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## **Regulating the farmers' market: *paysan* expertise, quality production and local food**

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**Abstract:** This paper considers the meaning of local, quality food in the context of a farmer's market in Montpellier, France. The focus is on understanding how farmers conceptualize 'local', how they perceive and cater to their clients' demand for quality food, and what mechanisms are deployed to ensure a joint approach to these conventions. With a market association capable of carrying out site inspections to weed out 'fake- farmers' and an expectation that each vendor would participate in staged demonstrations of agrarian competency, the market emerges as an exclusive and tightly regulated commercial space that promotes both local protectionism and alternative consumption practices.

### **1. Introduction**

Nestled below a length of aged trees in a central neighbourhood of the French city of Montpellier, the Marché Paysan d'Antigone pulls you in with offers of fragrant fruit, regional cheeses, and cases of Languedoc wine. There are wicker baskets and bikes parked along the walkway, parents and children browsing the selection of local honey and crowding around the pie and quiche stand, and samples of watermelon offered by young vendors in straw hats and aprons. The Marché Paysan d'Antigone is in many ways an archetype of the traditional French farmer's market: sellers and clients chatting over crates of produce, several local cafes serving *pastis* and coffees within distance of the stands, and a cacophony of sounds and activity that transform this space into a convivial, if temporary, community. The emphasis in

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this farmers' market, as in many others in Europe and North America (Vecchio, 2011; Smithers et al, 2008), is on buying local goods from vendors who are also farmers and artisans, and can speak to the quality of their produce. French farmers markets, following de la Pradelle (2006), can be viewed as sites where membership to the local community can be cultivated through appropriate consumption, and a place that allows a multiplicity of social and economic actors to meet over similar interests as a way of encouraging the formation of a shared, neighbourhood identity (Sirieix and Schaer, 2005).

At the same time, below the expanses of colourful crates and seemingly effortless conversations another set of rules apply: the farmers' market is a tightly regulated commercial space where, alongside the expectations of each market's governing body, a series of municipal bylaws and national health and safety codes must also be observed. The bureaucratic and internal structure of farmers' markets are, with several key exceptions (Smithers and Joseph, 2010; de la Pradelle, 2006; Black, 2005; Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000), less well studied. Yet the form and flow of a farmers' market is due in large part to these standards: the height and position of the stalls, types of goods that can be sold, who is admitted as a farmer and artisan, and most of all, how notions of quality and local are defined, asserted and regulated. While the importance of face-to-face interactions and trust between vendors and clients have been well documented (Kirwan, 2004), the manner through which farmers encourage the formation of these links on an individual and market-wide basis also merit consideration. My approach to the *Marché Paysan d'Antigone* is shaped by an interest in the regulatory framework of the farmers' market and in understanding how farmers conceptualize 'local', how they perceive and cater to their clients' demand for quality food, and what mechanisms are deployed to ensure a joint approach to these conventions. I therefore seek to contribute to ongoing discussions around the role of farmers' market in the

sale of regional goods (Spiller, 2012; Harris 2010; Sims 2009) by querying how such products are presented, regulated and sold in the Marché Paysan d'Antigone.

In the article that follows I first consider the meaning of 'local' and 'quality' before drawing on existing work on farmers' markets to examine how these terms are used. After a brief overview of the fieldwork approach in Montpellier, France, I consider how the Marché Paysan d'Antigone is formally differentiated from other outdoor markets, the rules and customs which support a specific vision of quality food, and the economic and cultural value derived from being a *paysan* and local producer.

## **2. Identity politics and cultures of consumption**

Farmers' markets have been the focus of several studies on consumption practices, alternative food networks, and rural development. While the growth of farmers' markets in the UK and North America is most often linked to shoppers' desire to move away from industrial food production (Le Trobe, 2000), in France they have also been associated with a growing interest in rural heritage, culinary traditions and tourism (Bessière, 1998). The opportunity to buy directly from farmers and artisans and consume 'authentic' regional products has allowed these sites to distinguish themselves from the myriad of other outdoor markets and indoor *halles* which are a steady feature of many French cities (de la Pradelle, 2006). While Smithers et al (2008) warn that the complex economic, political, and social interactions of farmers' markets make it more difficult to generalize, many aspects do translate across North America and Europe. The emphasis on primary production and frequent ban on participation by re-sellers and wholesalers means that farmers' markets are most important in regions with strong agricultural traditions (Leitch, 2003) where they represent a viable complement to

supermarket shopping (Smithers and Joseph, 2010). For Jordan (2007), the increasing importance of such specialty vending sites are indicative of a desire to return to a pre-industrial, non-commercial form of eating which is imbued with nostalgia for an idyllic rural. The exclusivity of farmers' markets – in terms of the cost of goods and the types of shoppers who can, and wish, to access them (Slocum, 2007) – marks these as culturally distinct sites where notions of quality food have as much to do with the perceived flavour of the products as the cultural cache attached to shopping there (Spiller, 2012).

For Valceschini and Torre (2002) quality in food is understood in two ways: as a series of characteristics assessed through scientific measures which indicate that the product has met industry standards for safety and consistency; and the more difficult to pin down sense of quality linked to the social and cultural context of food production which emphasizes place designations, small scale or artisanal preparation, and a guarantee of origins through AOC and other labels (Murdock et al, 2000). Although not necessarily organic or pesticide free, the approach outlined by the second definition places quality food in the realm of pre-industrial agriculture, with tacit suggestions of natural production methods, traditional knowledge, and support for rural heritage and practices. Yet, setting quality/local in contrast to industrially produced fails to take into account the complexity of each term and the degree to which standardization has shaped the quality food market (Guerrero et al, 2009). The development of Stilton as a regional cheese in the UK (Tregear, 2003) has, like Camembert in France (Boisard, 2003), required the identification of a single production method and the invention of a traditional boundary in order to effectively market the good to national and international customers. Likewise, tracing the development of an AOC beef label in the Maine-Anjou region of France, Noury et al (2005) detail the use of a place-designation as a promotional tactic and the extensive negotiations between breeders and Parisian supermarkets for access

to lucrative urban markets. The acceptance of AOC labels often overlooks challenges to the territorial integrity of the designation – in the case of wine (Gade, 2004) and Champagne (Guy, 2001:166), from producers in competing French regions claiming that craft traditions do not follow political boundaries – and the important role played by industrial standardization in the creation of a uniform and predictable item. The challenges of defining traditional food is also highlighted by Leitch (2003) in her examination of Italian *lardo* where intra-community debates about the true origin of the product have resulted in a fragmented sense of how to define, sell and produce this item as a quality, local good. In this case ‘local’ becomes increasingly problematic and takes on a romantic aura that overlooks the complex political, economic and social negotiations that underpin regional designations in food (Dupuis and Goodman, 2005). Rather than a reference to a historically fixed site, ‘local’ can more readily be understood as an imagined place produced through the actions of rural and urban actors (Harris, 2010), including farmers who actively participate in food markets with the sale of their own quality goods.

Analyzing the notation of quality, authentic, traditional and local, Stiles et al (2011) put forth the useful concept of ‘ghosts of tastes’: ghosts being those cultural attributes which are not visible and tangible for shoppers, but that add symbolic value to food through reference to places, people and cultivation methods by way of labels, images and packaging. This allows shoppers to, in effect, consume the local at a global scale – buying Roquefort cheese in Canada, for instance – and at least in the French context, positions farmers as the custodians of agrarian heritage and key actors in the production of quality food. The status afforded to farmers is a more recent development that has overturned negative associations of the word *paysan* with backward, rural and pre-modern peasants (Weber, 1976), and instead presents *paysan* as the farmer-heroes of the good food movements (Heller, 2002). From the vocal

agrarian politics of José Bové and his Confédération Paysanne, to the many cooperative and agrarian associations called on to demonstrate their expertise and knowledge in the definition of AOCs and regional designations (Berard and Marchenay, 1995), the farmer/*paysan* is the symbol of an idealized rural sought out by urban consumers and countryside tourists (Bessière, 1995). The *paysan* identity is certainly problematic, not least because of the exclusionary nature of local protectionism and the seeming conversion of agrarian traditions into a form of natural capital (Douguet and O'Connor, 2003) that it represents. The deliberate use of the title *paysan* – as noted in Montpellier's Marché Paysan d'Antigone – suggest that the meaning of being a farmer in France, and their role in defining local and quality, are worth interrogating further.

Farmers' markets encapsulate some of the complexity of defining 'quality' and determining the scale of 'local'. Amongst markets in Ontario the term 'local' has been translated as a set distance from the site of the market, whether that is a 50km radius in southern parts of the province or a much larger stretch in the north (Smithers et al, 2008). This process not only sets strict boundaries on who can participate – which is enforced by market managers and associations – but also demarcates a perimeter for the community as a whole and feeds into the sense of defensive localism noted by Dupuis and Goodman (2005). The emphasis placed on a measurable 'local' is also at play in UK farmers' markets where it has become closely intertwined with the definition of quality: with few stalls having formal place-based designations the promotion of local as a "repository of certain values" (Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000:294) linked to history, heritage and traditional methods makes this a key selling technique. The significance of being a local, *provençal* market is recognized in de la Pradelle's (2006) work in southern France, where Provence becomes a synonym for desirable products and face-to-face interactions between vendors and shoppers are particularly

important for communicating the association between place and quality. The appeal of a set-radius measure of ‘local’ makes this a deceptively easy term to define and one that is readily enforced through farmers’ market regulations. The nuances of ‘quality’ and its dependence on the more elusive notions of traditional, non-industrial and heritage based make this a more challenging parameter to govern, yet one that Hollow and Kneafsey (2000) and Smithers and Joseph (2010) identify as needing further consideration in terms of how farmers’ markets are structured, promoted and managed.

### **3. Research approach**

The analysis that follows is based on three months of ethnographic fieldwork in Montpellier, France in the summer of 2007. Situated an hour west of Marseille on the Mediterranean coast, Montpellier is France’s 8<sup>th</sup> largest city with an economy developed around tourism, education and research, the high-tech sector and wine production. The city has undergone extensive urban redevelopment in the last three decades, including the construction of a series of new neighbourhoods – including the Antigone district just south of the city centre – and the regeneration of the historic town centre. Stretching along a main street in the Antigone neighbourhood the *Marché Paysan d’Antigone* runs every Sunday morning with upwards of 50 stands facing each other across a narrow walkway. On Wednesday mornings some of the producers also join a smaller market in the heart of the Antigone neighbourhood, alongside more commercial traders and wholesalers. The *Marché Paysan d’Antigone* is one of a dozen markets run by the Montpellier municipality in proximity to the city centre: a number of smaller 4-6 stall neighbourhood markets run once a week in surrounding districts, alongside one very large organic foods market, a low-cost wholesale market, a suburban flea market, and a series of covered *halles* which present many more meat and dairy options.

Research in the Marché Paysan d'Antigone saw me stationed at a series of produce stalls where I sold, weighed and packaged goods, handled the tills, and helped with the end-of-session cleanup. My work was unpaid and the conviviality amongst stalls meant that I could alternate between different locations with considerable ease and also join the early morning breakfasts where groups of producers met over coffee, cheese, and sandwiches. Semi-structured interviews with 10 vendors complemented participant-observation in the markets and research in the local city archives. Interviews with vendors were generally held at the start of the market session at each vendor's stall, lasted approximately 40 minutes, and were sometimes followed by a farm visit. Brief, semi-structured interviews with 20 customers were conducted near vendors' stalls and focused on a limited number of questions around the frequency of market shopping, loyalty to certain producers, and the reasons for using the Marché Paysan d'Antigone over other city markets. The more extensive work with producers and constrained engagement with clients is reflective of a desire to understand how producers and artisans conceptualize the market, the regulatory mechanisms used to define the scope of 'local', and how a regional reading on quality in food production is presented. All interviews were conducted, transcribed and coded in French, with quotations presented in this article translated into English by the author.

#### **4. Situating the market**

While in many ways the form and appearance of the Marché Paysan d'Antigone mimics that of the city's other outdoor sites, this site has a unique administrative structure that makes for some notable behind-the-scenes differences. Most of Montpellier's outdoor food markets are organized by the municipality and are closely regulated by the city's *Affaires Commerciales*



section (Ville de Montpellier, 2001). The municipality determines the size and exact location of each market, selects vendors through a panel composed of city officials and market leaders, referees disputes between vendors, manages public space usage and collects a fee for each seller based on the expanse of their stall. To join Montpellier's neighbourhood markets potential vendors are required to complete an *Affaires Commerciales* application, demonstrate that they are in good standing with the local chamber of commerce, and make note of the type of items they will sell. In turn, the municipality monitors each market through the presence of city officials – known as *placiers* – who allocate vendors to particular spots and collect stall fees. The municipality frequently creates markets as tourist attractions: the summer-long wine markets, Christmas markets, book market, and flower markets have a regular schedule of rotation through the city's main tourist square. The Marché Paysan d'Antigone is the only market in the city to be exempt from most of these regulations. Instead, the Marché Paysan d'Antigone is self-managed and self-regulated through an elected governing council made up of farmers, artisans and local vintners. The governing council selects participants, allocates spaces, confirms that each vendor is registered with an agrarian or artisanal association, and ensures that health and safety bylaws on food storage, stand height are followed along with regulations on market starting and closing times. While vendors are still required to pay a public space usage fee to the municipality, the *placiers* who pass through the market early each Sunday do not comment on the size, location or organization of stands. The logic informing this market's unique structure is linked to the Marché Paysan d'Antigone's history and the social standing of farmers in the region.

Originally set in the village of Gignac to the west of Montpellier the Marché Paysan was an innovative direct-selling venture created by a grouping of local farmers keen to raise the profile of regional production by engaging more closely with customers (cf. Marché Paysan).

When in the late 1980s the organizers of the Marché Paysan were invited to relocate to Montpellier by then-Mayor Georges Frêche the group was given the opportunity to select their market location and form an independent association. The large plazas and neo-Classical design of the Antigone district – along with the absence of any neighbourhood markets – appealed and the Marché Paysan d’Antigone was formally opened by Georges Frêche in 1990. That producers were effectively recruited from Gignac for their unique status as *paysans* gave the market some leverage with Montpellier’s city council, leading to a separate charter and a limit on how and when *Affaires Commerciales* could intervene. The further declaration of the market as an independent non-profit association meant that farmers could organize as a members-only operation, thereby reserving the right to determine the terms of participation and removing any requirements for adherence to the chamber of commerce. Administratively distinct from other Montpellier markets and unique for its emphasis on local production, the Marché Paysan d’Antigone emerges as an exclusive vending space that places particular importance on the role of *paysan* in defending local traditions, and puts forth a regulatory structure geared towards separating true producers from imposters and resellers.

#### *4.1 Paysan expertise on show*

For vendors of the Marché Paysan d’Antigone being *paysan* is not a trivial label but a marker of expertise and quality that stands in contrast to ‘resellers’ or ‘commercial vendors’, those stall holders in other market who buy produce at wholesale distributors and deal in imported and internationally sourced goods. The binary between *paysan* and ‘commercial vendor’ is articulated on several levels and is ingrained in both the formal regulations governing the market and the informal customs and rules which vendors are expected to follow. The statuses

of the Marché Paysan d'Antigone expressly forbid the sale of goods not produced or crafted by vendors themselves, with clients reminded of this clause by sellers and through the market's website. Furthermore all vendors in the Marché are required to clearly and legibly indicate their *paysan* status with colour coded plaques that identify farmers (yellow) and local artisans (green) along with the village closest to their site of production, with some farmers adding their full address and post code.

Regulations aside, most farmers and artisans who took part in interviews argued that the manner in which they interact with customers is the most effective means of communicating the value and importance of their *paysan* status. Since most farmers lacked formal AOC or other quality and place-designations, the process of helping shoppers select groceries was identified as a key junction for each vendor to actively demonstrate their unique status. When shoppers in the Marché Paysan d'Antigone approach a stall they have two options: either pick up a basket and fill it with goods of their own choosing, or ask the farmer to make the selection for them. While clients generally feel comfortable picking root vegetables and other staples on their own the selection of more delicate items is often left to the farmer's expertise. The selection of cantaloupes and watermelons was cited by producers at several stalls as being the most important. Positioned behind the cash register in my capacity as ethnographic researcher the performance of knowledge and expertise through cantaloupe selection was one of the more persistent patterns of market work, and one that required both farmers and their assistants to play a role. As shoppers worked their way through the greens and vegetable section of the stand towards the seasonal fruit— a linear separation at play in nearly all grocery stalls — they would reach the cantaloupes, select one or two to check for fragrance, and then demand the expert advice of the farmer. While stall assistants might make a selection for clients when it comes to potatoes, tomatoes or salads and defer the call for the expert opinion,

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with cantaloupe the farmer was always called over. Clients frequently sought not just a cantaloupe but one specifically for noon of that day, and another to be eaten mid-week, or several small, very ripe cantaloupes for a brandy dessert, perhaps something fragrant to be had with prosciutto. There would be descriptions of the perfect cantaloupe eaten the previous week, and trust placed in the farmer to find an identical taste and experience for this week. The farmer would, in turn, select one or two cantaloupe, and comment on their weight and the importance of harvesting at the right time. The stem would be tested – if it falls off easily the cantaloupe is ripe but may keep; if it is a deeper shade of yellow, fragrant, with a honey coloured syrup formed at the rind the cantaloupe is *à-point*, perfectly ripe and should be eaten that day.

“They know how to eat them, but not how to choose them” clarified one farmer when asked why clients wanted assistance in selecting a cantaloupe. The farmer is perceived as most qualified to choose because he grows the melons, follows their cycles, has years of experience in harvesting, and is able to make the desired selection by knowing their exact level of ripeness. For the client who on a Sunday is buying an item to eat later in the week, it is important that the cantaloupe be several days from the perfect flavour. Even stall assistants who had worked at a stall for several years and had the task of separating out different qualities of cantaloupe before the start of each market session, regularly deferred to the farmers when it came to melons. Occasionally other products were subject to the same scrutiny, and demands made for the farmer to be involved in selection. This often happened with heritage tomatoes and in instances when several varieties of potatoes, salads or onions were displayed. Here, the farmer would be called on to either define the variety and harvesting technique, or to explain the particular virtues of one good over another. Alternatively, clients would ask if the produce was local, and have the exact location of

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cultivation for grapes and peaches explained by the farmer with careful reference to the yellow '*paysan*' plaque noting the postal code of the farm. When the location was revealed or the farmer explained the variety on sale, clients often responded with delighted exclamations in support of local production or the importance of eating quality foods, the two – local and quality – used interchangeably. When stall assistants performed the same task of place-identification they did so by pointing to the farmer and adding a few words about how long they had been part of this *paysan* market.

Queried about the sale of cantaloupes, farmers commented that in their view clients conceptualize good food not only in a sensory manner – that it taste and look good – but as something that is made even better when legitimized through the opinion of an agrarian authority. That *paysan* expertise, as one farmer notes, comes at a price that is nearly double that of other city markets:

True, there are people who say that it's [the market] expensive. But there are a lot of people here who are from the countryside who know their work. And they will explain what they know...They [clients] appreciate the work we do for them.

Customers not only buy melons and tomatoes, but the qualification of the person cultivating them. This is where the difference between farmers and commercial sellers is most forcefully made. To be a farmer is to follow in the *paysan* tradition, and to have full control over production. As one farmer told me in conversation, her decision to leave a big-city job in favour of the countryside was prompted by a desire to guide her own work, to be able to cultivate the land, and to follow her personal beliefs on the value of quality, organic

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production. Another farmer explained that his produce was so good because he was able to monitor every point of cultivation. These points are also consistently communicated to shoppers. Working outside conventional agro-business and labour market constraints – leaving the big-city job – gives certain legitimacy to the product. The cantaloupes are not produced to meet a quota, there is no pre-determined schedule for ripening, farmers are not rushed by a wholesaler demanding profits. That farmers must still make a living is not disputed. However, their ability to dictate the terms of their work makes the final good qualitatively superior. De la Pradelle finds that for the market to succeed it must be a site where the client can “find herself face to face with a tradesperson who in various ways stages their own fundamental freedom” (de la Pradelle, 2006:93). Farmers’ regular affirmation of their liberty to independently set the terms of their work is part of the formula. A sharp contrast is made with resellers who are portrayed as constrained: dependent on external supply chains, profit-driven, lacking the means of controlling quality, and thus less ‘free’ to make an honest sale.

So it follows that if farmers provide a quality product at a price, then commercial sellers provide a generic good cheaply. Price and skills are inextricably linked, and made a function of agricultural qualifications. By asking farmers to describe the difference between their work and that of resellers, the terms of this difference are laid bare and the value of local, informed production based on regional traditions is highlighted. One producer notes:

The resellers, they buy from producers. So, if they buy from true producers, that’s alright. But sometimes they buy at commercial outlets where they don’t know the provenance of the food. If they bought at a producer, they would know where the goods came from. For me, if I was a reseller, that would be

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absolutely essential...[but] most of the time when they buy, they buy commercially...And it seems to me that a reseller has to be worried about the traceability of their products.

Resellers are divorced from the mechanism that ties farmers to the land, and by extension to a product that has a higher economic value. The resellers' failures to recognize the importance of sourced food is made to speak to their broader inability to fully serve local clients.

Discussing the sample tasting offered by farmers at market, one producer notes:

Each summer we teach people through sampling. So we do tasting of cheese, honey, wine, oysters, foie gras, and so on. And the tasting, teaching how to sample is very important. And it's, a producer can do it. But not a reseller. A producer is working with his products, he can [offer tastings], and a reseller can't do that. That's the difference between producers and reseller...Tasting isn't done in any old way.

Through tastings and by explaining produce varieties, farmers impart some of their knowledge to customers. As Meneley (2007) notes with respect to olive oil production, quality and authenticity function as markers only if they are signalled by a cultivated, educated pallet and embedded in local practices. In the case of the Marché Paysan d'Antigone this authenticity requires a traditional know-how that, at least according to some farmers, resellers are simply not able to imitate. The attraction of this market over others is explained as the opportunity for city clients to buy quality products, conceptualized as items with a clear provenance and ones which are firmly situated in a distinct locality.

Farmers are aware of this cursory link and ensure that the relationship between site of production, regional history, and small-scale farming is emphasized. A honey producer from the Cévennes region north of Montpellier explains:

Honey is at once a representation of a vegetation, of a landscape, of a region, and of the people who live there, and also of a heritage. For instance, honey from the Cévennes. Honey from the Cévennes is a representation of a region – the Cévennes – with its chestnut trees. It is also an image of a civilization, the protestant communities and their history of resistance, their famous stone houses where they would take refuge, and the honey they would keep, like the one I have on display at my stand. It is also made famous by [Robert Louis] Stevenson who wrote ‘Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes’ [in 1879] and in his pack sacks he would carry jars of honey. The same that I have on the stand over there. So, honey is a representation. And we can explain to everyone that honey is an image. At once, it reminds of a flower, an aroma, and a history.

The pots of honey are transformed into living historical objects by their ties to the land. Their elevated status demands that the farmer harness the land and effectively draw from it a cultural meaning not found in the goods of international commodity chains. Quality food is derived through both expert cultivation and the commodification of rurality (Murdock et al, 2000). The honey effectively has a local identity that cannot be duplicated, and one that market goers can literally consume. The reference is to *terroir* products – a quality marker that ties the provenance of certain goods to a singular, spatially limited, geologically homogenous, and culturally unique geographical area (Trubek, 2000). To designate a food as



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being of specific *terroir* is to imply that there is only one authentic mode of production. The link between *terroir* and economic value is explicitly made:

The *terroir* it's heritage, these two things are linked. And the *terroir* that's the earth, that's production. .... And I think there's a clientele for this sort of thing. And I also wanted to tell you the farmers they are rivalled by other farmers it's normal. The farmers of Europe are going to be rivals. But one thing has something the other doesn't, it's the *terroir* and it's the heritage. Your products have to be linked to heritage.

For Leitch (2003) this deepening interest in *terroir* production speaks to a “strategic symbol reversal, [where] the food artisan is envisaged not as a backward-thinking conservative standing in the way of progress, but rather as a quintessential modern subject, a holder par excellence of national heritage” (Leitch, 2003:447). Honey from the Cévennes is sought after precisely because it is divorced from modern, industrial production. Through those jars of honey the historical events that determine the character of the region are defined, and the product along with its *terroir* are situated in broader discourses of what it means to be Montpelliérain. As Bessière (1998) aptly notes, heritage is “no longer considered solely as a link between past and present, but also as a reservoir of meaning necessary to understand the world: a resource in order to elaborate alterity and consequently identity” (Bessière, 1998:26). Food heritage is also a marketable quality whose presentation, as noted in the following section, is closely regulated within the Marché Paysan d'Antigone.

#### 4.2 *Systematizing authenticity*

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So far the link between local, quality and *paysan* has been discursively established and supported with reference to customs and practices linked to the way goods are sold. Farmers consciously perform a certain role that focuses on their status as *paysan*, capable of linking together land and heritage without the need of formal AOC or place-designations. For the Marché Paysan d'Antigone to have such a draw a more firm confirmation of each seller's *paysan* status is needed. Clients have to be assured that the individuals behind the stall are in fact legitimate farmers and not just skilled resellers hoodwinking shoppers into paying double for a kilo of vegetables. The unique administrative structure of the Marché becomes important, and the ability of farmers to define the terms of participation and regulate each other comes to the forefront. The regulations define how the Marché Paysan d'Antigone Association feels direct-selling ventures should be run, and also reflects what they believe clients expect from a farmer's market.

With the success of the market staked on a reputation for providing local goods, the problem of '*faux-paysan*' – fake farmers – is a sticking point. As one producer at the Marché quietly told me, "I am not sure if I should say this, but there are some who lie". That is some who, despite appearances to the contrary, seem to be just a bit extraordinary in their ability to deliver an exemplary product. A farmer details their suspicions:

Tomatoes, this year everyone is having difficulty growing tomatoes. It's the whole region: those who are organic, those who are not organic, all different methods, and this year the tomato is late with everyone except them [another stand at the market]. They are different. They are the only ones in the whole area, in the whole region, to have early tomatoes. We wonder.

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At Montpellier's Marché Paysan d'Antigone, measures have been put in place to ensure authenticity. Two statutes from the Marché Paysan d'Antigone Association Charter address the question. First, Article 4 of the Charter outlines the goals of the association as:

- Promote the agricultural and tourist products of the below noted geographic regions;
- To facilitate the direct distribution of agricultural products originating from farms situated in the departments of: Hérault, Aude, Tarn, Aveyron, Gard and Lozère;
- To contribute to the further development and diversification of farming in these regions.

Through this measure the geographic extent of 'local' is defined as the area surrounding Montpellier and the five nearest *départements*, or administrative districts. This allows for the inclusion of oysters from nearby Bouzigues (Hérault), Roquefort and goat's cheese from Lozère, a cheese and potato prepared dish called *aligot* from the Aubrac region (Aveyron), AOC Languedoc wine, *fois gras* from Hérault and Aude, along with locally grown kiwis and other exotic fruit which are certainly not regional dishes but are necessary to draw a wider clientele. The express purpose of the market is to support local agriculture through direct farm sales, a point firmly made through Article 6: Item 1 of the Charter stating that membership will be granted only to:

- Farmers covered under AMEXA [national farmer's health and insurance scheme], whose site of exploitation is located in a township of one of the departments mentioned in Article 4 [noted

above], and who sells exclusively and without middlemen agricultural goods, both primary or value-added, produced solely on their respective farms.

The clause for value-added allows for farmer to sell jams, wine, foie gras, prepared pies, and in some cases jewellery and handicrafts made with local products. As Smithers and Joseph (2010) note with respect to farmers' markets in Canada, setting the parameters for local quality and distinguishing 'authentic' farmers from 'resellers' is a challenging undertaking, and one that invariably sees some local producers excluded from participation. Considering the process from a different perspective Peterson and Kern (1996) suggest that banding around common goals and criteria allows farmers to build stable, reliable reputations that increase overall group profits while reducing internal competition, a claim supported by Patchell (2008) with respect to AOC wine producers in France. Both conclusions are valid with respect at the *Maché Paysan d'Antigone*: the terms of membership limit participation to certain categories of farmers, which in turn allows participants to claim a higher price point for the assurance of quality, local *paysan* goods.

Compliance with the *Marché Paysan d'Antigone* Charter is ensured in several ways. To join the *Marché Paysan d'Antigone* an applicant must be ratified by the Association's Administrative Council. The Council is composed of eleven members elected through a general assembly, who are in their own right farmers, vintners, and artisans. Participants are required to present a list of products they cultivated or fabricate to Council, who in turn determine which goods can be sold in the market. With consideration to the limited client base, the Association has quotas for the number of producers in each category: there can only be a single onion farmer, two olive stands, four cheese makers (of which two fabricate *chèvre*

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and two *brebis*), a single fishmonger, and at most ten grocers. A farmer cannot add products outside their designated list, and may change occupation – for instance from *foie gras* to poultry and eggs – only with the consent of the Council, or else risk losing their place at market. The use of quotas and approval of individual goods for sale means two things: that farmers are forced to specialize; and more importantly, that if any participant introduces goods outside their declared list they are brought to the attention of the Administrative Council. The strict application of these regulations also means that many farmers are excluded from the market, and some of whom have instead taken up spots in Montpellier's neighbourhood and organic markets.

If any doubts are raised as to the authenticity of a farmer, the Association takes action to validate the product. When asked if they have encountered '*faux-paysan*' one farmer explained the process:

That's why we had to kick one of them out, because people think they can come and just sell anything. And for us, because, well, if they do it [bring products from other farms/regions] you can see that it's off. We have the right to carry out inspections. We have to inform them before we do it, but we would come and do an inspection...at the site of agricultural exploitation. So, if we see that there are some doubts, we send four or five people who will carry out an inspection at the farm and determine if the person is a producer or not.

The ability to inspect is a powerful tool. To customers it guarantees that farmers are not making false claims. The food on sale is precisely what is advertised. The notion that a true

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*paysan* can be distinguished from a '*faux-paysan*' through a farm visit is instructive in other ways. It suggests that authenticity can be calculated and evaluated. The *terroir* quality is not, after all, so intrinsic that it cannot be gauged by others who are invested in its protection. The validation process also suggests that simply farming in the area is not sufficient to produce a quality product. The argument put forth by defenders of Champagne, Stilton and other AOC product is precisely this: there is one recognized, set method of cultivating traditional products and any deviation, be it through the addition of foreign ingredients or by growing champagne grapes in a neighbouring department, renders the product inadmissible. The AOC label is the legal definition of the correct mode of fabrication. Of course many of the tomatoes and peaches sold in Montpellier's markets are not AOC certified. However, the notion of quality carries down the rank of small-scale farmers, all the while preserving the deep-held belief that good food is inextricably linked to a defined landscape, local heritage and specific production methods.

The difference between a farmer and a reseller – the accusation against those who sell non-farm produce being that they are essentially resellers - is made by reference to a common understanding of what it means to be a *paysan*. It includes a sense that legitimate production sees the farmer cultivate their own land, and more pertinently, does so while recognizing the unique agrarian heritage of the five departments listed in the charter. Particularly in Montpellier, where José Bové makes regular appearances for court proceedings stemming from his anti-GMO activities, violent opposition to EU agrarian free-market regulations is coupled with the City of Montpellier's continual celebration of the region's *paysan* roots through open-air photo exhibits commemorating the efforts to protect regional heritage, the meaning of *paysan* is firmly entrenched in local memory and living history. At the Marché Paysan d'Antigone the protection of regional tradition is placed in the hands of the farming

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collective, and subjected to internal regulation. If you are proven to have bought wholesale, you are disassociated and your *paysan* status publicly called into question.

#### *4.3 Conceptualizing quality*

The market is a collection of agrarian experts, and as such, it is transformed into a space where the meaning of quality and local can be defined, and in turn consumed. Farmers have a particular conception of how their clients envisage quality, and seek to deliver on this vision. When asked why they shop in the market, many clients respond with reference to the superiority of the produce, the finesse of the wine, the fresh-out-of-the-oven smell of pies. Many of these points depend on personal taste. Yet some farmers in the Marché take this a step further by suggesting that recognizing quality is also a function of a trained clientele capable of discerning the best from the rest, a question of culture as much as palate. One farmer explains:

Quality is a product, we'll let that, for example a chicken let's say. We will feed it for four months. That means that it's not pushed, it will have flavour, and that's the same for salad and fruit. We can choose to give it a bit of help, put it in a cage and force feed it, feed it, until it fattens. And since it doesn't move it won't use a lot of calories. But the meat will be dead, it will be fat. We would gain a month of feeding but it won't be the same meat as a chicken who is quality. But of course it depends on taste, there could be people who like the other.

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The punch is in the last line. Not all eaters value the more natural mode of production associated with ‘quality food’, the contention being that their pallet lacks the culinary education to demand better. To want quality is to know how to recognize it. Another farmer speaks on the same issue:

Quality is a food that has taste and that’s fresh. At Antigone [Marché Paysan] what we sell on Sunday was picked on Saturday. It’s freshness, you can’t find that elsewhere. It’s unique. Next to having our own garden we can’t find fresher. That’s quality...Taste, they’ve [fruits] got a real taste. There’s variety, the selection, it’s not the variety you would find in the big distributors, here they are different and often better...[produce] is not treated [with pesticides] or as little as possible. It is well presented, it smells good, it is pleasant, when we eat it, it is good. When we keep it we can keep it for up to a week or fifteen days in the fridge. Of course you’ve got to pay for that. But the quality, it’s a choice, it’s really a choice.

Quality is a mindful decision to eat well. For farmers the choice is to practice agriculture in a conscientious manner; for clients the choice is to learn to appreciate and enjoy the fruits of that labour. As Heller (2002) notes “to be ‘cultured’ in France is to be ‘cultivated’, or to have good taste. The meaning of ‘taste here is twofold, as both food and people may be understood as cultivated or tasteful” (Heller, 2002:28-9).

Both parties to the market transaction – the producers and the shoppers – must have the capacity to perceive quality. At the Marché Paysan d’Antigone this is well noted. One regular client articulates this point:



[Many of the producers] are passionate, they speak about their trade with passion, and most of them are also intellectuals....their dress and their appearance, they put on hats that look very peasant, but in reality they are all intellectuals. You speak with them and you see that they are very cultured. You can speak with them about many things. It's an intellectual...it's people who travel a lot, who have things to say, who are curious.

This client perceives the farmers as well-versed not only in agricultural production, but also in politics, culture and history. They are able to so successfully relay traditions specifically because they have competences in these social fields. Farmers readily take up this role, and demonstrate their agrarian expertise through performances like that of cantaloupe sales. The process of communicating their skills to shoppers is a point discussed informally behind the stalls of the market and more directly through meetings of the *Marché Paysan d'Antigone Association's* Administrative Council. At times selling produce at the stands felt like an intellectual meeting over food. Farmers and clients are happy to step aside and discuss a piquant point of local politics or a national incident. If recognizing quality is linked to education and cultural expertise, then not just anybody can be a connoisseur. Consumption, as Holloway and Kneafsey (2000) aptly note, is increasingly a political action. As one farmer notes:

[Clients] don't come for the price because it's expensive. They are looking for quality. They want advice...they also come for a cultural exchange.

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To ensure that clients are amply aware of the unique attributes of a quality market, farmers and artisans stage regular reminders. At the Marché Paysan d'Antigone straw hats were supplied and farmers and stall assistants wear them for the duration of the day. The hats created a distinct country-bazaar feel, and combined with the colourful provençal-style tablecloths universally used to cover the front of stall tables, artfully highlighted the *paysan* nature of the market. Most clients seemed to enjoy the spectacle, some mocked the hats, but many accepted the colourful table covers and wooden produce crates as an expected manifestation of *paysan* heritage. Many producers know their customers well and have built friendships over the years. Children and grandchildren are brought to the market and introduced to loyal farmers. A convivial ambience is staged, and as one vendor told me “this atmosphere is typical of village markets, but not city markets”. Rural sentiments are brought to urban neighbourhoods with visual references to *terroir* and *paysan* traditions, which are encouraged and sometimes mandated by the Marché Association. The unique heritage of Languedoc is performed for clients who can affirm their belonging to the community through regular consumption of local food.

The playful atmosphere of Montpellier's markets is in part the result of the relocation of wholesalers – the economically powerful, internationally supplied traders who provision most supermarkets in the city – to the industrial zones on the periphery of the city. The neighbourhood markets, thus, have a limited role in food distribution and can instead be re-imagined as sites of cultural spectacle and local consumption. “I am not a vegetable seller. I am there to serve them [clients], to discuss with them, and to exchange recipes” one market vendor asserted, placing the emphasis on service rather than the economic value of transactions.

## 5. Conclusion

Examining farmers' markets in the UK, Holloway and Kneafsey (2000) conclude that they are at once alternative ventures and conservative spaces: alternative for the emphasis on small-scale, non-commercial production that supports alternative food networks; and conservative for the degree of protectionism and exclusivity they inspire. The ways in which Montpellier's Marché Paysan d'Antigone is organized, regulated, and promoted to clients supports this assertion. The Marché provides a unique venue for smaller regional producers and artisans to sell their goods and allows shoppers access to seasonal, fresh food. The performance of a *paysan* identity is central to the production of quality foods and is a key component of the daily life of the market, with vendors asserting their position as agrarian experts through the sale of cantaloupe and emphasizing their unique position as custodians of *terroir* heritage. At the same time the notion of local and of quality are tightly regulated by the Marché Association, with a strict parameter on the area considered to be 'local' to Montpellier, and a series of regulations that gives the Association the power to inspect farms and exclude those who do not adhere to the rules. The rules are in place, farmers argue, to ensure that the market delivers a comprehensible, consistent and governable sense of local quality to clients who are already well versed in culinary heritage discourses. The result is an alternative vending space that operates under protectionist measures, and a site where notions of 'quality' and 'local' can be articulated through enforceable rules and established practices.

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