farmers’ Market brand as a place of ‘feel-good’ shopping.

The 'green' values attributed to the markets by customers appeared to be shared by many of the farmers at the markets. These values were proclaimed in the signage and promotional materials used by farm stalls and market managers. However, on closer examination, definitions of 'environmental' farming, 'chemicals', 'food miles' and other values discussed at the markets differed considerably between participants, and were by no means straight forward. Is produce that is certified organic more environmentally friendly? Or is biodynamic better? Or have farmers always been environmental, required to look after their land to ensure profitable crops season after season? And how does a citrus grower's 14 hour round-trip to Melbourne every weekend fit with claims of better 'food miles' and environmental sustainability? These topics were routinely discussed by stallholders when I visited their farms and kitchens throughout my research.

Through examining the ways in which different stallholders described what being environmental meant to them, compared to customer understandings, we can explore how different understandings of green consumption and what it means to be environmentally friendly coexisted at the markets. These differences were particularly evident when environmental sustainability was discussed with conventional market gardeners.

Rosa and Antonio owned a medium sized farm<sup>60</sup> in Werribee, surrounded by farms owned by Rosa's extended family members. Skirting the North-Western shore of Port Phillip Bay, the land of Werribee was flat, with no fences between farms, few trees, gridline-straight roads, and large rectangular fields, where shed complexes and farmhouses dotted endless fields. This orderly growing region differed greatly from market garden I had visited in other, hilly, peri-urban settings. However, like other peri-urban land, this farmland was in the process of being reclassified, and new housing developments could be seen creeping into the orderly, weed-free fields of conventional, monoculture vegetable production.

Rosa and Antonio were both from large Italian farming families that had grown vegetables in Sicily, Italy for generations before establishing farms in Werribee. As with surrounding farms, most of their land was dedicated to single crops, which were sold to supermarkets throughout Australia via the wholesale market in Melbourne. They were encouraged to join Farmers' Markets through Rosa's relative from a neighbouring farm, who told them they would be able to get a good price for some of their excess produce. Since joining some of the first markets nine years ago, they had committed a small partition of land to growing a diverse range of vegetables that they sold at the markets all year round.

After a morning in a vast, immaculate field picking artichokes for the wholesale market with Rosa and her nephew, we sat down to a delicious lunch of homemade salami, crumbed artichokes and pasta, to which Antonio exclaimed "It's genuine. No preservatives, nothing. Just the salt and olive oil. But what can they put in olive oil? Nothing. It's genuine. In Italian we say genuina." Antonio and his nephew, who owned the neighbouring farm, debated the best way to grow artichokes over lunch. His nephew teased Antonio by suggesting that he could grow the "purple ones", Californian artichokes, which Antonio did not like because they were "too spikey". This conversation was taken

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<sup>60</sup> The stallholders referred to their farm as a 'medium sized farm' as it was smaller than surrounding farms that sold all of their produce wholesale through the Melbourne Markets.

as an opportunity to explain to me how difficult it was to grow good artichokes. Antonio told me the story of an organic producer who asked his advice on growing artichokes, which he considered 'impossible' for an organic producer. Thumping the table with his fist periodically for emphasis, in his thick Italian accent, he explained:

"A bloke rang me up that he wants to know a bit about it, he's an organic grower. And he wants to know what to do, how he gonna grow artichokes. And I told him – I say you buy the seeds, blah blah blah, I said. [Thumping table for emphasis] But – if you are fair dinkum organic grower, you will not grow artichokes. Because artichokes need a lot of fertilizer ... [they are] a very hungry plant. And you put plenty of manure, chook manure into the soil, and then you gotta put phos- phosphoric err ahhh chemicals as well. You don't tell this to the greenies because they reckon its disease. It's not disease. [Thumping table for emphasis, he then leant over the table towards me, pointed and continued] You got have fertilizer and a lot of water for artichokes. Not once, like other crops twice a year you fertilise them, you gotta fertilise once every two to three weeks, it's a very, very, very hungry plant."

At the Showgrounds Farmers' Market, Rosa and Antonio's stall was often the only conventional vegetable stall, competing with two organic producers. During our conversation at their farm, there seemed to be a need for them to justify their conventional growing methods. Antonio's expressed his frustration towards organic production as he retorted:

"Of course we care about environment. We care about our land; we need to, to make good profit. *We have always been environmental.*" He added "you reckon organics don't use chemicals? You know, you been there, course they use chemicals."

Antonio and Rosa's idea of 'environmental', seen in this comment, was one of farm sustainability, and was something that, in their view, was not incompatible with the use of pesticides and other 'inputs'. This sentiment was reiterated by conventional farmers throughout my research. The use of 'chemicals' was associated with cleanliness and crop healthiness, as they linked their use to poor soil ("oh, the soil is terrible, shocking" as Rosa added), and dangers in the environment that could affect their crops. Antonio explained this logic through stories of farming in Italy in his youth:

"You see the way they grow vegetables in Italy, it's amazing .... I come from Randazzo [province of] Messina in Italy, near volcano ... In 1970, Etna [the volcano] was erupt, and the lava creeps back slow, black, when rock break is fire ... leaves little ... [but] when it cools down four months later it is all planted [thumped the table for emphasis and gestured broadly with his other hand] trees vines, everywhere ... you see, no need to spray because the ground has been sterilised."

The volcano's 'sterilising' effect on the soil needed to be recreated here in Werribee where there was no volcano, justifying the need to use inputs to 'sterilise' the ground between crop rotations, thereby removing weeds and other 'dangers'. This view stood in stark contrast to those at the market that espoused the benefits of organic and biodynamic farming techniques that they claimed "respects the normal functioning of ecosystems, avoiding the use of agrochemicals, and leads to food "free" of synthetic chemicals and, thus, more healthy." (Carvalho, 2006:690). This demonstrated how values attributed to 'natural' soil, to the land, and to inputs could differ between farmers. It also showed how conventional farmers such as Antonio and Rosa were aware that many



of their customers desired to have 'chemical free' produce, but saw this as something that they did not really 'understand'.

Conventional farmers such as Antonio were keen to point out that organic producers used similar sprays, or 'chemicals', as they did, referring to fertilisers used to encourage plant growth. Similarly, many insisted that, while customers liked to hear that items were 'chemical free', they still wanted produce to look 'beautiful' and blemish free, something only achievable with the use of 'inputs', such as pesticides and fertilisers.

In conversations, some market managers and customers expressed a belief that by being at the market, farmers were changing to more environmentally friendly methods, by cutting down on pesticides and crop diversification, and this was reiterated to me many times during my fieldwork. However, I found that if that were true, it may not have been based on the market experience altering their views on the use of such inputs. Another conventional market gardener, Matthew, illustrated this during a lunchtime discussion on his family farm. Matthew worked off of the farm, but helped out his elderly parents on their small<sup>61</sup> peri-urban block in the hills surrounding the Yarra Valley, where they had produced garlic and strawberries for the wholesale markets for many years. Matthew attended Farmers' Markets every summer with his mother, selling both of their main crops as well as a range of other summer produce that they grew just for the Farmers' Markets.

That lunchtime, as our conversation moved towards conventional and organic farms who sold vegetables at the markets, Matthew acknowledged customers desire for "spray free" produce, but explained how that was just "not possible" for garlic or strawberries, as both were "temperamental" crops that could "ruin" easily. However, he continued:

"I suppose that anyone who's coming to a market, they want it to be fresh and they want it to be chemical free. ... Like with the peas, they get this sort of mildew on the outside. Sometimes people say 'why are these like this?' And we tell them 'look, it's still alright on the inside. We can stop that, by spraying them. But if you spray something you're not going to eat, what's the use of spraying them?"

This response indicated that for Matthew, using "sprays" on produce was not the danger that many of his customers perceived it to be. Rather, sprayed produce was considered safer, more presentable and edible than non-sprayed produce. So for Matthew, a decision to not spray pea pods was a practical, economic business decision. After all, why spray pea pods and make them look perfect, when you only eat what's inside?

Matthew and Antonio's rhetoric regarding "sprays" and other "inputs" highlighted some of the many complex ways that environmentally sustainable farming was conceived by farmers selling at the markets. Big or small, conventional or organic, farmers would put their case forward that their approach was the most sustainable. More importantly, most of them saw it as their role to 'educate' their customers on what farming was 'really like', advocating their approach as both 'good' and necessary.

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<sup>61</sup> With only a few fields, the stallholders referred to their property as a 'small farm'.

In return, customers would ask questions of the farmers. However, I rarely saw customers openly challenge farmers on their environmental credentials once such things were 'explained'. Farmers who sold at the markets seemed to be granted the position of a farmer that was 'doing the right thing' simply by being there to answer such questions.

Some customers actively sought organic produce, questioned new stallholders and avoided those they knew were conventional growers. As one customer described "You just know it's better for you ... you get more nutrients ... your body *feels* better." However, this customer still happily purchased non-certified organic fruit, apples that she claimed "looked like they were organic" and oranges as "[the stallholders) tell me what they do, they're good people".

Many customers like this that indicated that they preferred organic produce for such reasons did not always consume them exclusively. Others limited organic purchases to those deemed 'most important', although definitions of 'important' produce differed greatly between individuals. For example, while one woman told me that lettuce had to be organic because of "chemical sprays" and "chlorine washing", another claimed carrots and potatoes were more important as they grew "in the ground", "surrounded" by "chemicals". Another customer explained to me that "if I eat fruit and veg raw, then I like it to be organic...but it costs so much more ... so that's my general rule, but I don't always keep it. Everything at this market, it's all good ... I know them, so I know it's good."

However, the healthy and environmentally friendly values commonly attributed to organic produce, for some customers, were attributed to all Farmers' Market produce, which was taken to be healthier, "organic" or "better than conventional" goods purchased elsewhere, particularly at supermarkets. For example, when the Showgrounds Farmers' Market began, a large grocer-like vegetable stall was present at the entrance of the market. I noticed that many regular customers bought large volumes of vegetables from this stall. One day, I overheard two women say to each other "look at this clean cauli [cauliflower]! Pretty good for organic, right?" The stallholder, who was standing next to me at the time, did not correct her assumption.

This particular situation was not unique. Several times during interviews, customers would refer to stalls that sold vegetables, fruit, honey, jam, cakes, milk, cheese, juice, pasta, dips, and pre-made meals as 'organic'. When conventional growers were asked whether they were organic, many often supported the presumption that all market produce was "as good as" organic, for example a vegetable producer at Collingwood remarked to a customer "well, we are basically organic anyway ... those [organic certification] just wanna take your money."

Some customers not only saw Farmers' Market produce as being healthier and better for the environment, but also framed produce found elsewhere in comparison as particularly unhealthy and dangerous. For example, a group of mothers with young children at the Showgrounds Farmers' Market reported to me that they would only feed their children organic fruit and vegetables, as they wanted to avoid "poisons" and "chemicals" that could make their children "sick" that were found in supermarket produce. Talking to producers at the market allowed them to "really know" what they were feeding their children, therefore allowing them to 'feel good' about their purchases.

Such encounters demonstrated how the term 'organic', taken to mean certification by an external body for VFMA accreditation, held different meanings for many customers at the markets. As Andrew, a man in his fifties, shopping with his wife at the Showgrounds Market one day commented: "look, as long as I can look'm in the eye, they tell me they eat it no problems ... I see them eating the stuff ... you know it's all good ... organic..." Such sentiments also indicated that the 'good' values attributed to Farmers' Market produce were often assumed or implied, and were not always critically considered (Boström & Klintman, 2009:1).

Furthermore, talking about such values does not necessarily mean that they were applied to all purchases, for "the way that people talk about food does not necessarily match the way that they consume it" (Eden, Bear & Walker, 2008: 1054). Some who expressed general 'environmental' reasons for shopping at the market, and claimed to 'love' the seasonality of produce, would 'fill in' their 'missing ingredients' for the week by shopping at community markets or green grocers, thereby still getting their out-of-season produce, which would come from interstate or overseas. In addition, while many customers framed their consumption decisions as an extension of their social, ethical or political values, such values were frequently weighed up against economic value, and customers avoided stalls, conventional and organic alike, that were deemed to be "too expensive". These examples further illustrate how customers and stallholders negotiated ideas of 'good food' at the markets. Nevertheless, by attributing such values to their farmers' market purchases, through 'knowing' the farmers behind the stalls, customers could feel that they were doing the 'right thing', thereby making the markets a 'feel good' shopping experience.

### **Ethical Values**

According to Christian Coff, a new ethics of food is emerging in which consumers are encouraged to think of the consequences of their consumption choices (Coff, 2006:5). Farmers' Markets are often seen as a part of "foodie culture", as reflective of a growing "food elite" (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:287) who can afford the "luxury" of ethical consumption (Hinrichs, 2003:44).

Ethical consumption discourses were most evident at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets in the presentation of free range eggs and meats, where producers visibly made ethical claims. At stalls, photographs from the farms were used to promote an image of content, well-treated animals in as natural circumstances as possible. Often, these displays would include information to educate customers on why their produce was more ethical or environmentally friendly than conventional goods bought elsewhere.

One such example was 'Sam the egg man', as he was known at the market, a producer new to farming that ran 600 egg-laying chickens, selling exclusively at Farmers' Markets under a banner that claimed he sold "Real" free range eggs. Sam and a few other free range egg producers, who were united under the label "The Free Range Farmers Association", used their positions at the market to educate their customers on the poor regulations surrounding free range eggs, promoting their own associations standards as truly 'free range'. While all of the eggs sold at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets were sold as 'free range', not all of the free range egg producers were members of this organisation. The Association required a low stocking density and a ban on any beak trimming or

“de-beaking”, as Sam called it, which meant that some other free range stalls at the market would not meet their criteria. Their campaign therefore suggested that eggs bought elsewhere, and from others at the market without their logo, weren’t actually free range, as industry regulations were not strict enough to stop de-beaking and over-crowding.<sup>62</sup>

Sam and the other Free Range Egg Association producers used the markets to advocate against a proposal being debated by industry regulators The Australian Egg Corporation at the time, to extend the definition of ‘Free Range’ chickens from 1500 to 20,000 birds per hectare, or “2 birds per m<sup>2</sup>”. The decision, made in June 2012 after my fieldwork concluded, has gone ahead. In a media report, the Australian Egg Corporation stated the need to ensure national standards, and to bring into line all egg producers selling under a ‘free range’ label, as far more ‘free range’ eggs were sold than produced in Australia.<sup>63</sup> The Free Range Egg Association and associated stallholders disagreed vehemently with this sentiment, and they campaigned against the changes through the prominent display of signage and petitions at their stalls. The campaign featured prominently at Sam’s stall, provoking discussion with customers at the markets:



Figure 27: The ‘egg man’s’ stall.

<sup>62</sup> Campaign was run by stallholders who were members of the Free Range Farmers Association. See: <http://www.freerangefarmers.com.au/>

<sup>63</sup> For more information on the Australian Egg Corporation and recent changes to regulations, see: <http://www.aecl.org/media-centre/consumer-research-results-free-range-stocking-density>

I observed customer reactions to the Free Range Egg Associations campaign at a number of different markets, specifically with two different producers at Collingwood and Showgrounds markets. The reaction of some was polite agreement; others outraged agreement, while others noticed the signs but kept moving. While standing at the market stall, a middle-aged woman remarked to me “it’s terrible, isn’t it? Those poor girls [chickens]. At least we know when we buy them here, don’t we!”

While all eggs sold at markets I visited claimed to be free range, the Free Range Egg Association’s campaign aimed to point out that not all egg producers, even at the markets, were as ‘free range’ as they were, and therefore as legitimate. From my observations, customers who acknowledged and discussed this campaign saw this as a reference to eggs purchased elsewhere, not for eggs from other stalls at the same markets. As with the customer quoted above, many assumed that for an egg producer to be at the market, they had to be a legitimate, ethical free range egg producer. Knowing that free range eggs were ‘really’ free range was a key concern for a considerable number of my interviewees. For example, during an interview, Anna, a customer in her twenties, explained to me:

“You see those [supermarkets]; they’ll do anything to take our money. Take our values and turn them against us. But here we know ... we know those [chickens] aren’t locked up.”

Free range eggs were the most often cited ethical issue in interviews with customers at both inner city and outer suburban markets. Knowing that eggs produced were “really” free range was repeated constantly when I asked what customers looked for in a Farmers Market. Stalls were covered with photographs of happy chickens in fields, interspersed with pictures and the names of Maremma dogs that protected their flocks. These images of happy, healthy birds allowed customers, as one producer commented, “to know that they came from a good place”, evoking an idyllic image of a simple, honest, beautiful rural life as discussed in the previous Chapter.

Free range meat was another topic that was often cited by customers when discussing the value of shopping at a Farmers’ Market. However, unlike free range eggs, which were taken to be worth the extra cost, discussions of free range meats were constantly qualified in relation to cost. This was particularly evident in my observations at two different free range pork stalls at the Collingwood and Showgrounds Farmers’ Markets.

Beth, a free range pork producer, lived near a small High Country town over 3 hours’ drive from Melbourne with her husband and young children. Originally from Melbourne, they had planned to live a self-sustaining lifestyle off of their bit of land, but found it “harder than anyone realises” and ‘fell’ into breeding and selling rare breed Large Black crossed with Berkshire pigs.<sup>64</sup> As a biologist and “former vegetarian”, Beth claimed that she sympathised and understood the environmental

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<sup>64</sup> Rare breed livestock, including pigs, sheep, cows, goats, and poultry, were featured prominently at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets. The Rare Breed Trust of Australia (RBTA) define rare breed livestock as “traditional” breeds that are “disappearing” due to industry reliance on fast growing commercial breeds (Chambers, 2004:7-9). They argue that rare breeds must be protected through farming, for “it is no longer prudent to leave the world’s animal genetic resources up to forces of nature or industry. Maintaining genetic diversity has too large a role to play in biosecurity and the future of our food.” (Chambers, 2004:8). For as the RBTA argued, “if we fail to maintain the diversity of our livestock, we will breed our industries into a corner that will be difficult to breed out of” (Chambers, 2004:7). Stallholders at the market such as Elizabeth referred to their farming of rare breed livestock as ‘saving’ the breed in question from ‘disappearing’ altogether in a world of industrial agriculture and commercial breeds that, as Elizabeth commented “are made to get fat and die ... too quickly ... an unnatural life ... unhealthy meat”, and so to revive “real food ... proper slow grown meat ... real flavour ... healthier ... good fat ... traditional farming.” Large Black and Berkshire pigs are both classified as rare breeds by the RBTA (Chambers, 2004:11).

concerns of her customers, having until recently “been one [a customer] myself”. However, as a “former city greenie”, she saw some of her initial views as naïve. “I used to think organic meat was a good thing” she told me, “but now I think organics for meat is pretty cruel ... I love my girls [the breeding pigs], and if they need medicine, I’m gonna give it to them... that’s not an environmental thing.” Her dedication to her animals meant that she would come to markets with only “one or two beasts” and would “sell it all” before making another “trip” to the abattoir. She saw her non-intensive farming methods as both a more ethical and environmental approach to meat production, “because like it or not, people want to eat meat, and this way, it’s better all round, it’s ok.”

Beth’s stall included photographs of her breeding pigs, with their names, and she spoke to regular customers frequently, updating them with stories of their wellbeing, saying “Piper is a bit poorly” or “Penne had her piglets this week!” These interactions indicated Beth’s emotional attachment to her animals. She admitted privately that she sometimes found it hard to separate the business of meat production. While walking around Beth’s small farm, we stopped to meet their ‘pet’ goats, half a dozen goats of mix breed that shared a field with their milking goat. “We get these goats to eat, but if they get a name, they become pets ... So those last two [recent arrivals] are called curry and ragu!” Later in the day, she added “like the goats, it’s the same with the pigs ... they get a name, they stay ... you can’t get too close to the piglets ... it gets too hard.”



Figure 28: The free range pork producer’s stall

Committed to the values of free range farming, Beth often declared her frustration at customers who “didn’t understand”. Her pork was sold at a premium, and many times I observed customers who at first spoke with her about the importance of free-range farming that then turned away without purchase when they looked at the price, or were unable to find the most popular cuts of meat.

Beth’s story of free range farming fitted into a rural idyll promoted by advocates of free range farming, where happy, contented animals live in peace and, in the often repeated and misquoted words of advocate Joel Salatin, they only ever have ‘one bad day’ that they ‘shouldn’t see coming’.<sup>65</sup> However, not all free range farmers adopted such an idyllic image. Jayden and Shirl, with their young children, were dairy farmers from the Strzelecki hills in Gippsland. They sold their milk wholesale to Devondale (owned by Murray Goulburn); though as the price of milk lowered they sought to diversify their land, first introducing geese for wholesale, and then rare breed Large Black pigs to sell at Farmers’ Markets and small retail outlets. They also started their own business selling agricultural products to improve soil health, as well as training services for farm planning and regenerative agriculture.<sup>66</sup> Unlike Beth’s promotional materials that focussed on her contented animals, Jayden and Shirl’s material focussed on the quality of their land and the subsequent quality of the meat. With a picture of black pigs in a lush green field, their pamphlet began:

“Perched on the rich rolling hills of the Strzelecki’s in Gippsland, our soils are nurtured for the future of the planet and ongoing healthy food production.

We care about our soil health as a priority so that:

- Our livestock enjoy good health naturally
- Only the most nutritious food leaves our farm for your enjoyment and health
- Mineral rich pastures grow all year round
- Our farming system regenerates the soil rather than deplete it.”

For Jayden and Shirl, the ‘selling point’ of their free range pork was the superior flavour garnered from their idyllic surroundings. Caring for the land, in line with their other business interests, added to the ‘natural’ appeal of their product, and a photo board of black pigs in green fields was displayed at their stall to substantiate their claims.

Despite the different approaches to selling their free range pork products, both stalls attracted similar customers, who would speak of the values of free range food production while keeping an eye on the cost. For example, at the Showgrounds Farmers’ Market, where both of these stallholders attended at different times, I interviewed a group of mothers, Sophie, Rebecca and Christina, who attended the market with their young children. They revealed that, while they ‘loved’ the idea of free range ethically raised meats, price limited their actual purchases:

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<sup>65</sup> The quote that ethically farmed animals should only have “one bad day” refers to their day of slaughter. This ‘quote’ was often repeated by stallholders at the markets and attributed to Joel Salatin, an American farmer and key sustainable and ethical farming advocate. For details see <http://www.polyfacefarms.com/>. An example of stallholders using this quote to explain their approach to ethical farming can be seen here: [http://www.angelicaorganicfarm.com.au/blog/DISPATCHES\\_FROM\\_THE\\_FARM/tag/Joel\\_Salatin/](http://www.angelicaorganicfarm.com.au/blog/DISPATCHES_FROM_THE_FARM/tag/Joel_Salatin/)

<sup>66</sup> See [http://agriculturalsolutions.com.au/grasser\\_farms](http://agriculturalsolutions.com.au/grasser_farms)

- Sophie: "I bring my kids here ... they can see the veggies. They can ask the farmer questions..."
- Rebecca: [interrupting] "Yeah, like 'what is it'! Saves me asking!"
- Sophie: "... we can buy meat and look at the pictures and know that chicken comes from chicken ...
- Christina: "ooh, I'm not sure about that."
- Sophie: "... no but it's a good thing. We can see them and they look happy, cook up the pork at home..."
- Rebecca: "but it's too expensive here, I don't buy it here."
- Sophie: "...well yes we can't get a lot of it but we can tell them about it ... [looks around] like they can know that stuff doesn't grow all year, you know, you have to wait. That's what I'm teaching them [by shopping here]."
- Rebecca: "well still, can't wait for everything ... we still like Happy Apple [local green grocer]."

This interaction indicated how education about food and food production, for the parents and the children, was a significant part of the appeal of the market. However, it also indicated how such ambitions were often limited by concerns over price. These customers provided different justifications to each other and to me as a researcher to explain why their purchases do not always correspond to their values, in this case, the valuing of seasonal local produce and of selecting free range meats. Rebecca indicated no preference for free range meats due to the expense, whilst Sophie was apologetic of her need to prioritise the household budget rather than buying all the family's meat, and produce, from market stalls. Nevertheless, all mothers agreed that the presence of free range meats at the markets enhanced their market experience, making the market a 'feel-good' shopping experience regardless of whether any of the products were actually purchased.

However, ethical consumption at the markets was not always a straight-forward 'feel-good' experience, particularly in relation to free range meats, when differences between customer and stallholder values surfaced. This was particularly evident when a small country abattoir faced closure after an animal rights group released film footage of an employee mistreating a pig before slaughter.<sup>67</sup> Customers were concerned with this development, which was mentioned in local media, and stallholders told me that many of their regular customers had brought up the issue with them at the markets. While customers voiced concerns with the ethical treatment of the animals, stallholders were concerned that the closure of small abattoirs would threaten the viability of small scale ethical meat producers. Concerns were particularly voiced at Collingwood Farmers' Market and other inner city markets, leading the market manager, Miranda Sharp, to email a statement to their customer email list not only to show support for the abattoir, but also to explain how the closure would result in less ethical outcomes:

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67 For media coverage of this event, see: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-11-30/abattoir-closed-over-animal-cruelty-concerns/3703144>



“The impact on these farmers is enormous and should be considered immediately, and before Giles is closed permanently. The alternative is to transport their animals to the other small abattoirs, nowadays few and far between; at greater cost, stress to the animals and demand on the businesses. The likely scenario is that they will go out of business.

The further impact is the loss of more genuine free range farmers, just when we are starting to make inroads into the public’s support for the Australian pork campaign and local distribution networks such as Farmers’ Markets where many sell their product in a very personal transaction. The domino effect will be widespread and simply mean more independent, Australian regional businesses will cease and large commercial operators will have more of the market share, importing more product from elsewhere and further eroding our food security and agricultural sector.”<sup>68</sup>

The emotive language employed here illustrated the complex ways in which positive values attributed to Farmers’ Market produce, such as locality, environmentalism, support for small businesses and country communities, and ethical consumption, were championed by stallholders and market organisers that felt the need to educate their customers on the ‘reality’ of farming. It also indicated a considered discourse between stallholders, market managers and customers at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets, where meanings were performed, through the displays and stories of the farm, and negotiated, through incidents such as this where the most ethical outcome was not always clear.

These ethnographic examples illustrate something particular to the markets in Melbourne that differentiated them for international Farmers’ Markets, particularly in the US. In their ethnographic study of the Bloomington Farmers’ Market in the USA, Robinson and Hartenfeld argued that vendors and customers worked together towards the common goal of building an alternative future to food production, creating a community (2007:218). However, at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets, community and solidarity against corporate agriculture was not at the forefront of the market experience for stallholders. By focussing, rather, on educating customers on the ‘hard work’ of farming, the markets were about helping individual farmers in their struggles against cheap imported produce and ‘unfair’ supermarkets. Indeed, stallholders that could rise above the need to sell at a market were considered a success. The goal, then, was for individual shoppers to support the ‘right’ kind of producers, elevating them in the existing food production ‘system’, rather than challenging the ‘system’ completely. This focus on individual consumption choices as a facilitator of change is reflective of a neoliberal world view and a consequence of late modernity, and differentiates Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets from markets elsewhere.

Nevertheless, ethical and environmental consumption practices were embraced at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets, with sustainable and ethical farming forming part of the “rhetorical relations of the everyday” (Eckstein & Conley, 2012:172) that made the markets a place of good food. However, in practice, these “buzzwords” (Eckstein & Conley, 2012:178) meant different things to different

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<sup>68</sup> Excerpt from an open letter written by Miranda Sharp, Market Coordinator, proprietor of Melbourne Community Farmers’ Markets (MFM) and Chairperson of the VFMA. This was sent to both MFM and VFMA customer email lists, and placed on the MFM website. The letter also included a testimonial from a free range pig producer who used the abattoir. For full details, see <http://mfm.com.au/news/reality-check>.

participants. However, as the examples above demonstrate, even when the meaning of such words differed greatly or were implied ambivalently, or such convictions were not met with purchases, the markets were still able to function as feel-good shopping experiences.

## **Conclusion**

As I demonstrated in previous chapters, good food values were negotiated and produced through market interactions, as stallholders educated customers about food production and 'life on the land', and customers shared their own good food values. However, these understandings were not static; rather, meanings were negotiated and performed. 'Feel-good' values held as vital to the Farmers' Market brand (Chalmers et al, 2009:323) such as ethical or environmental considerations actually meant different things to different participants, and these differences were rarely critiqued. Nevertheless, the presence of 'good' and 'bad' stalls did not damage the Farmers' Market brand as advocates for VFMA Accreditation argued. Rather, markets were still able to function as feel-good shopping experiences for regular customers, associating then with an imagined 'good life' that was consumed through the experience of shopping and the transformation and consumption of goods purchased at the markets.

## Conclusion

### Consuming the Field

One morning during my fieldwork at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets, my husband and I prepared a leisurely breakfast for some house guests. This, I informed them, was no ordinary breakfast. The orange juice was freshly squeezed at the market out of new season oranges from Mildura, the bacon from 'happy' free range pigs in the King Valley, the eggs from 'contented' free range chickens in Gippsland. We had visited a market together the day before and had viewed pictures of animals from both of these farms, we chatted to the producers about their farming ideologies as we shopped. The bread was sourdough, handmade by a woman who nursed her own starting culture of natural yeasts, giving each loaf a slightly different taste. Apples and pears on the table came from a farm near the Yarra Valley, their blemishes indicating a spray-free life cycle. The cultured butter was freshly churned out of milk from North-East Victorian dairies in an old butter factory, once derelict but now reclaimed, flavoured with salt from Mt Zero in the state's west, with a taste that rivalled the best European artisan butter found in high end delicatessens. The jar of raspberry jam on the table came from a small farm in Yea, where a lovely couple grew and picked all kinds of fruits to prepare jams and preserves for the city markets. Loose leaf tea in the teapot came from a tea producer in the Yarra Valley, and the coffee was made with beans sourced from the Queensland family of a coffee stall operator. The milk came from a dairy farmer who, sick of the 'unfair' farm gate<sup>69</sup> prices offered by multinational dairy companies, had started his own milk label. Later in the day, there would be gourmet vegetable based dips made in Daylesford by a delightful woman who sourced fresh ingredients from local organic producers as well as her own garden, or even from the side of the road. These would be accompanied by multi-coloured heirloom carrots grown organically near Ballarat, and cheeses made in a tiny on-dairy cheese factory up north near the Victorian/New South Wales border.

This simple meal was inseparable from the story of each item present. The produce came from almost all the different growing regions in Victoria. But these products were also connected with the producers that had sold the goods to us. Oranges were from 'The Orange Lady', who threw extra mandarins into our bag as we made our purchases. The eggs were from 'our egg man', whose signs at his stall warned us of free range eggs that were not 'really' free range, which indicated his passion for the welfare of his chickens and the freshness of his product.

As this example demonstrates, for many Farmers' Market customers, the foods bought at the markets and the stories of their origins were inseparable. Stories that were told, shared, implied and assumed gave the produce sold at the market meaning for customers, producers and market managers alike. These stories allowed the markets to become places of 'feel-good' shopping, as products were given meaning, and this meaning could then be consumed and enjoyed with such stories in mind.

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<sup>69</sup> Farm gate price refers to the net value of an agricultural product when it leaves the farm. Commonly used by participants to indicate the money they received selling their wares wholesale.

The appearance of the stalls, and their very presence at the market, allowed some customers to see them as good food choices. Others connected the good foods with market characters and conversations. Customers “need to know what it’s really like, on the land”, as a farming stallholder informed me and my guests as we were educated about our foods and their journey from “paddock to plate”. In return, we shared recipes and family traditions, talked about our own food growing experience and the experiences we had growing up in the country.

However, this feel-good shopping experience was not necessarily straight-forward. While we suppressed the urge to have blemish-free fruit, agreeing with other customers that we’d rather have spots on our apples than eat fruit covered in chemicals or forces the farmer to discard most of his crop, we still hunted through wooden crates to find the least blemished of all the fruit provided by the stallholder. We embraced the idea of eating seasonal local produce, but still went to the local green grocer to ‘fill in’ missing ingredients. However, it still felt good that we had ‘made a difference’ by purchasing fresh local food from local producers.

The meanings attributed to these edible goods were negotiated by both producers and customers, as rumours, innuendo and gossip permeated the market space. We avoided a vegetable stallholder whose produce looked “too clean”, when another vegetable stallholder identified them as “dodgy”, a “shop” that was reselling produce purchased elsewhere, “ripping off” both their customers and other, legitimate, farming stallholders. Such stories of fraud interrupted the ‘feel-good’ shopping idyll of the market, but did not stop us shopping at the market altogether. Rather, over time, certain stalls were ignored in favour of ‘our’ favourite producers, their goods either becoming regular ingredients for our weekly meals or special treats purchased sporadically. Other, more convenient places of good food were abundant in Melbourne, and so loyalty to particular stallholders, forged through reciprocal relationships developed over time, kept us coming back to the markets long after fieldwork ended. However, when stallholders were not present or the quality of their goods declined, this loyalty could evaporate and we could source similar products elsewhere.

This simple breakfast provides a final illustration in this thesis to the ways in which foods purchased at the market were not simply considered good food, but how they became inseparable from the producers and the stories associated with their production.



Figure 29: Produce from the markets.

## Researching Melbourne's Farmers' Markets

This thesis has examined, through ethnographic description and analysis, stallholder stories and customer interactions at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets. The markets were spaces where different ideas about good food, farming, and consumption were played out. They were spaces where producers, for whom the markets were necessary work, and customers, for whom the markets were leisure, came together.

Focusing on these interactions, this thesis has demonstrated how producers "produce newly knowledgeable customers" (Kneafsey et al, 2008: 103) through emphasising the hard work of farming and food production, while at the same time selling the image of an ideal way of life, the good life, tied intricately to western constructions of a rural idyll. Conversely, this thesis has also demonstrated how some customers produce the 'right' kind of producer through their interactions at the markets, where meanings were negotiated and ideas of good food production were performed on both sides of the market stall.

These findings are situated within broader anthropological theories of consumption and production. Specifically, the coming together of urban customers and farming stallholders provides an insight into alternative consumption practices and small-scale production in the context of late modernity and a globalised food system in the setting of Melbourne, in post-industrial Australia.

## Farmers and the Markets

Chapter One demonstrated Australia's historical relationship with farming and food production, as policies shifted from protectionism to neoliberal free trade (Harris et al, 2012:377). However, as Chapter Five and Six revealed, Australia's isolation, its historical colonial construction of tough farmers battling against an inhospitable land, has contributed to a deep-rooted sentiment among rural populations that those in urban Australia *should* protect and support farming, not only for the good of the country and the nation as a whole, but for their own survival. This sentiment has been echoed throughout Australia's political history, competing with the neoliberal free trade ideals that have come to dominate Australian politics.

The markets provided a context through which such constructions of farming were played out when urban consumers and rural producers came together, and Chapter Two outlined how I researched this interaction. As Chapter Five and Six demonstrated, farmers sought to educate their urban customers on the 'reality' of life on the land. It was assumed by these participants that 'city folk' were unaware of just how important farming was to their own survival, and to the good of the country, and so they needed to be reminded. The importance of being seen as a 'real' Aussie farmer, then, was paramount to the success of their businesses, and the markets themselves, as revealed in Chapter Four.

Conversely, reactions to the construction of farming and farmers as the lifeblood of Australia who needed the support of urban consumers was far more mixed on the other side of the stall. As

Chapter Six, Seven and Eight revealed, customers came with their own reasons for shopping at Farmers' Markets, and these were negotiated with 'their' stallholders at the markets.

Nevertheless, constructions of the country as a place where people 'really know' about the plight of farmers, that are really connected to the land and 'understand' what it is 'really' like to struggle in a land of extremes, was reiterated by many customers to stallholders as they spoke of their connections to the country. As detailed in Chapter Six, these stories placed legitimacy and 'authentic' living within a particularly Australian imagining of the country.

In this way, this research reveals an interplay between the rural and the urban that was particularly Australian, and in doing so, a particular view of alternative consumers and small-scale producers that differed from those featured in international Farmers' Market and local food movement research. International food movements advocate for shifts in the modern global food system towards a focus on local producers (Hinrichs, 2000:295; Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:287-299; Heller, 2013:1; Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007:234-235). This goal was also expressed by Melbourne's Farmers' Market participants; however, their means and intentions differed considerably. What was particularly revealed through these interactions was the individualistic approach to such changes. Rather than being seen as something that could be advocated for collectively, the individual choices and desires of urban customers were targeted to save individual farmers from the threats of 'big business'. Similarly, this was not about preserving an agrarian way of life as seen in international local food movements (Heller, 2013:5), for expansion, particularly into export, was celebrated as the height of success. Therefore, the markets did not represent a radical shift in the way that the business of farming was to be carried out in Australia, but the elevation of the 'right' kind of farmers into this global sphere.

This absence of alternative ways to change consumption or production practices in discussions at the markets, such as broader social campaigns or collective action, revealed the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideals for both the farming stallholders and their customers. While structural elements outside of farmers control were consistently referred to in order to demonstrate the 'hard work' of farming, ultimately the success or failure of farming ventures came down to the 'hard work' of individual farmers. Similarly, supporting local food producers as a consumer was an individual act, one that could be encouraged in others, but was framed as a 'feel-good' choice amongst an abundance of food choices.

## **Local Food, Morality and the Markets**

However, this did not mean that non-market values did not play a part in the selling of goods at the markets. Rather, the emphasis on individual choice demonstrated the construction of a morality around food choices at the markets, which was inextricably linked to a neoliberal world view and reflective of late modernity. Creating a moral framework around food choices, based on notions of 'good' and 'bad' foods, allows individuals to mitigate the abundance of food choices available (Lupton, 1996:27), which symbolises control over both their bodies and their lives (Caplan, 1997:15). Constructing local food as more natural, wholesome, better for the environment and better for society at large, consumers could 'feel good' about their consumption choices at the markets.

As demonstrated in Chapter Four, the construction of local food as a 'good' food choice was seen as paramount to the success of the markets for stallholders and market organisers. While definitions and understandings of local food differed, the notion of supporting local producers was seen as a morally good choice that could be promoted through the markets. The distinction of having these good food choices differentiated Farmers' Markets from other markets in Melbourne.

However, as Chapter Seven and Eight revealed, the ways in which products were considered good food choices was varied and complex on the other side of the stall. While some customers framed their support of local producers within a moral paradigm, feeling 'guilty' for purchasing similar foods elsewhere or purchasing out-of-season goods from supermarkets, others happily negotiated good food options at the markets with other 'good' foods found elsewhere. The morality of good and bad foods was played out as customers' negotiated value and values in their purchasing decisions (see Alkon, 2008:491-494). Similarly, good food values were performed on both sides of the market stall, as customers supported ethical farming but chose not to purchase goods, and stallholders placated the 'naïve' views of their city customers by paying lip service to environmental concerns or 'educating' them on the 'reality' of food production.

Nevertheless, the positioning of the markets as good food consumption spaces, where customers could 'feel-good' that they were doing the morally right thing in supporting local producers, allowed concessions to be made, for example in the health of foods considered 'naughty' elsewhere. Again, this demonstrates the pervasiveness of a neoliberal focus on individual choice, and the role of consumption in the making of the self (De Solier, 2013:16) and the making of the world in which consumers want to live in.

## **The Rural, the Urban and the Good Life**

However, this focus on individual choice was only part of the consumption landscape at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets. For what was behind the construction of local food as good food and the desire to support farmers was the construction of 'the good life', based upon an originally European but particularly Australian rural idyll.

Researchers have noted that dissatisfaction with modern life is a hallmark of alternative consumption movements (Goodman & DuPuis, 2002:6-23). The appeal of a way of life that is connected with the land, where production has a higher moral value than consumption (De Solier, 2013:16), and a life connected to nature (Alkon, 2008a:274), is positioned as the antithesis of fast-paced, consumer-driven and isolated modern urban living (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:287-299). However, as I demonstrated in Chapter Six, while this construction was situated within a rural idyll and utilised by stallholders to sell their wares, it was one that was created and maintained within the realm of the urban (see Edensor, 2006:488).

Furthermore, the appeal of Farmers' Markets, the rural idyll and this construction of 'the good life' is situated within a particular social context that had an unspoken association with class. Those that shopped at urban Farmers' Markets could be categorised as Lindholm's "bohemian bourgeoisie", the



“elites raised to be opposed to elites” (2008: 64), who can afford the “luxury” of ethical consumption (Hinrichs, 2003:44) and were intricately connected to “foodie culture” (Guthrie et al, 2006:567), a kind of “food elite” (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:287). Indeed, these were the customers that Farmers’ Market stallholders sought out, although through visiting outer urban and rural markets, I found that in practice many market customers did not fit this description. Nevertheless, participants themselves freely admitted that the ideal towards which they aspired, where good local food ‘straight from the land’ could be cultivated, cooked and consumed as part of a more wholesome way of life, was something that was out of reach for the majority of Australians. To shop at the markets and participate in this ‘good life’ was therefore a marker of distinction (see Bourdieu, 1984:169-175) in Australia at this point in time, exclusively for those that could afford the ‘luxury’ of time spent purchasing, making and consuming good food. In this way, market participants could demonstrate their good taste and create an ultimately exclusive consumption experience.

Ethnicity too featured at the Farmers’ Markets and in the imagining of the good life, particularly in regards to notions of authenticity. As explored in Chapter Three and Seven, acceptance of others could be performed and differences could be celebrated through consumption at the markets, but only if those selling goods were deemed authentically ‘other’. Furthermore, while crowds at different Farmers’ Markets in urban locales were varied, the markets themselves could be considered predominately ‘white’ spaces of consumption within a diverse and multicultural Melbourne landscape. This was particularly highlighted, as discussed in Chapter Six, through an observed appeal towards Europe as the home of good food, and a particularly European rural idyll that included an image of agrarian life, a kind of “Disney-fied” image of “pre-industrial wholesomeness” (Heller, 2013:12-13) without historical roots in Australia.

The appeal of the rural idyll in the construction of ‘the good life’ could be theorised in many ways. As demonstrated in Chapter One, it could be considered a Polanyian double-movement to re-embed the economic into the social (see Dibden et al, 2009:299-308). Alternatively, as discussed in Chapter Seven, it could be seen as a way in which consumers mitigate the risk of the unknown in a context of uncertainty surrounding food choices (see Beck, 2000:213; Marsden, 1998:285), although spreading knowledge of the ‘reality’ of the current food system is one of the defining features of modern local food movements (Kneafsey et al, 2008: 103).

However, I argue that, for some consumers and producers at Melbourne’s Farmers’ Markets, this construction of the good life represents desire and dissatisfaction that was not located in the past but in the present. Rather than being seen as a reactionary need to ‘return’ to the simple life of the country, participants were looking for an alternative way to live in the present, even if that alternative way was temporary. This did not necessarily mean a rejection or replacement of modern urban life, but a way in which to ‘make time’ within this modern life, to experience the ‘good life’ of the country in a temporary way that was incorporated into everyday living. There was ‘hard work’ involved, as customers resisted the ‘temptation’ of cheap and readily available food from elsewhere, but there was also ‘just reward’ in the consuming of goods, whether ready-made or made from scratch at home, that came from ‘real’ people and ‘real’ places (see Weiss, 2012:623-624), that were imbued with all the attributes of nature (see Alkon, 2008a:277) and ‘authentic’ living.

Feel-good shopping at the markets, then, can be theorised in relation to class, authenticity and identity, as customers sought out 'real' good food experiences that corresponded to their values. Individual, one-on-one interactions with particular producers allowed this 'feel-good' shopping to be instantly rewarding, as the benefits of consumption choices were evident immediately in the 'helping out' of local producers, regardless of the temporary nature of the markets. "Morally embedded economic exchange" (Alkon, 2008:488), or the ability of customers to choose to 'help out' the right kind of stallholders, the ones deemed most worthy or the highest of quality, is reflective of a neoliberal paradigm of individual choice. This ability to choose was framed as the most powerful, if only, way in which individuals could facilitate change in themselves, and the world around them.

## Conclusion

Through spending time with small-scale producers on their farms, in their homes and their kitchens, and spending time observing and participating in the interactions between customers and stallholders at the markets, I carried out an ethnographic study of Melbourne's urban Farmers' Markets. Through this, I was able to unpack what the markets meant to certain producers and the ways in which values and meaning were created and sold through the markets to their urban customers.

Participants on both sides of the stall sought to differentiate the Farmers' Market experience from other consumption experiences. In doing so, interactions at the market revealed particular constructions of good food, farming, fairness, modern urban life and rurality that were constantly reinterpreted, manipulated and negotiated by participants. Stories told through the markets linked produce, producers and customers with the countryside and a rural idyll, and were established, reinforced or lost through reciprocal relationships between stallholders and customers. Promoted through these stories was a more wholesome, simple way of life, 'the good life'. Through shopping at Farmers' Markets, participants were able to connect themselves with the countryside, and 'feel good' about their consumption practices, even if these products contributed only a small amount to their overall food purchases. Furthermore, this construction of 'the good life' was not associated with a nostalgia for the past but an imagined, better, present and future. However, the temporary nature of the markets allowed such meanings to be held alongside other food experiences, while still allowing the markets to provide a 'feel-good' consumption experience.

The analysis presented here is situated amongst a plethora of anthropological research on modern food production and the modern consumption landscape in post-industrial nations. It provides an insight into how a particular group of small-scale producers have addressed the challenges of an increasingly global modern food landscape. It also provides insight into how a select group of urban consumers have responded to the consequences of this modern food landscape. Broadly, the phenomena of 'feel-good' shopping and the buying and selling of 'the good life' at the markets reveals a performance, temporary in nature, limited by its reliance on neoliberal understandings of individual choice. This is indicative of late modernity, as it demonstrates dissatisfaction and disconnection with aspects of the modern world but posits the market as the only way in which such dissatisfaction can be counteracted.

Further, this thesis contributes to anthropological understandings of food as it reinforces the central importance of food in our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. As an everyday life-giving substance, the foods that participants consumed and prepared were taken not only to reflect who they were, playing a central role in the construction of their identity (see De Solier, 2013:101), but also in the forming of the world in which these participants wanted to live. For farmers and other stallholders, it was a world in which their 'hard work' was valued and appreciated by those consuming the products of their labours. For some customers, it was a world where good food from 'real' places was valued higher than unknowable, cheap processed foods from 'elsewhere'.

Nevertheless, both the customers and producers featured in this research represent a small group amongst a larger cohort at Melbourne's Farmers' Markets, and an even larger population that did not have anything to do with the markets. Rather than being seen as a comprehensive analysis of urban consumers or small-scale farmers, this research is situated in the space in-between the two populations. It is framed within the context of late modernity and a neoliberal paradigm, where individual choice is promoted as the only way to enact social change. Therefore, this thesis provides a glimpse into one small part of the modern production and consumption landscape, building upon the picture of late modernity in the context of Melbourne, Australia.

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**Title:**

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**Date:**

2015

**Persistent Link:**

<http://hdl.handle.net/11343/56933>

**File Description:**

Producing Melbourne's Farmers' Markets: Local Food, Farming and 'Feel-Good' Shopping