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New Orleans Producers: Directing the Regional Food System One Informal Contract at a Time

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Science
in
Urban Studies

By

Emily Nichols

B.A. University of Iowa, 2008

August 2014

Acknowledgments

I would not consider myself a foodie, just someone who enjoys and appreciates food. I have childhood memories of visiting both Grandparents' orchard and farm in Oregon. Grandpa Craton grew cherries and apricots and sold them in farmers markets and at local grocery stores. Grandpa Nichols grew wheat and alfalfa in Eastern Oregon and sold his crop to a local distributor. I grew up appreciating a farmer's hard work and dedication to their fields through my father's stories about harvest and responsibilities around the farm. I was introduced to food systems through popular literature of food consumption practices in American cities, energy production, and globalization. Further investigation uncovered the problems and concerns of the globalized food system and food industry. In asking my family about their distribution practices I instantly became interested in small farm distribution practices. New Orleans is the best place to study food systems from a farmer's perspective because the community values food and New Orleans farmers accepted my intrusion.

This thesis would not have been completed without the help of the small producers that contributed to this study. They took time out of their busy days to answer all of my questions. I hope this paper highlights their love of farming and dedication to providing quality food to New Orleans. I also hope this paper encourages others to study the food system from the producers perspective. I dedicate this thesis to all the small producers that are doing what they love. May you keep producing for America.

This thesis was accomplished after a year and a half of hard work and commitment. I owe a lot to Dr. Renia Ehrenfeucht. I went to her when I first started to contemplate my proposal and Dr. Ehrenfeucht guided me into developing a thesis that I have enjoyed and that I am proud of. I have enjoyed working closely with Dr. Ehrenfeucht and appreciate the way she challenged me as a student. Thank you.

I also would like to acknowledge Dr. David Beriss for helping me develop the methods and questions for this study. Dr. Beriss's extensive knowledge of food and culture has added great detail to the methods and research questions in this study. Dr. Ana Croegaert shared her knowledge about consumption patterns and how the language used and absent in the discourse analysis was valuable. Thank you all for your help in completing this research. I could not have survived the process of completing a thesis without your guidance and encouragement.

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Abstract

Large corporations largely control food production and distribution in the global food system and have generated a desire for locally produced food. Although small independent producers still contribute to regional food systems, there is little understanding about how they distribute and market their products. This thesis uses both semistructured interviews to investigate the distribution practices of urban, family, and regional producers in the New Orleans region and discourse analysis to disclose how localist discourse shapes producers marketing practices. The discourse analysis discovered that the web presence of local New Orleans restaurants, farmers, and Crescent City Farmers Market targeted concepts that reflect localist beliefs and values. It was also established that small producers respond to consumer demands, but still have the power to shape the regional food system through negotiating informal contracts and striving to enter into the niche market.

Keywords: Small Independent Producers, Farmers Markets, Localism, Consumption, Global Economy, Regional Food System, New Orleans

Chapter 1 Introduction

Small independent farmers have recognized they cannot compete with food conglomerates mass production of crops so they strive to enter the niche market for locally produced food. Small producer's practice of direct marketing, customization, and diversification of production appeals to the niche market and also created a role for small producers within New Orleans regional food system. This study will bring to light the farming practices of small independent farmers in New Orleans and the obstacles and decisions that impact the organization of distributing their food.

Food conglomerates largely control food production and distribution in the global food system and global economy. Food conglomerates own the entire production process of poultry, vegetation, and livestock. The multi-industrial control that food conglomerates have within the food industry is called vertical monopolies. By controlling multiple industries that make up the food system, food conglomerates control the entire production process of the food market. Small independent farmers cannot compete with the power and reach these conglomerates possess in the global economy (O'Hara and Stagl, 2001; Hess, 2009).

O'Hara and Stagl argue the structure and practices of the global food industry and system is unsustainable (O'Hara and Stagl, 2001). Many observers have argued the United States participation in this unsustainable food system is directly linked to the handful of food conglomerates that control the flow of food into American cities (O'Hara and Stagl, 2001; Friedman 1993). The control food conglomerates have gained in the United States

has allowed corporations to dictate the variety of food offered and have generated an unsustainable food system (Hinrichs and Lyson, 2007, p. 22). Vertical monopolies are not the only method corporations have for controlling agribusiness. Large-scale farmers are integrated into food conglomerate control through contracts that specify and determine what the contracted farmers produce (Hinrichs and Lyson, 2007, p. 22). The contracts aid food conglomerates in having control of food production at a local level and abets them to engulf more producers under their control (Hinrichs and Lyson, 2007, p. 22).

Research Focus

There is little research about distribution practices of small farmers in the United States. Current studies have focused on consumerism within farmers markets, but there are not any studies that focus on the producers the markets. This research examines small farm distribution practices and how those distribution practices contribute to the regional food system. I hypothesized the distribution practices of the independent farmers in the New Orleans region shape the regional food system because the circulation of their production in the regional and local economy drives the demands for locally produced food. The production and distribution practices of small independent producers influence local businesses buying practices. Restaurants want to connect to producers because the prestige locally produced food gives restaurants and the demand to support local producers.

My research questions are as follows:

1. How do the farmers organize their food distribution?
2. How do the farmers view “local” and how does it impact the distribution of products?

3. How is the regional food system shaped in localism discourse?

To answer these questions I conducted semistructured interviews that focused on seven small producer's routine from production to processing and then distribution. The detailed account of producer's distribution practices allowed this study to understand how farmers distribute products. For the discourse analysis I examined restaurant websites and menus, Crescent City Farmers Market website, and farmers' websites. This analysis was aimed to understand how these institutions used language and concepts that are associated to localist discourse to attract consumers.

This research found that small independent producers organize their distribution methods based on consumer demands. It was hypothesized that small producers direct the regional food system and they do direct the regional food system. Through negotiations with consumers, forming informal contracts, and customizing and diversifying their food production and distribution with local shops, restaurants, and individual consumers. Negotiations are the informal contracts that are formed between producer and consumer. Through these negotiations, local producers in New Orleans create the demands of restaurants, grocery stores, butcher shops, and individual consumers. These acts of negotiations are structured around the capabilities of small producers customizing orders for consumers and diversifying production. Even though farmers are reacting to the demands of consumers, they have control of what they produce, how they produce it, and where to distribute the food. Small independent producers have the ability to impact consumption methods of businesses that contribute to the regional food system. These production and distribution practices create the demand for locally produced food and these demands create the regional food system.

Thesis Structure

Chapter 2 explores the current literature and research of the global economy and food system. This review explains the globalization of agriculture and how food conglomerates control the current food system. This chapter also follows the negative externalities of mass production practices in the globalized food industry and the reactions of local food organizations to these methods. The end of the chapter specifically focuses on the history of New Orleans food system.

Chapter 3 outlines the research design through explaining the assembly of the semistructured interviews and discourse analysis. The producers that participated in this study are introduced. The strength and weaknesses and merit of the study will be examined at the end of the chapter. Chapter 4 discloses the themes that were discovered in the discourse analysis of Crescent City Farmers Market website, restaurants' menus and websites, and the websites' of New Orleans farms. Restaurants websites claim to celebrate and preserve southern Louisiana cuisine to attract customers. Restaurant menus use specific descriptions and general labels to identify the farm that provided the ingredients for the dish. Crescent City Farmers Market and farmers' websites use ethical and sustainable farming methods to attract customers. This chapter explains that localist discourse reflects consumer demands, which influences farmers marketing methods.

Chapter 5 outlines how small independent producers structure distribution and describes the factors that influence decisions of production practices. Farmers explain their views of "local" and concluded that farmers define "local" based on a variety of factors and remains subjective.

The Conclusion shows that my hypothesis was correct and the research allowed this study to expand on the hypothesis. Small independent producers shape the regional food system through negotiations with local shops, grocery stores, and residents that value locally produced food.

Chapter 2 The Transformation of the Urban Food System

This section of the thesis builds on the main point that small independent producers are functioning within a globalized food system that is heavily controlled by food conglomerates. I will set the framework of the global economy with Daniel Miller's example of grocery stores and how the global economy affects local national economies. I will outline David Hess's argue that deregulation of the food industry allows corporations to buy into multiple industries that focus on a single agricultural production (Hess, 2009). I will then explain that vertical monopolies are not the only source of control, but link Thomas Lyson's argument that contractual practices between producers and distributors have also concentrated the food industry (Lyson, 2007). This centralization of control causes vertical monopolies within the food system (Hess, 2009). I will then link O'Hara and Stagl's argument that the current structure of the food system has provoked a recent interest and reaction from localist movements because of the perceived negative externalities that globalization has on food production and the environment (O'Hara and Stagl, 2001). I will then wrap up with a brief history of New Orleans food system pre and post Katrina to set a more local setting.

Globalization of Agriculture

The globalization of markets has tied local economies to each other resulting in mergers and closures of global businesses affecting local communities. Daniel Miller demonstrates the power of the global economy by using grocery store closures in Northern England as an example of the connections of the global economy. The closure of locally owned and successful grocery stores in Northern England sparked Miller's interest while

researching consumerism (Miller, 2001). Miller explained that grocery stores were closing because of the change in ownership and mergers that were executed in the global economy (Miller, 2001, p. 157). Miller also discovered the Opium War in the late nineteenth century was also part of the reason successful grocery stores in Northern England were closing their doors (Miller, 2001). After further investigation, Miller found that China bought ownership of the businesses that took part in starting the colonial rule of Hong Kong and closed them down because of the treatment of their country during the Opium War and colonial rule (Miller, 2001). Miller argues the financial actions of a Chinese firm in the global economy influences communities in Northern England. Through this example Miller demonstrates two aspects. One is that the global economy is not a newly developed organism because local economies of countries have been connected since trade routes. The second aspect is that the global economy has linked countries together and financial decisions within the global economy impact more than one economy.

Globalization links local economies together making them obsolete because the actions in the global economy have a significant influence in the local economy. Saskia Sassen argues this connection in the global economy allows the centralization of industries (Sassen, 2012). Sassen expands that statement by arguing spatial dispersal of industries and economies intensified globalization (Sassen, 2012, p. 7). Sassen links her argument to the wide range of specialization within the global economy and is “causing centralization of economics control in industry sectors” (Sassen, 2012, p. 2). Sassen’s explanation that globalization is centralizing sectors of industries frames the concept of vertical monopolies controlling the current food system. Sassen’s argument explains the features that create

vertical monopolies are conglomerate diversification in specializations and production concentration of multiple industries (Sassen, 2012, p. 2).

Impact of Globalization on Food Production

A compelling statistic that shows the degree of centralization in the food industry are the five conglomerates, which include Chiquita and Del Monte, that own eighty percent of global trade between them (Steel, 2008, p. 101). These statistics point to a concentrated food industry that is controlled by just a few corporations. O'Hara and Stagl define global markets as "spatial configurations of multinationals who monopolize entire sectors of the global economy" (O'Hara and Stagl, 2001, p. 535). The international business practices of food conglomerates through production of crops in South and Central America and then importation into domestic markets builds international networks. Giddens characterizes globalization as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (Giddens, 1990, p. 64). Globalization has connected the food industry tightly so that a drought in Asia or South America will affect the type of fruit that is available in American grocery stores.

The wide range of industry specializations allows conglomerates to creep into multiple industries. A vertical monopoly within the food industry is a corporation that owns the land where food is produced, the ships that transport the products, and the distribution company that package and sells the product into the food system. Vertical monopolies own the links that create the entire industry chain. Steve Striffler found that the poultry industry is controlled by a handful of corporations and that chicken farmers lost control over their independent operations because of the concentration of power

(Striffler, 2005, p. 16). What makes the poultry industry concentrated is the intense ownership and specialization of the entire production process by one corporation. The different links in the chain come together after mergers of smaller production firms into larger distributors.

O'Hara and Stagl also argue that these contracts "link multiple smaller producers to a giant processor" (O'Hara and Stagl, 2001, p. 535). O'Hara and Stagl add that contractual practices are considered a "simple integration" with the conglomerate and the outsourcing of production adds to their chain of production without ownership, while still maintaining control (O'Hara and Stagl, 2001, p. 535). The contracts between food conglomerates and large farmers give corporations control of large vast of land and production (Lyson, 2007, 21). Lyson argues the contractual practices that integrate farmers and corporations have been used since the 1960's and are "reconfiguring production at the local level because it's the processor and not the farmer who determines what commodity is produced and where" (Lyson, 2007, p. 21-22). Lyson also argues these binding contracts allow corporations to dictate farmer's role as a controlled producer within the food system (Lyson, 2007).

Another example of the concentration of the poultry industry is the contractual practice between corporately owned food distributors and chicken farmers. The distributors dictate how many chickens the farm needs to produce and the distributors also set the price they will pay for each chicken (Striffler, 2005, 58). If a farmer cannot fulfill the contract the distributor cancels the agreement and leaves the farm vulnerable to bankruptcy. Food conglomerates control extends to independent farms that are not specifically owned by the corporation, but are restrained by the corporation. The farmers are subjected to agricultural servitude because they are chained to corporately owned

distributors through the contracts and the concentration of corporate ownership in the poultry industry. Food conglomerates control the majority of food that enters the United States food system.

Localist Movement in a Globalized Food System

The mass production within the globalized food industry has sparked a social movement that values and promotes sustainable economic and environmental production methods. In response to the current production practices within the global food system, local food movements focus on the negative externalities of homogenous production, unsustainable economies, and regaining local authority (Hess, 2009). The attention local food movements have given food production has struck a new interest in localism for farmers, consumers, and restaurants. The local food movements support local food systems and accumulate awareness of the current industrial food system. Organizations argue the movement is based on the following principles. Buying local food will reduce energy usage during transportation of imported foods into supermarkets and also create less waste through eliminating packing to protect food during travel (Thompson and Hodges, 2011, p. 1117). The local food movements mission is to bring awareness and increase consideration for where food originates and to increase support for local producers (Martinez et al, 2010). The increasing public awareness of processed food, how the current food system is impacting the environment, and causing food insecurities allowed the local food movements to gain popularity (Hess, 2009, p. 53). The organizations are maintained by individual actions that reflect the belief a local food system is more beneficial to the city and residents than the current centralized global food system (Hess, 2009).

Local food activists communicate to communities the benefits of responsible economic and environmental consumer practices. David Hess argues the localist movement is in “support of government policies and economic practices oriented toward enhancing local democracy and local ownership of the economy in a historic context of corporate led globalization” (Hess, 2009, p. 7). Currently, independent farmers produce and distribute food on a smaller scale in the regional and local food system. Independent farmers have a niche market through providing local food because of the interest in local food consumption (Hess, 2009). Hess states localist movements want to improve the current role that small independent producers have in the regional and local economy (Hess, 2009). Hess does not believe that localist movements will deflate the globalized food industry, but argues supporting local producers will sustain their role in the regional food system (Hess, 2009, p. 101). Advocates argue if local producers gain a supportive role in the local economy it will promote sustainable production methods.

Critics of centralized food production fear that unethical farming practices of food conglomerates are destroying the environment and future food supply. O’Hara and Stagl argue the specialization that occurs in the globalized food industry weakens production because of the increase of “homogeneous production methods, consumption patterns, built environment, patterns of social organization, as well as concomitant loss of diverse social and biological diversity” (O’Hara and Stagl, 2001, p. 534). As O’Hara and Stagl point out, homogeneous production patterns of plants and livestock weaken species because long-term sustainability depends on species ability to adapt to environmental changes and demand patterns (O’Hara and Stagl, 2001, p. 534). The practices of mass production of crops and livestock are not sustainable practices and are impacting the capability of the

long-term food markets (O'Hara and Stagl, 2001, p. 535). Other negative externalities of homogeneous and mass production of species are the uses of fungicides that contaminate groundwater, causes health side effects, and creates a dependence on insecticide to guarantee a profitable production (O'Hara and Stagl, 2001, p. 534).

Food conglomerates have changed banana production from nature made to man-made within the last few decades. For example, the production of bananas has changed drastically over the last half century due to genetic mutation. Dan Koeppel explains in his book *Banana*, that Cavendish bananas are genetically altered to survive fungal disease that once destroyed most of the banana crop worldwide (Koeppel, 2008, p. 82). The genetic mutation is responsible for creating a banana that produces reliable profit for food conglomerates. As a result, bananas are the most popular fruit in the United States and the Cavendish banana is the most common banana to be placed in supermarkets. Carolyn Steel states that food conglomerates are controlling the variety of bananas sold in supermarkets and the large-scale production of Cavendish bananas are threatening the existence of the "remaining gene-pool of bananas" (Steel, 2009, p. 101). This rapid production does not allow for food to adapt to the changes of the "homogenous production patterns" and results in a loss of biological diversity (O'Hara and Stagl, 2001, p. 534). Another example from Steel that demonstrates the dangers of homogenous production methods is the thirty percent of the forty-five hundred livestock species that are close to extinction because most milk and beef production comes from one breed of cattle (Steel, 2008, p. 101). O'Hara and Stagl declare the unethical production of food is destroying the long-term sustainability and robustness of the food system.

Localist movements confront the issue of the loss of economic and political power within the global economy. The emphasis of localist movements is summarized in this statement.

Localism emphasizes the problems of the corporatization of the economy and the loss of local sovereignty, and it draws attention to the project of building an economy based on economic units other than large corporations, rather than finding solution that adjust the role of the government in the economy and that address the pervasive growth of within-nation inequality (Hess, 2009, p. 55).

Independent farmers are fighting to sustain a presence within the local and regional food systems without being swallowed into the control of food conglomerate. This is evident in the growing number of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), farmers markets, and community gardens in the United States (Brown, 2001, p. 667). The increasing presence of markets that sell locally grown and ethically produced food indicates there are small independent farmers that are surviving outside of the scope of food conglomerates. This phenomenon has attracted social scientist attention to study farmers markets and consumers. Past research has focused on the market place and consumers, but do not concentrate on the vendors that make up these markets.

Allison Brown outlines a historical review of how farmers markets were a necessary and vital component to urban food systems. After World War II, the interstate highway system and government encouragement developed suburbs that eliminated the demand for farmers markets (Brown, 2001, p. 655). The expansion of suburbs moved commercial retailing of food outside the city center and depopulated downtown areas causing a decline of the number of farmers markets (Brown, 2001). Within the last four decades farmers market presence has been restored within urban areas with the passing of Farmer-to-

Consumer Direct Marketing Act of 1976 (Brown, 2001, p. 657). This law allowed farmers access to public urban areas to improved direct contact with urban customers. Directly after the law passed the number of farmers markets grew rapidly (Brown, 2001). Brown linked the growth of the number of farmers markets to the increasing urban population and their demand for fresh food. Brown states the study and support of farmers markets is important because the markets are an essential support system and source of income for most farmers.

The articles, “Going Local: Exploring Consumer Behavior and Motivations for Direct Food Purchases” (2008) and “Understanding Consumer Interest in Product and Process-Based Attributes for Fresh Produce” (2008), examines why consumers shop in farmers markets and how much they are willing to pay for quality fresh local food. They found the main reason for consumers to buy local food is to obtain information about the produce they are buying and to have the ability to trace the food to the grower. They specify the majority of farmers market consumers are “locavores”, who try to consume local produce and meat that are grown or raised within a 200-miles radius of where the food is being sold (Thilmany et al, 2008, p. 1303). “Locavores” are contributors to the local food movement and have strong ties with markets that sell locally produced food.

Place is a very important aspect of the food process because it allows individuals to connect and value the food they consume. Place is an essential part of the definition of “local” because the sense of place that is connected to locally grown and produced food gives consumers awareness of the consumption practices. The importance of a standard definition of “local” is the impact local food has on the local food system and the actions of the industrial food system has on shaping cities. Lydia Zepeda and Li Jinghan argue the

term “local” is liberally used because “there are no standards in the United States to define it” (Zepeda and Jinghan, 2006, p. 9). Zepeda and Jinghan also argue that place needs to be “part of the food system helping to define what foods are consumed and how people value and engage with those foods” (Blake et al., 2010, p. 412). The term “local” will be explored more later in the thesis and the methods chapter will explain the significance of including the concept into the analysis.

These studies of consumerism and consumers in farmers markets around the United States are an example of how localist food discourse is used to attract consumers. Miller argues that commodities are a powerful symbol of social class and identity (Miller, 2001, p. 114). Miller references Pierre Bourdieu’s work of how consumerism of food is a distinction of class status (Miller, 2001, p. 118). Bourdieu argues that consumption practices assert individuals into social classes in society based on their distinct taste (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 57). Bourdieu’s argument connects directly to Wolf *et al* demographic findings of farmers market shoppers (2005). The demographics of farmers market shoppers tends to be a person who is older and employed, who is most likely married, and have “middle to high income distribution” (Wolf et al, 2005, p. 199). The demographic of farmers market consumer demonstrates the social class that farmers markets attract and how shopping at farmers markets will designate an individual as middle class. Thorstein Veblen argues that the need to distinguish and identify with a social class is from conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 2008). Veblen’s argument can be connected to shopping at farmers markets, which is open to the public. Both studies of farmers markets acknowledge that direct marketing of produce are more expensive, but still reasonable and worth the extra money. When farmers market consumers acknowledge they buy directly from the farmer they are

visibly consuming a more expensive and what is identified as a higher quality of food. Consumers are exhibiting they have the opportunity to buy food at a farmers market.

The conspicuous consumption can also be connected to Alison Hearn's argument of commodity activism and Miller's argument of "green" consumption (Hearn, 2013; Miller, 2001). Hearn argues that commodity activism allows consumers to identify with the cause or issue connected to the brand through purchasing an item that supports medical research or local producers. Hearn argues that branding allows consumers to feel part of the larger cause and gives consumers the opportunity to self-brand as an activist (Hearn, 2013, p. 23). Hearn does raise the question whether commodity activism and self-branding will change social behavior and consumption patterns (Hearn, 2013, p. 35). Miller addresses Hearn's question by arguing that "green and similar issues have faded away to become largely inconsequential for the vast majority of shoppers and instead become a niche of specialist shopping for a subgenre of dedicated activists entirely within the middle class" (Miller, 2001, p. 125). The shoppers in Miller's ethnography proved they are less concerned about commodity activism and more concerned about price (Miller, 2001, p. 121). Miller's argument also connects to Bourdieu and Veblen's argument about consumerism, class, and taste. Miller's point is also validated in the Wolf *et al* survey asking farmers market consumers the reasons they shop at the market instead of the grocery store. The participants of the survey are farmers market shoppers and non farmers market shoppers (non-shoppers). This study shows a thorough examination of the demographics of farmers market consumers and why they prefer to shop there (Wolf et al, 2005). They concluded consumers of farmers markets highly value quality fresh looking produce that are reasonably priced, they value knowing where the food was produced, and the ability to

trace the food back to the grower (Wolf et al, 2005). The study also concluded that farmers market shoppers place more importance on food than non-shoppers because they indicated they “enjoy cooking” and “meals are the most important times of the day” (Wolf et al, 2005, p. 200). Hearn and Miller both argue that commodity activism is practiced, but the issues that are connected to the item is not as important as self-branding or being identified within a social class.

To build on the argument of niche marketing, the subject of mass production and capitalism cannot be avoided. Sam Binkley compares mass commodification to consumer lifestyle and argues consumers are overwhelmed by choices because of mass production of items (Binkley, 2009). Niche marketing puts feelings into the product and creates a solution for individuals (Binkley, 2009). Mass production expands the market because there are multiple selections of one commodity that are similar to each other, which creates holes in the market for products that focus on a solution to a problem. Mass production and niche marketing play very nicely into a capitalist economy because the consistent growing of the market is a self-generating cycle of commodity production.

Karl Marx theorizes in a capitalistic economy class position in society is based on economic power and is distinct but often tied to social status, which is gained through prestige (Liechty, 2003, p. 13). Max Weber theorizes that within a capitalistic economy class position in society is determined by the production and the consumption of goods of an individual or group within the economy (Liechty, 2003, p. 13). Weber also theorizes that social status in a capitalist market is determined by education, lifestyle, and socialization (Liechty, 2003, p. 13). He argues there is an interclass competition within the capitalist market for social capital and status (Liechty, 2003, p. 15). Marx and Weber are

complementary theorists. Marx argues that the relations individuals or groups have with materials determines the position of social class they are categorized (Liechty, 2003, p. 13). Weber argues the sociocultural complexity of the capitalistic market creates and consumption of commodities alone cannot be determined social class (Liechty, 2003, p. 13).

New Orleans History of Food Systems

Before the First World War, New Orleans had a well-established and diverse market system because the Mississippi River allowed access to diverse trade and commerce.

Before the First World War, 32 markets were established in the market system throughout the New Orleans area, placing one market in every neighborhood (Crescent City Farmers Market, n.d.). After World War II, New Orleans saw a decline of markets because of the continuing development of grocery stores (Crescent City Farmers Market, n.d.). After Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans has made a great effort into rebuilding market systems and making farmers markets like HollyGrove and Crescent City Farmers Market a staple in communities.

The food system in New Orleans was reestablished after Hurricane Katrina. The rebuilding of the food system was a slow process and urban agriculture advocates saw this as an opportunity to rejuvenate a local food system. New Orleans Food and Farm Network (NOFFN) is a small non-profit organization that was formed after Hurricane Katrina to help “hard-hit neighborhoods” gain access to food (Bailey, 2009, p. 17). Urban agriculturalist and NOFFN saw the lack of food access as an opportunity to build a sustainable food system in the community of Hollygrove. They focused their efforts to establish HollyGrove Market and Farm as a food outlet for the Hollygrove neighborhood and surrounding communities (Bailey, 2009). HollyGrove is a centralized resource for the agricultural community. The

market buys crops from the urban farmers that grow in HollyGrove and from local farmers in the surrounding communities.

HollyGrove Market and Farm was established after Hurricane Katrina in 2008 to give the local community of Hollygrove walk able access to fresh food. HollyGrove is not a traditional Community Supported Agriculture organization. HollyGrove organizers understood the surrounding community could not afford to invest in the farm and market, like a regular Community Supported Agriculture organization is set up (Crescent City Farmers Market, n.d.). Customers do not need to invest in HollyGrove to have access to the food that is sold in the market. Customers can purchase boxes of food or they can purchase single items and HollyGrove residents receive 25 percent off groceries (Crescent City Farmers Market, n.d.). HollyGrove is a market place for locally produced groceries, it is an urban farm, it provides space for community gardeners, and provides educational courses on how to cultivate home gardens. Their mission is to provide accessibility to fresh and local foods to Hollygrove neighborhood and the surrounding areas of New Orleans. They want to demonstrate and promote practices of economic and environmental sustainability. The farm provides training programs to teach the community about agriculture and how to cultivate food to promote sustainable practices. The training programs consist of composting, recycling, and how to start and maintain chicken coops (Crescent City Farmers Market, n.d.). Backyard growers, community gardens, small-scale urban farms, and rural farms in the surrounding New Orleans area produce the groceries that are sold at HollyGrove Market and Farm.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Research Design

This research focused on how small independent producers organize their distribution practices and how those distribution methods contribute to the food system. This research included interviews with small independent producers in the New Orleans region and analysis of localist discourse in the web presence of restaurants, farmers, and Crescent City Farmers Market. I conducted a multi-method qualitative analysis of distribution exercises of small independent farmers in the New Orleans region to answer the following research questions:

1. How do the farmers organize their food distribution?
2. How do the different classifications of farmers view “local” and how does it impact the distribution of products?
3. How is the regional food system shaped in localism discourse?

The research used semistructured interviews with seven farmers in the New Orleans region. I interviewed four family farmers, two urban farmers, and one regional producer. Every farmer that was interviewed was an owner and head of operations of the farm. Because many independent farmers do not have formalized farming practices that would reflect a business plan, semistructured interviews were the most effective way to understand their distribution practices. The farmers were contacted through email, phone calls, and text messaging. I received the farmer’s contact information through Crescent City Farmers Market website and farmers’ websites. Farmers were also contacted when visiting Crescent City Farmers Market while farmers were selling their crops. The interviews were

conducting at the farms, Crescent City Farmers Market, and the University of New Orleans. I recorded the information of the interviews by audiotaping each interview and transcribed and coded each interview.

Methods

Semistructured Interviews

I conducted seven semistructured interviews for this research and asked open-ended questions that prompted producers into explaining their distribution, production, and marketing practices. The themes of the interviews were structured around questions of how farmers became involved in farming, their farming practices of production and distribution, and how farming has changed in the past decade. The farmers explained their production process of raising livestock, catching seafood, and cultivating vegetation. The farmers then walked me through the steps of processing their product, which included pasteurizing milk, the slaughtering of livestock, and harvesting of fruits and vegetables. The farmers also told experiences they had distributing to consumers in New Orleans. The experiences range from individual customers to large institutions.

Classifying the Farms

This thesis focuses on three types of farmers in the New Orleans area: urban farmers, small family farmers, and medium independent farmers. The three classifications of farmers represent different types of producers in the New Orleans region. The farmers included in this study are not under contract to produce for food conglomerates. The three classifications of farmers are defined as the following. An urban farmer is defined as growing crops within New Orleans city limits and on previously developed land. A small

family farm is defined as a farm managed and owned by the same family for more than a generation. Regional farms are independently owned and supply food on a larger scale than family farms. The combination of vegetation, poultry, livestock, and seafood production allowed my research to entertain the perspective of different classifications of farms organization of distributing food in the New Orleans region. Distribution practices are defined as the process of how farmers contact consumers, the negotiations between farmer and buyer, the steps of processing the food, and the method of delivering their product.

Table 1: Classifying the Farms

Alias
Family Farm
Oak Farm
Willow Farm
Evergreen Farm
Maple Farm
Urban Farm
Cedar Farm
Pine Farm
Regional Farm
Cyprus Farm

Coding

I used topic coding for analysis because I was looking for themes that highlighted how small producers organize the distribution of food, how they view “local”, and how “local” impacts distribution (Richards and Morse, 134, 2007). To keep my findings organized I had separate documents with sections for each question and placed the themes that corresponded with each question. I was specifically looking for how farmers sold their

products, contacted the distributors, how localist discourse influenced distribution decisions, and what types of regulations impacted their production and distribution practices.

Discourse Analysis

This study also conducted a discourse analysis of restaurant websites and menus, farmers' websites, and Crescent City Farmers Market website. The discourse analysis examined the different narratives that are present on farmers' websites and Crescent City Farmers Market website. Within those narratives, I examined how producers presented themselves to attract customers through humane animal treatment and sustainable and environmentally friendly farming methods. The discourse analysis examines ten menus and websites of restaurants in New Orleans. The farmers that were interviewed for this study were included in the discourse analysis, as well as the farmers that are represented in restaurant menus. Crescent City Farmers Market website is the intersection for connecting restaurants and farmers and focuses on local food beliefs. The inclusion of the market's website is important in identifying and defining "local". The restaurants were picked from the Crescent City Farmers Market website page, "our chefs" (Crescent City Farmers Market, n.d.) The page lists the chefs that consistently purchase vegetables, meat, and cheese from local producers in the New Orleans region. The web presence of restaurants, farms, and farmers markets gave me access to how these institutions were attracting the public's interest through the use of localist discourse. The discourse analysis showed how farmers, restaurants, and Crescent City Farmers Market use localist discourse on their websites to engage in a niche market.

Merit of Qualitative Analysis

This study was designed and pursued with important concepts to maintain the research qualitative integrity. These concepts include trustworthiness, credibility, and standard qualitative methodology (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011, p. 46). The initial contacting of the producers was based on the three classifications that would be included in the study. The sample of producers in this study was a convenience sample because the farmers were picked based on their willingness to take the time to be interviewed (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011, p. 46). The lack of control I had on which producers participated introduced bias of who was included in this study. The small sample of this study follows standard qualitative research methods (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011, p. 45). The small sample allowed this study to get an in-depth understanding of small producers distribution and production practices and the factors that influence those practices. The combination of a small sample set and semistructured interviews allowed this study to retrieve a detailed account of how small producers organize the distribution and production of their food.

There are limitations of this study. The limitation is the representation of each farm classification included in this study. I had a limited schedule to conduct the interviews and the time constraints eliminated the opportunity to have conducted a second round of interviews. The follow-up interviews would be used to clarify what distribution changes, whether regulation or opportunities, producers think need to be implemented. I would have also have liked to visit all the farms and watch the production process first hand. This would have given my research more of an understanding of how farms are organized and structured.

This study contributes to fields of research on consumerism, agricultural studies, local food organizations, and specifically to how producers in the New Orleans region produce and distribute their product and relate to consumers. As stated before, there is little understanding of how small producers organize their distribution of food and what factors influence their production and distribution process. This paper brings to light how small producers function within the regional food system and how they negotiate their way into the niche market.

Chapter 4 Local Discourse and How it is Used

I hypothesized the distribution practices of small independent producers shape the regional food system. The use of localist discourse to distribute product is a part of how they shape the regional food system. Small independent producers invoke localism through their humane acts of treatment to animals, crops, and the environment. Restaurants use the same language in the form of specific descriptions and general labels to connect to consumers that value localist ideals. The restaurants are connecting to Crescent City Farmers Market analytical reasons to shop locally and want to connect with the food beliefs that are reflected on the market's website. The web page of "our chefs" makes the connection more obvious to customers and supporters of Crescent City Farmers Market. The title of the web page gives customers the idea that they too share common food beliefs with the community and Crescent City Farmers Market. The restaurants want to provide a meal that tastes good, but also makes customers feel good about what they eat in their establishment.

Restaurants

Chefs Biographies, Food Movements, and the Highest Quality

This section will discuss the findings of the discourse analysis of restaurant websites and restaurant menus. The discourse analysis found restaurants' websites have three themes in their narratives. Restaurants link to the larger localist framework by promoting the chef's southern heritage, authenticating chef's motivations behind the selection of dishes on the menu, and the direct connection the chefs have to particular food movements and beliefs.

The restaurants that John Besh owns use his southern orientation to promote the authenticity of the restaurant's southern dishes and endorses him as a preserver of southern cuisine because he is dedicated to southern Louisiana food culture (Restaurant August, n.d.). The biography describes Besh's childhood as the beginning stages of his understanding and appreciation for southern cuisine because of his childhood experience of fishing in Lake Borgne, which is described as the "epicenter of coastal cuisine in Louisiana" (Restaurant August, n.d.). Restaurant August uses chef John Besh's southern heritage to attract customers. Localist discourse favors local cuisine because geography mostly dictates local production. Susan Spicer promotes her motivations for serving local produce at her restaurant, Bayona, by referring to her support for the slow food movement. Susan Spicer and her team do not promote a particular cuisine or style, but instead Spicer is described as a "pioneer of the slow food movement" (Restaurant Bayona, n.d.). Spicer's website attracts people through their food beliefs and pronouncing pride in the restaurants participation in the slow food movement. Susan Spicer supports the slow food movement, but does not promote the movement on the restaurants website. There is an absence of direct links to slow food movement information web page. There is also no explanation of her reasons to support and organize her business around the food movement.

The linguistics used to describe local produce on restaurants' websites as the "highest quality" attracts residents with high food values. The menu of Ancora Pizzeria describes the ingredients of their pizzas as the best produce for making pizzas because the ingredients come from farmers markets in New Orleans (Crescent City Farmers Market, n.d.). Bourbon House is another restaurant that serves local produce and meat from Crescent City Farmers Market. Bourbon House's mission is to serve the "highest quality of

food while supporting family farms and fishermen” (Crescent City Farmers Market, n.d.). Restaurants use chef’s motivations and food beliefs to mirror localist food movement’s language. There are a lot of restaurants in New Orleans and with the tough competition, restaurants want to ride on the coattails of local producers reach into the niche market.

Specific Descriptions and General Labels

Restaurants use menus to connect to the localist framework by labeling ingredients that are produced locally. Restaurants use two different concepts on their menus to link dishes to localist discourse, specific descriptions and general labels. Both concepts connect restaurants to local producers and to local food organizations values.

An example of a general label is restaurant August’s menu that uses “Gulf grouper” and “a tasting of farmers market vegetables” to indicate the ingredients are locally grown and caught (Restaurant August, n.d.). The general label of “a tasting of farmers market vegetables” allows August to acknowledge the ingredients were bought directly from a local producer in a farmers market (Restaurant August, n.d.). Restaurants want to connect to local producers even if they do not know which producer provided the ingredients to stand out to consumers and from other restaurants.

Specific descriptions communicate to the patron who provided the meat or vegetables that are included in the meal. For example, Dante’s Kitchen patrons read the beef provided in the dish comes from Two Runs Farm or Chappapeela Farms (Restaurant Dante’s Kitchen, n.d.). The consumer can identify the farm and where the ingredients are coming from connecting the restaurant to the farms. The broadcasting of where food originates shows the importance consumers put into the quality of food. Restaurants aspire to obtain and cook with fresh local food to provide premium dishes that reflect patron food

values. The discourse shows that consumers value local food provided by local growers. The menus and websites of restaurants show that customers pay attention to the ingredients on the menu and make an effort to support local producers. Restaurants are tapping into the locally produced food niche market through connecting to farmers and the use of language that reflects localist values.

Farmers' Websites

Humane and Sustainable Farming Methods

The humane methods of treating animals and sustainable farming practices were two main themes for New Orleans farmers' websites. Farmers document and display how they treat their animals through their websites by documenting how animals are raised and what they are fed. Farmers also document the ethical cultivation methods they practice on their website. Localist discourse promotes the importance of protecting and insuring a healthy food system for future generations through ethical and sustainable farming practices. Farmers are connecting to the localist framework by explaining their sustainable and ethical practices.

Farmer's web presence emphasizes the ethical production of crops or growth stages of livestock. The vocabulary used on farmers' websites outlines the methods used during production. It publicizes what the animals are fed, how they are raised, and where the animals are pastured. The farmers write the animal's narrative from the growers' perspective. Animal narratives are written in different forums, such as blogs, production updates of what is available, and Facebook posts. Through these forums, the farmer provides information, such as, the animal's relationships with the mother and how the animals are adapting to farm life. The farmers are almost humanizing the animals through

naming the animals, posting pictures on websites, blogs, and updating status reports of recovering animals. Another example of farmers humanizing their animals is a duck and pig farm that guarantees their animals freedoms to improve their life.

Chappapeela Farms insures their animals' freedoms while living on their farm. The five freedoms are the following.

- Freedom from hunger and thirst.
- Freedom from discomfort.
- Freedom from pain, injury, and disease.
- Freedom to express normal behavior.
- Freedom from fear and distress. (Chappapeela Farms, n.d.)

The freedoms reflect localist discourse to ensure and maintain the welfare of the meat production. The freedoms that the animals have reflect the Bill of Rights that ensures freedoms to American citizens. The freedom of expression in the Bill of Rights and freedom from tyranny in the Declaration of Independence are reflected in the freedoms that Chappapeela Farms guarantees their stock. The freedoms animals get on Chappapeela Farms connect to the larger localist framework because the living conditions and the humane treatment create the highest quality of meat.

Chappapeela Farms also has a slideshow of their animals interacting with each other and with the farmers. The slideshow includes pictures of the living quarters of the animals, how much room they have to roam and play, and the unhindered access they have to water and food. The captions above the pictures explain what is seen and how the farm is structured to ensure the animals' five freedoms. Pictures show the animals have unlimited access to clean water and food through filtered containers in the middle of large gated fields. The ducks are shown freely roaming around and the pictures also show they have access to shelter when they desire to be indoors. The pigs are shown running, grazing, and

enjoying leisure time in the cool mud that is provided to them. Also, the mother pigs are shown nursing their piglets to show that they are nurturing mothers and take care of their piglets. The farmers are petting the pigs during their leisure time and also show the farmer and family interacting with the animals. The captions of the pictures use positive descriptions to show the details of the animals' lives and how they enjoy living on the farm.

An interesting finding within the discourse analysis of farmers' websites was the inconsistency of disclosing methods of meat processing. Chappapeela Farms discloses the distance each animal travels to the plant for processing, but not every farm website discloses their processing method to the public. Evergreen Farm does not disclose information about the processing methods on their website. Animal processing is part of the humane treatment of animals that farmers claim to protect on their websites. The process of animal processing is a gruesome topic for a website, but processing methods are an important part of humane treatment of animals.

Farmers are also promoting their commitment to sustainable farming practices. Farmer's web presence declares they want to preserve and contribute to methods that will ensure a viable food source for the community and future food production. Cedar Farm website highlights the use of natural and conventional farming methods for pest control and sustainable and resilient crop maintenance. Cedar Farm "focuses on developing a sense of responsibility, community, environmental stewardship" to teach younger generations the importance of a healthy and natural ecological system (Cedar Farm, n.d.). The farm's mission is to promote and teach sustainable and resilient farming methods that farmers once abundantly used while cultivating crops. Cedar Farm practice of natural pest control is introduced through a discussion about their philosophy on sustainable growing and how

they implement that practice. Cedar Farm discusses the benefits of cover crop farming method and explains it is a natural and traditional practice of pest control and creates nitrogen gases that fertilize the soil naturally to provide a better crop for the following season. The language used to discuss sustainable growing reflects local food organization beliefs. The sustainable methods contribute to a sustainable food system through resilient farming practices that will protect future food supply.

Farmers Sharing Local Food Movement Values

These next two sections will highlight how producers share local food movement values during production and how they use localist discourse to market their food. All of the farmers in this study except for one used localist discourse to sell directly to customers. Producers emphasize natural production methods during cultivation. The sustainable farming methods of natural pest control and the natural production of fertilizing soil reflects local food organization values.

Natural production and farming methods are more prominent for small producers because natural production does not require government certification and inspection. Evergreen Farm produces pet food and uses Guinea Hens for natural pest control to protect their animals from ticks and fleas (Evergreen Farm, personal communication, March 7, 2014). Guinea Hens eat the ticks and fleas preventing other animals from being inflicted with the pests and the diseases they spread. Evergreen Farm does not spray or use chemicals that harm the animals because they specialize in natural pet food for animals that have allergies. Spraying chemicals in the animal's environment raises the risk of animals inhaling and ingesting the harsh chemicals that prevent pests. The use of other animals to keep pests under control is an easier, older, and more natural practice. Just like

Evergreen Farm uses other animals for pest control, Cedar Farm uses other plants to control pest in their field of crops.

Oak Farms grow hydroponic tomatoes and while they sell at Crescent City Farmers Market, they wear a shirt with their slogan, “We know it cause we grow it” (Oak Farm, personal communication, February 25, 2014). Oak Farm knows everything that is given to the tomatoes and is confident the tomatoes are not impacted by run off water and pesticides. The hydroponic greenhouse allows Oak Farm to grow their tomatoes in a controlled and sterile environment. Local discourse values natural production and the protection of surrounding ecological systems because chemical treatment of plants and animals have a lasting affect on the environment and can cause human health issues when consumed.

Localist discourse endorses locally produced food because local production cuts down on the travel time of food and the negative environmental impact. Oak Farm states that tomatoes in grocery stores that are from Canada and Mexico are probably a week old because of the shelf life of a tomato can survive the transportation from farm to store. Tomatoes have a shelf life of two weeks, which allows buyers to purchase tomatoes from growers nation wide and internationally. A lot of the tomatoes in grocery stores today “are pick[ed], process[ed], pack[aged], and then put on a truck to get to [the store]” (Oak Farm, personal communication, February 25, 2014). The fuel and packaging of the tomatoes is not a sustainable practice that localist discourse supports. Oak Farm does not package their tomatoes and the tomatoes that Oak Farm provides are picked within 24 to 48 hours of purchase. Localist values are shaping how farmers are treating their animals, crops, and the environment because the localist values are impacting consumer beliefs and consumer

practices. This is apparent when customers are asking the same questions that localist discourse are asking and demanding similar expectations of localist values.

What Farmers Say During Transactions

This section answers how the label of “local” impacts distribution practices. The interviews found that the “local” label and the use of localist discourse allows farms to place themselves in a niche market that gives them an edge on their competitors whether it is other local farmers or commercial production. Small producers use the same localist discourse on their websites during direct transactions to educate consumers about benefits of locally produced food.

Evergreen Farm pushes their product as local as much as possible because they think it is important to buy and produce local products. The localist movement’s mission and publicity of local food brought this newest up swing in the interest in local food production. This most recent shift in trends has opened up a niche market for small independent producers. The public discussion of local food production has created a market for small local farmers to supply. The market for local production has driven small producers to provide the niche market of locally produced food. The producers provide food that supports local food organizations mission of humane animal treatment and sustainable farming practices. Consumers, such as restaurants, have led small producers to strive to enter the niche market within the local food production market, The more specialized the food and production method farmers provide, they have better access to consumers that share localist values. Evergreen Farm wants to provide consumers the option of buying locally produced food without it being a “luxury” item at a luxury price (Evergreen Farm, personal communication, March 7, 2014). Evergreen Farm states it is

important consumers have options of making purchases that give them pride and make them feel good about their purchase. They want a fresh product that is high quality. In the interviews most of the farmers stated that people are willing to pay more for better quality and fresher product. “When we sit down and eat something, we want to feel good about it. Even if its not great tasting, well I got it from someone near by and see them in a grocery store, I think that is a good thing” (Evergreen Farm, personal communication, March 7, 2014).

Other farms, such as Willow Farm, go with the trends to get as much out of their products. Willow Farm started to “turn [their] own milk, fertiliz[ing] with chicken litter, grazing and buying organic feed, so [they] are actually producing organic milk”, they just need to certify their milk plant as organic (Willow Farm, personal communication, February 25, 2014). Willow Farm will get a higher price for organic milk and it is what consumers want.

Evergreen Farm and Cedar Farm believe that people want to know about their food and the producers. Every spring, Evergreen Farm gets visitors wanting to visit the farm to see how the chickens are raised before they buy eggs. Evergreen Farm enjoys and encourages people to come out and visit the animals and see the environment the animals are raised. The farm also desires to educate and introduce their farming practices and the reason they chose those methods. Evergreen Farm finds people are more interested in knowing about how animals are raised and the animal’s diet. Customers also like to know if the animals are grass fed and if the product is organic. Willow Farm concludes customers want to know if the animals are healthy and whether the farms are raising and producing food properly. Willow Farm agrees that if farmers produce a good product people will pay

for the quality that farmers produce. Crescent City Farmers Market is a great way to remind people that food provided in the market is of better quality and to remind them how produce, meat, and seafood use to be. The interviews also found that the “local” label and the use of localist discourse allows farms to place themselves in a niche market that gives them an edge on their competitors whether it is other local farmers or commercial production. Small producers use the same localist discourse on both the websites and during direct transactions.

Crescent City Farmers Market Website

The Niche Market in the Farmers Market

This discourse analysis found Crescent City Farmers Market uses consumption practices of individuals to promote local eating habits and uses the niche market in the form of commodity activism to appeal to their consumer base. Crescent City Farmers Market conveys the message for sustainable practices, it clarifies the definition of local through political boundaries, driving miles, and provides descriptive definitions of local that match the language used on restaurant websites. The promotion of sustainable eating habits, the definition of local, and how the farmers market is environmentally friendly parallels localist discourse that encourages similar consumption practices.

Language of commodity activism on Crescent City Farmers Market website is present on the page “why buy local” (Crescent City Farmers Market, n.d.). The use of key words to attract consumer’s attention and concerns to support local farmers at the farmers market is evident. The website explains buying local food cuts down on carbon gas emissions because local produce travel a shorter distance than imported produce or cross continental grown produce. The websites explains that cover crop is a farming practice that

reduces carbon emission because “cover crops also capture carbon emissions and help combat global warming” (Crescent City Farmers Market, n.d.). According to Crescent City Farmers Market, cover crop is a growing method that seizes 12 to 14 percent of the carbon-emitted gases which vehicles and industry release in the air (Crescent City Farmers Market, n.d.). A consumer of local produce at Crescent City Farmers Market can brand himself or herself as green and as an individual that is conscious of how their consumption patterns effect the environment (Hearn, n.d., p. 32). Hearn explains consumers of green and local produce can label themselves as an activist because they are consuming produce that are environmentally friendly causing them to participate in “active consumption” (Hearn, n.d., p. 25).

Another example of how Crescent City Farmers Market uses commodity activism is through their dedication of shrinking the markets footprint. Using the same tool of commodity activism, Crescent City Farmers Market dedicates a whole page to making the market more environmentally friendly. Individuals can again brand themselves as green and a non-wasteful consumer because the market encourages consumers to bring reusable bags and the market reduced its carbon footprint by eliminating water bottles. The market now has reusable cups that consumers can buy and bring back and receive tap water. Also, the market publicizes the recycling of outdated newspapers to wrap seafood and they do not package vegetables, but tie them together with twine (Crescent City Farmers Market, n.d.). The web page “making the market greener” allows consumers to take ownership of making Crescent City Farmers Market green through their actions. This “active consumption” allows consumers’ to consider themselves as a green consumer that is aware of the environmental impacts of their consumption practices (Hearn, n.d., p. 25).

Crescent City Farmers Market lists ten reasons to shop at the market on their website. Local food is healthier and fresh is one of the ten reasons Crescent City Farmers Market justifies the consumption of local produce. The travel length from producer to consumer is on average 1500 miles (Crescent City Farmers Market, n.d.). It is explained on the website that during the 1500 mile voyage, the “delay from harvest to dinner table, sugars turn to starches, plant cells shrink, and produce loses its vitality” (Crescent City Farmers Market, n.d.). The interaction between consumer and grower that was lost during the transition from farmers market to supermarket is another attraction for consumers.

Crescent City Farmers Market uses community building and local sustainable economic language to appeal to consumers that want to support local farmers. Crescent City Farmers Market mission statement is clear about their purpose and direction of activism. The farmers market wants “to promote ecologically sound economic development” (Crescent City Farmers’ Market, n.d.). Crescent City Farmers Market advocates for family farms in the region, promotes healthy lifestyles for New Orleans citizens while generating sustainable local economic growth. Crescent City Farmers Market mission is similar to the local food movement organization mission. The movement’s mission is to support small family farms while receiving fair prices for their produce and to educate communities about healthy food and benefits of local food (The Food Shift, n.d.). The farmers market provides a place for “locavores”, who are strong supporters of the local food movement, a reliable market to consume local food that mirrors their food beliefs. A “locavore” consumes food that has been grown, produced, and travelled less than 100 miles from their plates (Dawn Thilmany et al, 2008, p. 1303). “Local food supports local family farms” and “local food builds community” are examples of Crescent City Farmers Market website

discourse that is comparable with the local food movement language and food beliefs (Crescent City Farmers Market, n.d.). The overlapping of language is an example of commodity activism attracting “locavores” through common mission statements.

The humanitarian narrative Crescent City Farmers Market uses to attract customers reveals the consumer base the market wants to attract. The language used on the farmers market website is to attract customers that are aware of their consumption practices. Commodity activism promotes the consumption of products with the façade of being social responsible and committing a charitable act while purchasing items. The Crescent City Farmers Market uses commodity activism as a marketing tool to touch consumers that care about social responsibility and economic and environmental sustainability. The page “why buy local” and “our impact” explain the overflow of benefits local businesses get that are near farmers market locations (Crescent City Farmers Market, n.d.). Based on this principle, Crescent City Farmers Market uses commodity activism through the narrative of local food is fresh, the best quality, and economically sustainable for local community. Crescent City Farmers Market uses the phrases “family farmers and other local agricultural enterprises” and the concept that the market is an intersection where there is a “greater social interaction between communities and sustainable economic development” (Crescent City Farmers Market, n.d.). The discourse of these phrases speaks to consumers that are conscious of their consumption practices and value local food. Appealing to consumer’s values through good citizen actions allows commodity activism to appeal meaning and identity to consumption practices.

Crescent City Farmers Market and farmers’ websites talk about humane treatment of animals and sustainable farming practices. The farmers market also frames their website

around localist discourse that explains the benefits of locally produced food. Farmers' websites give the public access to the farm through documenting the treatment of animals describing the production process to great detail. Restaurants presented different localist themes on menus than their websites. The menus used both specific descriptions to identify the food as locally grown, caught, or raised. On their websites, restaurants use chef biographies and personal motivations as a technique to attract consumers.

Table 2: Discourse Analysis

Crescent City Farmers' Market		Farmers Websites
Political Boundaries		Ethical and Sustainable Farming Practices
Grown in your own community		ethically raised
Neighboring county and community		humanely processed
Surrounding region		sanitary methods
Area growers		promote a viable food source for the community and future food production
		farm is dedicated to promoting the improvement of ecological practices
		farm wants to promote sustainable farming practices
Descriptive Definitions		
Fresh	Crisp	environmentally friendly
High Quality	Best Ingredients	no use of chemicals, naturally raised and grown
Better Taste	Flavorful	
Healthier	Seasonal	
Restaurant Websites		Restaurant Menus
Selling Local to the Locals		General Labeling of Local Farmers' Ingredients
dedication to preserving southern Louisiana cuisine		A tasting of farmers' market vegetables
menu is to honor New Orleans classic cuisine		Market vegetables
the menu reflects the restaurants and chefs commitment to local sustainability		Gulf grouper
chef grew up and fished around Lake Borgne the "epicenter of coastal cuisine in Louisiana"		some ingredients come from New Orleans markets
the menu choices celebrate the fish and water system in New Orleans		seasonal local ingredients
		using the best local food
		Menus specify what farm provides the produce
		Two Runs Farm beef
		Chappapeela Farms duckling
		Harris Ranch Filet
		Two Run Farms Lamb

Chapter 5 Speaking to New Orleans Farmers

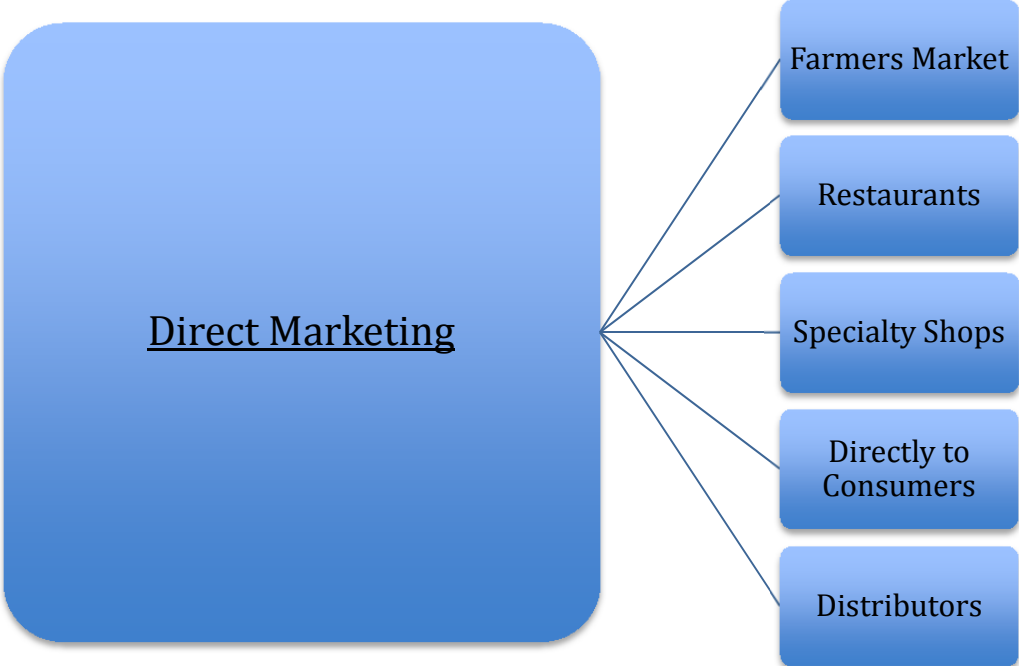
The interviews with the small producers gave this research access to valuable information about their distribution practices. This chapter outlines how small independent producers distribute their food and explain how they define a local producer. This study found that small independent producers distribute food through direct marketing or distributors. Farmers distribute their food through direct marketing to consumers, restaurants, and at farmers markets. Producers also sell to distributors like grocery stores and specialty shops. Direct marketing was the most efficient way for small independent producers to distribute their product because there was no intermediary. There was an interesting discovery during the interviews about how producers change production practices to satisfy individual consumer demands. The customization and diversification of production was imperative to small producers success to adjust to regulation changes and market fluctuation.

Direct Marketing

Direct marketing to consumers is the best avenue for small producers to distribute food. Direct marketing consists of farmers selling directly to individual consumers at farmers market and outside of farmers markets, and directly to restaurants, specialty shops, and distributors. This study found direct marketing leads to small producers to customize and diversify food production to meet the demands of customers. Farmers' distribution techniques are reactions to consumer's demands. Direct marketing is the best opportunity to organize their distribution of food because the customization of production would be difficult to achieve and provide to consumers without direct contact between consumers

and producers. The table below outlines the institutions that small independent producers sell products directly.

Table 3: Direct Marketing



Direct marketing is the main and most profitable resource for small independent producer to sell their products.

That’s why I said there is no way that I could make it without direct marketing (Cyprus Farm, personal communication, March 1, 2014).

We sell predominantly at Crescent City Farmers Market and so we are trying to meet the needs to customers that we have there (Cedar Farm, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

Farmers markets permit small independent producers to be introduced to other direct marketing opportunities. The small independent producers explained that restaurants are a great source for selling directly in New Orleans.

I figured that I could take it and sell directly to restaurants. So I had like six or seven restaurants in the French Quarter that I sold to. I already had connections through the oyster business, so I just built on that (Cyprus Farm, personal communication, March 1, 2014).

Specialty shops are another popular source of direct marketing for small producers in this study. Selling directly to specialty shops allows small producers to reach a higher volume of consumers and promotes their farms label. It is also an easier distribution process for Evergreen Farm because Cleaver and Company is responsible for selling the meat.

Cleaver and Company, which is a butcher shop. When we are ready to process the lamb we send it to the plant and then the whole animal is sent to Cleaver and Company and butchered there. Its kinds like the meat counter at Winn Dixie (Evergreen Farm, personal communication, March 7, 2014).

The Internet is another possibility for small producers to market directly to consumers outside of venues such as farmers markets. A lot of farmers announce the availability of food through Facebook, Craigslist, and the farm's website. The Internet is a great asset for small producers to reach the masses about what food is available for purchasing. The use of the Internet has allowed small producers to reach the highest amount of consumers that is the least time consuming.

We have our Facebook page and I also sort of stumbled on this paleo dieters group. They have this Facebook page with 50 members and they devour everything that I have for sale. I have a group of regulars that I contact through email. The woman who runs the paleo group is usually the first person that I contact and let know, like I have 10 chickens or I have 10 eggs, let me know what you need (Evergreen Farm, personal communication, March 7, 2014).

And another opportunity that small producers explore is selling directly to distributors. Though not all small producers sell directly to distributors because of the risk farmers take when agreeing to an informal contract with distributors. The experiences of the selling to distributors vary and past experiences dictate whether farms sell to distributors in the future.

So we started supply Rouses in Thibodaux, Houma, Morgan City, and La Rose down where I live. So we had like seven or eight stores that we distribute to when we have the quantity. They want to do local so bad they are willing to suffer through times when we have shade and can't deliver tomatoes and yet buy when we do have them (Oak Farm, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

In this study, these are the five avenues of direct distribution that are practiced by the small independent producers. The producers do not explore every avenue because they do not have the manpower to produce or sell to all five opportunities.

Customization

There were two trends that small producers followed while directly marketing their product. Customization and diversification of production was a constant practice for the small independent producers that cultivated their food. The inconsistency of the market for locally produced food drives producers to diversify and customize production to avoid stagnant periods of business. The business of customization involves informal contracts between producer and customer and occurs at different scales of modification.

This study defines customization as an occurrence when a consumer forms an informal contract with a producer to raise or grow a specific type of product. There is a great deal of informality in the business between small producers and consumers. Willow Farm did not raise hogs till after they started selling at Crescent City Farmers Market

because it was through the market they made contact with chefs from local restaurants (Willow Farm, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

We weren't doing the whole hog before, but restaurants wanted a certain kind of hog and so we started raising a certain type of hog. The beginning started at the farmers market and then grew from there with Don, Mark, and others. It just got out that we had some good hogs. I work real close with them because I am raising a certain type of hog and that means a lot to them. It's a different type of hog than the hog that big commodity places slaughter. They are lean and don't have a lot of taste to them (Willow Farm, personal communications, February 25, 2014).

Willow Farm decided to pursue this customization since the numbers were favorable for both parties, but a contract was not signed. There was an understanding the restaurant was in the market for customized hog (Willow Farm, personal communication, February 25, 2014). The interesting aspect of customization is the relationship between the producer and customer. The interviews found that farmers that have close relationships with restaurants and local specialty shops have a greater success with customization. Customization of hog was a risk for Willow Farm, but the risk gave them an edge in the market.

Evergreen Farm is customizing their production of turkeys to fulfill an agreement with Cleaver and Company, a local butcher shop that specializes in high-end meat.

Cleaver and Company is in the market for free range turkey for the upcoming holiday season. But we started talking about turkeys because he (Cleaver and Company) was getting them from Kentucky or Arkansas. We have had good luck raising turkeys and we like raising turkeys. So we are going to raise 50 to 100 this year instead of the 15 we did last year (Evergreen Farm, personal communication, March 7, 2014).

Again there is no contract, but there is an informal agreement between Cleaver and Company and Evergreen Farm. Evergreen Farm will then send their customers to one spot,

Cleaver and Company, for their holiday turkeys. Evergreen Farm is another example of a large-scale customization of production practices.

As discussed earlier, experiences with selling to distributors vary between producers and influence future organization of distribution. Small producers are taking a risk when engaging in informal contracts. Oak Farm is hesitant about customizing large portions of tomato production because of the uncertainty the agreement will be broken.

I use to distribute to John Burns, Jack and Jakes. Before last year, I planted a whole row specifically for him, which I will never do again. To tie my house up to one person because when the next season came around he started folding up his business and stopped buying all tomatoes. He was distributing to schools, Breaux Mart, and other stores. I was selling him a large number of tomatoes. And when I lost him I was like “what I am going to do”? (Oak Farm, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

Oak Farm is hesitant about customizing large portions of tomato production, but they do not shy away from small customizations. Oak Farm will customize tomato production to satisfy individual consumer’s desires. Tomatoes are not a vine ripen fruit and can be picked at several stages depending on the types of tomatoes consumers are asking for.

You can pick a tomato in several stages. It all depends on what you are looking for. The guy at the table said the heirloom tomatoes are not soft yet. A lot of people don’t want soft tomatoes. And another guy would say it is too soft. You have to satisfy the customers. So I pick them in varying stages (Oak Farm, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

Small producers have demonstrated small customization practices like the individual custom picked tomato to the large customization practices of customizing hogs and turkeys. Consumer requests influences customization and how small producers organize the distribution of their food. The farmers are at risk when they customize because the nature of the informal contract is based on the principle that the customer is not obligated to buy the customized product. Customization through informal contracts is the cause of the

inconsistent market, but customization is another way that small independent producers shape the regional food system. This research made two discoveries about the supportive agricultural community that needs to be noticed. The limited circulation that makes up the distribution structure of small independent farmers in New Orleans consists of four key players. The first key players are the farmers themselves because they feed the local and regional food system with locally produced food. The second key players are restaurants, grocery stores, specialty shops, and distributors that buy locally produced food. The third player is Crescent City Farmers Market and other direct markets because the organizations give the farmers a place to sell their products and introduce producers to other market opportunities. The fourth and most important players are the individuals that support farmers through consistently purchasing food, whether it is because the individual is a “locavore”, paleo dieter, or thinks local food tastes better, their consumption practices give farmers a market to sell into. These informal contracts between producer and consumer influence consumption patterns of restaurants, butcher shops, and individual households. These entities construct the regional food system through interactions and simple supply and demand.

Diversification of Production

The decision of what to cultivate and where to process is based on several factors and impact distribution practices. The diversity of production for small independent producers in New Orleans is essential to survival. This study defines diversification as the change in production based solely on the producers decision and does not include outside influences. Diversification of production for small independent producers is crucial for their survival because the competition in the market is intense. The diversification varied

from farm to farm, but they all agreed that things need to change or it will stunt business growth. The diversification is on a scale from small additions of production to a production overhaul that required new equipment, livestock, and knowledge.

Oak Farm is an example of a small-scale diversification because of space restraints of the hydroponic house.

I grow a variety of tomatoes. You can see on the table there are five different varieties up there right now, with cherries, heirloom tomatoes, the beefsteak cherries, the big beefsteak, and the yellow Lorenzo. Business can get stagnant on you if you don't change. People will say, 'Oh there is the beefsteak cherries'. It is to give them something different. That is why I do the pink tables clothes. That is why I had the shirts made. I am going to get a banner for the tent. People want to see something fresh (Oak Farm, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

Oak Farm recently added peppers to the table because customers like to see change and a variety of complimenting foods. The addition to the table at Crescent City Farmers Market is an item that will not take up a lot of space and get in the way of Oak Farm tomato plants.

Willow Farm is a fourth generation family farm and has changed their production process the most drastically. Willow Farm can testify to the importance of diversification of production to survive.

We started milking goats. We tried to diversify because it got to where milking cows was not enough. We couldn't just stay with one thing and the farmers market has really helped us and meeting all these people and learning the hogs and milking the goats. Sometimes it gets over whelming and I want to get where it is comfortable, but that's the way we live (Willow Farm, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

Willow Farm experienced a larger overhaul of diversification that required new equipment, animals, and training. Willow Farm recently added goat milk production to make hard and soft goat cheese. The goat cheese allowed Willow Farm to enter into the niche market and produce a product that was not widely available in the south. Producing

goat cheese made them stand out from the other vendors in the Crescent City Farmers Market. Consistently adding new aspects to the farm is never easy, but it is a necessity for these farms to survive (Willow Farm, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

Selling to Distributors

Selling to distributors is the other way small producers distribute food into the food system. Distributors allow small fisheries to enter the national market and also sell in the local market. Small producers still customize production when they sell to distributors, but have proven to be a risk for farmers. This section demonstrates the different experiences and the inconsistency of the market that small producers battle.

Selling to distributors is hard on some small producers because both the farmer and distributor, such as a grocery store, need to make a profit from the product. Willow Farm has moved away from selling their products in grocery stores and Co-Ops.

I don't go to a lot of grocery stores. We sold to grocery stores around home, but I want to get back to selling to people because they [grocery stores] want 25% off all the products. You start out wanting five dollars for a gallon of milk and by the time you sell they want the price under four dollars. That's not what I want, that was the whole thing getting away from grocery stores or Co-Ops. They give you nothing or very little for your milk, maybe a dollar a gallon and they are the ones that make all the money. Not the people that provided the milk. The only way you can make it work is if you were a conglomerate that turns out millions of gallons a week and we are just a small dairy (Willow Farm, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

Oak Farm had a different experience selling to grocery stores. Rouses produce buyer came out to the Bayou Central Market and talked to Oak Farm about supplying hydroponic tomatoes to the local stores.

Rouses came out to the market down the bayou when we were at the Central Market. He said, 'man, I didn't know there was a local grower of tomatoes that was doing hydroponics.' So we started to supply Rouses in Thibadaux,

Houma, Morgan City, and La Rose (Oak Farm, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

Oak Farm communicates with a produce buyer on the days before picking. Oak Farm will estimate how much they have, pick the tomatoes, and then call Rouses produce buyer to tell him how much they actually have. Oak Farm tries to deliver to Rouses twice a week depending on weather and the growth of the tomatoes. The experiences of farmers in the market vary largely.

Customizing and diversifying production is an important aspect in direct marketing. The different experience of customizing and diversifying production causes the inconsistent market. Small independent producers are shaping the regional food system through customization and diversification of production because these negotiations influence consumption patterns of restaurants, grocery stores, special shops, and individuals. The ability of small producers to influence demand and business buying practices is an indicator of small producers shaping the regional food system.

Regulation Influence on Production and Distribution

Over the last ten years small fisheries have been battling regulation changes that ban the use of specific equipment to catch shrimp and fish. This section uses the equipment bans of fishing nets and the implementation of a turtle excluder device to demonstrate regulation influences distribution and production practices of small producers. Regulation impacts what small producers can raise or catch and where producers can process their product. These restrictions effect what small independent producers distribute into the market. Regulation effect small and large producers differently and is creating an uneven playing field between the two scales of producers.

Equipment Bans Influence Production

The impact of equipment bans hinder small producers ability to effectively enter the market to distribute seafood. This section focuses on two regulation changes that influenced how boats target shrimp and fish. Shrimping boats were required to install a trolley system to protect Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle. Fishing boats were restricted from using fishing nets and required to switch to using hooks. These regulation influence production of small fisheries because they change what they target.

Turtle excluders are a trolley system meant to protect Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtles and all shrimpers were required to install the device on their boats. The turtle excluder was a factor in influencing production practices.

They started I guess it will be about the mid 1980's they started with turtle excluders. When they first introduced them to us, it was a trolley efficiency device. It's a big piece of metal that lets turtles go that get hung up in the nets. What it did was make it a real burden to us, especially the small boats because we lose like 25 percent of your shrimp when you are picking up with the troll because the shrimp go out the hole that the turtles are tended to go out (Cyprus Farm, personal communication, March 1, 2014).

Cyprus Farm does not agree with the implementation of the turtle excluder. Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtles mostly stay further off shore and only when they migrate certain times of the year do they come close to shore (Cyprus Farm, personal communication, March 1, 2014). Small boats, like Cyprus Farm, do not go out far enough for Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtles to be a concern. Larger boats go further off shore and have more contact with the turtle than smaller boats that stay closer to the shore (Cyprus Farm, personal communication, March 1, 2014). Another influencing factor is how small shrimpers have to work with a gear specialist in Mississippi to make the turtle excluders lighter for their boats because the device was geared toward larger boats (Cyprus Farm, personal communication, March 1,

2014). A lot of fishermen went from shrimp to netting fish because of the device (Cyprus Farm, personal communication, March 1, 2014). The impact the turtle excluder has on small boats puts them in an uneven playing field with larger producers. After Cyprus Farm changed to netting fish another regulation involving fish net ban was implemented, which again influenced small fisheries production decisions and distribution practices.

There are different size fishing nets that allow fishermen to target the size of fish they want to catch and the migration patterns of fish also control what fishermen target (Cyprus Farm, personal communication, March 1, 2014). Fishing nets are made of mesh and consist of diamond shapes. The size of diamonds is consistent on a single net, but fishermen have multiple nets with difference gages of diamond size. Fishing nets are indiscriminate because depending on the size of the diamond the nets let smaller undesirable fish to go through and the larger fish that are targeted are caught (Cyprus Farm, personal communication, March 1, 2014). The fishing net ban was based on the argument that the nets are discriminate, meaning the nets are not selective in what is caught. The fishing net ban was another influencing factor for small boats to decide what to target.

You go out to an area and the redfish are so out of control that half your bait will have red fish hanging on it that you have to shake loose and let them swim. And the other half of the bait is going to have the other stuff that you don't want like stingrays, you know stuff that is not edible, lets call it. So your percentage of fish that you keep may be a third of what you catch on the hooks. It is not a selective way of fishing and it's a horrible way of putting [fisheries] into the market. It is something that to me if they wanted to go with efficiency, it's the worst efficient way they could have made us fish (Cyprus Farm, personal communication, March 1, 2014).

Small fisheries are entering the food system at a greater disadvantage then before the trolley system and the fishing net ban. Having small independent producers work harder to

catch less fish is an example of an influential factor impacting production methods and distribution practices.

Equipment Bans Influencing Distribution

The equipment ban regulation also influences distribution practices. The ban of catching red drum fish has caused an unbalanced ecosystem and created another influencing factor impacting production and distribution practices of small fisheries. Red drum fish are over populating Louisiana waters and contributing to the shortage of crabs, oysters, and shrimp (Cyprus Farm, personal communication, March 1, 2014). Fishermen rely on selling crab as a financial safety net because fisheries get a good price for crab year round. The increase of crab traps has diminished the quality of crab available to fisheries.

Cyprus Farm will trap crab and sell them fresh or frozen to restaurants that have signature crab dishes year round. Cyprus Farm will contact stores and restaurants when crabs are in high demand. With the hurricanes in the last decade and the Deep Horizon oil spill in 2005, there is an increase in crab traps.

The last few years we have been having problems with the crabbing industry basically because we are not getting the right amount of recruitment. People are putting more effort into the pounds that look the same but to me if you need to put 2000 traps out to do what we did with 100, something is wrong. Some of these guys have 2500 traps in the water, so they can do 1250 one day and 1250 the next day. And your pie is only so big and when you start slicing up these little pieces, the profit margins are gone (Cyprus Farm, personal communication, March 1, 2014).

The increase of crab traps in Louisiana waters and the regulation reform over the last few decades are changing how seafood is distributed in the local markets have changed. Cyprus Farm and Maple Farm ship the largest crabs and other catches out of state to more prominent markets. When talking with Maple Farm, they stated that they target “boutique

style restaurants” in Maine, New York, California, and Boston because they pay a good price for Louisiana seafood (Maple Farm, personal communication, March 11, 2014). Cyprus Farm argues this distribution practice of seafood is the reason that two generations ago New Orleans residents had a better selection of seafood (Cyprus Farm, personal communication, March 1, 2014).

New Orleans Farmers

Small farmers also have regulations on production that impact their distribution practices and what they are able to sell in the market. Meat processing regulation impacts where small independent producers process meat and the types of animals they raise. The restrictions of meat processing limits what livestock small producers can raise and regulation hinders how small producers enter the market to distribute.

Evergreen Farm knows there is a market for rabbit in Louisiana because Mississippi state farmers sell rabbit in Louisiana.

It’s a regulation issue. All of the meat in Louisiana is regulated by Department of Agriculture and Forestry. Except for game bird and small animals, that is quale, guinea, pheasant, and rabbit. What we were doing when we had a processing exemption, I could do chickens, I could do turkeys, ducks, and I could do up to 10,000 of them a year, without the state inspector watching me. But if I wanted to do one rabbit, I would need to pay an inspector from Health and Hospitals in an approved facility. I priced out an approved facility at \$50,000 (Evergreen Farm, personal communication, March 7, 2014).

This restriction hurts small farmers in the food industry. Louisiana state legislation restricts small farmers from entering into markets.

Willow Farm delivers their meat to be butchered in Plaquemines Parish, where there is a slaughterhouse. The slaughterhouse butchers the meat, processes it, packages it,

and labels the meat for resale. The slaughterhouse has to be Louisiana state approved and Willow Farm needs to slaughter their livestock in the same state they are selling the meat.

I have a slaughterhouse five miles from my house in Mississippi, but I cannot slaughter them there and sell in Louisiana. Crossing state lines is a no-no. It is not a federal plant it's a state plant and it's the closest one to us in Plaquemines. If we kill down here, we sell it down here. Mississippi is the same way. I can't kill it here and resell in Mississippi. And most of my stuff comes from south New Orleans and Baton Rouge. We use to go to Jackson because of all the guidelines. Our deal was this was the only place that was slaughtering pigs, cows, and goats in our area (Willow Farm, personal communications, February 25, 2014).

The drive to Plaquemines Parish is four hours each way, which takes up a whole day to drop off livestock for slaughter and then again to pick up the packaged meat. Willow Farm suggests there needs to be more locations available to farmers since regulation requires livestock sold in Louisiana needs to be slaughtered in Louisiana. A better regulation for example would coordinate the state inspection systems and have the capability of processing multiple types of meat to make the process easier on the farmer, animals, and the processor. There are state and federal inspection plants where farmers can process meat. Louisiana state meat and poultry inspection regulation states that farmers that slaughter and process meat in state inspected plants can only be sold within that state (Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, n.d.). Meat that is processed in a federal inspected plant can be sold nationally and even internationally (Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, n.d.). The regulation states the reason for both inspections is to prevent consumers from obtaining tainted meat (Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, n.d.). Willow Farm states that there needs to be more processing plants because in Louisiana there are only four state inspection plants and one USDA federal inspection plant (Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, n.d.). The

limited amount of processing plants restricts small farmers from entering multiple markets because the USDA federal inspection plant is not easily accessible to all small farmers.

Are You a Local Producer?

Small producers define “local” and classify themselves as a local producer in a variety of ways. This section outlines how and why small producers considered their farm a local producer of food. In order for the producers to answer this question, they also had to provide their definition of a “local” product. Producers define “local” based on whether they think their farm is local. Producers did not reference their answers to the localist language of the 200-mile circle that encompasses New Orleans and crosses state lines. Rather five out of seven producers justified their answers with how well they know the consumers and the how long producers have been selling in the community. This thesis found small producers defined “local” based on if they are a local producer and they define a “local” product relative to the availability of products in the local market. This study concludes that “local” is subjective and relational, based on a host of factors.

I know these people, I am on the first name basis with a lot of them and we have been doing it for five years, I consider us local. If I am not here they call wondering where I am. We have local food and it’s coming from our farm. People can easily come to our place (Willow Farm, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

Oak Farm is located 35 miles outside of New Orleans and does not consider the farm local to New Orleans.

To me a local guy who has a hydroponic greenhouse in New Orleans is more local than me, in La Rosa (Oak Farm, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

Evergreen Farm considers themselves local producers because the farm is located in Louisiana.

It's a subjective kind of term. I feel like it is whatever you feel. To me local is in the state. Even if we lived on the edge of Mississippi and I could spit in Louisiana, it still would not be local. I look at within the state, but I think your version will be different and it all depends (Evergreen Farm, personal communication, March 7, 2014).

The producers included in this research had a wide variety of answers that classify their farms as a local producer. Within their definition, the farmers also expressed how they define a "local" product. How farmers' view local reflects where they are from, what they sell, and the restrictions of state regulations that control what is sold and consumed dictates what is considered local. The degrees of local are relative to the market of the specific product.

Conclusion

In the introduction and Chapter two I discussed and outlined the platform of the food system that small independent farmers produce and distribute food. Corporations control large quantities of food production through vertical monopolies and agricultural industrial servitude. Within these parameters small producers in New Orleans are finding ways to navigate within a corporate controlled food system by striving to reach the niche market of locally produced food.

The localist discourse discussed in chapter three highlighted how restaurants, farmers, and Crescent City Farmers Market use localist values and language to connect to each other and tap into the niche market. Farmers in this thesis agree that people want to know more about what they consume. The producers in this study reason that consumers want to know more about the treatment of animals, what animals are fed, and where the meat and vegetables are produced. Through focusing on how different institutions use localist language, I concluded that Crescent City Farmers Market and farmers' websites promote ethical and sustainable farming methods. In the discourse analysis, it was also concluded that restaurants tap into the niche market by using localist language to link dishes on the menu to local producers. The descriptive terms used to define local places the farmer's food at the top of a food hierarchy. The local food bought in Crescent City Farmers Market is described as the highest quality, healthier, flavorful, and make the best ingredients for meals (Crescent City Farmers Market, n.d.). These descriptors define what is local in terms of what is believed to conceptually define "local". These descriptors give the food in the markets superiority from other food that is provided in New Orleans. Crescent

City Farmers Market is equating local as these descriptors and therefor declaring that local is defined by location of production and as healthier, seasonal, and the highest quality.

As I discussed in Chapter four, pinpointing a definition for “local” is hard because like the content analysis has shown, definitions for “local” vary with each individual producer. There was a mutual understanding between the three sources that “local” can be classified and identified by location of purchase and the source of the food. To comply with being “local”, the purchase needs to be within a farmers market, CSA, or food hub. The restriction to these three locations is important because the organizations that run the locations keep to a strict operation to support small local farms within their area. Consumers are attracted to farmers markets because the produce and meat are fresh, sustainable, and healthier. Local restaurant websites and chefs claim local farmers provide the best ingredients to create rich and flavorful dishes. And Crescent City Farmers Market has a set mission to provide family farms a location that allows them to receive fair pay for their seasonal produce.

Chapter five outlines that small independent farmers in New Orleans distribute mainly through direct marketing. They rely on having access to direct markets and mainly sell in Crescent City Farmers Market, directly to restaurants and specialty shops, and directly to customers from online or phone orders. My hypothesis that farmers shape the regional food system was correct. Small independent farmers are shaping the regional food system through their direct negotiations with distributors, restaurants, specialty stores, and grocery stores in the New Orleans region. The factors that influence distribution and production are customization and diversification of production. Small producers take a lot of risk and time customizing their production process. Small independent producers

customize and diversify production and distribution of food in order to react to the changes of consumer demands. Through these negotiations, small independent producers have the power to shape the regional food system. These informal contracts between producer and consumer influence consumption patterns of restaurants, butcher shops, and individual households, which construct the regional food system.

Before concluding this paper, I want to bring attention to some questions the interviews raised that are outside the scope of this study that would make for interesting future research. An interesting study would expand and explain into more detail what small producers would change in regard to restrictive regulations that influence production, processing, and distribution. And what other direct marketing opportunities small producers would like to see implemented in New Orleans. Another interesting concept this research raised that needs more exploring is how small producers' distribution practices influence the regional food system in other cities. I cannot help but wonder if this conclusion is specific to New Orleans region and what conclusions would be found in other regions of the United States?

I will not argue that consumers need to support local producers. I think the interviews and quotes from the farmers do all the talking. But I am going to argue that this paper is a small part of a larger question. What do we want the structure of our food system to be in fifty years? Small producers are a great resource to this question and to the hundred follow up questions. If society does not ask questions nothing will change. And I urge individuals to be the change.

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Vita

The author, Emily Nichols, is a native of Portland, Oregon. She received a bachelor's of arts in History at University of Iowa. After graduation she continued her search for the next steps in her education. Emily got involved with Habitat for Humanity and Special Olympics. Her experiences she gained working with these charities and the friendships she made opened her mind to the social and economic challenges individuals face. With her mind made up to help improve people's lives, she started to seek an education program that would give her the most opportunities and knowledge of social issues. Emily attended graduate level Urban Studies classes at Portland State University and knew the planning of cities and communities is a major influence in individual's opportunities and standards of life.

Emily decided to attend University of New Orleans because of the challenges the city has faced in the past and are still facing with rebuilding and recovering after Hurricane Katrina. Emily was provided with an opportunity to work with Luisa Dantas, a Tulane professor and a filmmaker, on an interactive website that brings attention to urban equity. Working on this website gave Emily more knowledge about the interworkings of disaster relief and exposed her to grassroots organizations. Emily is currently Senior Content Curator for the platform and manages the content that is added to the website. Even though Emily is moving back to Portland after graduation, she will cherish her experiences in New Orleans.