CAPITAL REGION FARMERS' MARKET

Navigating the local

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Abstract

The rise of interest in local food has led to the proliferation of a range of food distribution alternatives including farmers' markets within which 'local' is often embedded in market governance and practice. A review of the literature demonstrates that local is a highly contested and nuanced concept through which multiple economic, social, environmental, political and psychological criteria intersect (La Trobe, 2001). Farmers' market managers juggle these many and, at times competing criteria. This paper explores the link between the governance of the Capital Region Farmers' Market (CRFM) and the way in which the management committee enact the local through operational practices. The CRFM, located in Canberra in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), is the largest farmers' market in Australia, generating AU $20 million per annum for the local economy as well as a range of direct and indirect benefits for producers, consumers and the ACT community. The results indicate that the CRFM management committee understood the value of local as a point of differentiation from competitors and ensured that local was embedded in market governance and practice. However, the manifold criteria of local also provided the committee with the flexibility to meet competing needs of all three guiding 'pillars' of the CRFM: farmers, consumers and community.

Keywords

Farmers' market, local, Rotary International, non-profit.

Introduction

At the end of the twentieth century broader changes in attitudes to food were occurring in countries like the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK), with resultant shifts ensuing on the margins of the food supply chain. These shifts emerged in response to a series of intersecting developments in commercial food production and consumption, including advances in food technologies and mass food production (see for example Baker and Burnham, 2001; Byrne, 1991; Galbraith, 2002).

Simultaneously, global food security crises and the 1980s/1990s 'food scares', which saw outbreaks of salmonella, listeria and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), impacted negatively on consumer confidence in the food market (Advisory Committee on Microbiological Safety of Food, 2003; Dugid and North, 1991; Schlenker and Villas-Boas, 2006); as did growing concern with the environmental impact of the global food supply chain. The issue of 'food miles', or the distance food travels from producer to consumer, gained much ground. As the figures show, over the 1980s and 1990s not only was *more* food being moved but also it was travelling much further distances. For example, in the UK between 1978 and 2005 there was an increase of 23% in food being moved and an increase of over 50% of the distance that food travelled (Smith et al., 2005).

These crises produced consumer anxiety around the denaturalisation of food and weakening food security due to global distribution flows (see, for example, Baker's [1999] case study on the American apple consumer market), which in turn led to growing unease about customer abstraction from the whole food production process (Norberg-Hodge, 2012). As Zepeda and Li suggest, this

> *growing sensitivity toward origin of food is a predictable outcome of an increasingly competitive global food system; as sourcing in the commodity*

system becomes increasingly complex, consumers look for simple ways to identify desirable characteristics. (2006: 1)

One obvious way to address the complexities and abstractions of the global market was for consumers to buy food from 'local' sources because, as Hinrichs suggests, such sources "are immediate, personal and enacted in shared space" (2000: 295).

Closer proximity to the food source better enables knowledge of food provenance because farming practices are a part of a familiar and accessible cultural and regulatory environment: this in turn engenders increased levels of trust in the food (Feagan, 2007: 25). Thus the end of the previous century saw a rising interest in and support for local food in the UK, Canada, North America and Australia among others.

Defining Local?

While the concept of local food has gained popularity as an alternative to the global food system, the term itself is highly contested and holds "multi-faceted and sometimes contradictory meanings" (Hinrichs, 2003: 33). This situation arguably exists in part because there is no internationally accepted or legal definition for local food (Pearson et al., 2011: 887; Martinez, 2010: 3).

Some define local on proximity to market, that is, foods that are produced, processed, and retailed within a particular "radius of their point of retail" (Ilbery et.al., 2006: 214). Within this parameter of distance however, the 'radius' varies greatly. Arguably the most popular (and populist) measurement for local is 100 miles (Smith and MacKinnon, 2007). However, in the UK, the Farmers' Retail and Markets Association (FARMA) recommends 30 miles as "a rule-of-thumb", but this "can stretch to 100 miles" (www.farma.org.uk). In the US, the definition adopted by the US Congress Food, Conservation and Energy Act (2008) states that for something to be marketed as a "locally or regionally produced agricultural product", it needs to travel less than 400 miles from its origin *or* within the State in which it is produced. Zepeda and Li's (2006) study of customer perceptions of 'local' further loosens these geographic parameters to include driving time (six to seven hours being the most commonly cited driving limit) and mode of transport (car versus aeroplane).

Other definitions of local are embedded in concepts of 'place' rather than distance. As with the US Congress definition above, local is correlated with regional, state or national parameters (Morris and Buller, 2003; Coit, 2008) and is as much socio - economic or political as it is geographical. The concept of the foodshed, for example, which is at times used synonymously with local, holds that while consumers of food should live in relative proximity to their food supply, the measure of this proximity should not be "fixed or determinate boundaries", but rather a community's relationship with and responsiveness to 'nature' and thus,

> *…(t)he extent of any particular foodshed will be a function of the shapes of multiple and overlapping features such as plant communities, soil types, ethnicities, cultural traditions, and culinary patterns.* (Kloppenberg et al., 2006: 39)

Another 'scale' for local is the perceived size of the farms on which local produce is made. Thus the alternative local food networks consist of small- to mid-scale primary and secondary producers unable or unwilling to operate within the conventional food supply chain (La Trobe 2001; Sage 2003; Smithers et al., 2008).

Local is also conjoined with a broader range of values beyond distance and place—values that Jones et al., refer to as "emotional reach" (2004: 329). These value sets stem from what Smithers et al., identify as "the nexus of wider societal, economic, environmental and ideological concerns" (2008: 340) and are often reflected in the beliefs of 'green' consumers. They include among other things "a number of, albeit loosely specified, environmental, animal welfare, employment, fair trading relations, producer profitability and cultural conditions" (Jones et al., 2004: 329) as well as concerns with nutrition, health and food diversity (Higgins et al., 2008; Marsden, 1998; Renting et al., 2003).

One such value attached to the local is 'quality' (Nygard and Storsad, 1998). Consumer concern with the "output-enhancing technologies" of the global food chain that "denude agricultural ecosystems" and produce standardised, unnatural foods has generated an association for consumers between the perceived quality of agricultural produce and its 'naturalness' (Murdoch et al., 2000: 108). This has had flow-on effects for people's conception of local food which, as alternative to its global counterpart, is perceived as inherently more natural and therefore of better quality. The value of 'quality' also rests partially with food freshness, which again is associated with local because of the shortened food supply chain (Hinrichs, 2000). Thus "quality has come to be seen as intrinsically linked to the 'localness' of production" (Murdoch at al., 2000: 15).

What this analysis of the literature make clears is that local is a highly contested and nuanced concept through which multiple economic, social, environmental, political and psychological criteria intersect. Further, these multiple criteria may or may not conflict with each other—thus any efforts to observe certain criteria of 'local' (say distance) may necessarily preclude observance of other equally valid 'local' criteria (say environmental sustainability or quality) (Hinrichs, 2003).

Farmers' Markets and Local Food

One of the most rapid and prolific responses to the trend towards local is the rise of what is known as the 'new generation' farmers' markets. In the UK, farmers' markets have grown to 950 since the appearance of the first market in 1997, while in the US numbers have grown from 1,755 in 1994 to 6,132 in 2010 (Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee, 2010). In Australia, the first farmers' market appeared in 1999 and over the past twelve years these numbers have grown to over 160 (Adams, 2012: 4). Put into perspective, this growth translates into approximately 7% of the fresh food market, which is notable considering supermarkets have 50% market share, and farmers' markets tend to run weekly at most (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 2012).

The rapid proliferation of farmers' markets was propelled by the increased interest in local food. Farmers' markets are one of the key retail outlets through which farmers and consumers can interact directly (Jones et al., 2004). Indeed, Brown and Miller go so far as to suggest that farmers' markets "could be considered the historical flagship of local food systems" (2008: 1296).

This fundamental alliance between farmers' markets and local food is also apparent in the definitions and parameters of farmers' markets developed by peak bodies. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines farmers' markets as

> *a common facility or area where several farmers or growers gather on a regular, recurring basis to sell a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables and other locally-grown farm products directly to consumers.* (Lakin, 2007)

The US Farmers' Market Coalition definition of farmers' market centralises the local further:

> *A farmers market operates multiple times per year and is organized for the purpose of facilitating personal connections that create mutual benefits for local farmers, shoppers and communities. To fulfil that objective farmers markets define the term local, regularly communicate that definition to the public, and implement rules/guidelines of operation that ensure that the farmers market consists principally of farms selling directly to the public products that the farms have produced.* (Moran, 2010)

The Victorian Farmers' Market Association, which has been extremely influential in the Australian farmers' market scene both because of the longevity and the volume of market activity in Victoria, also makes the link with localism:

> *An authentic farmers market is a predominantly local fresh food and produce market that operates regularly at a public location which provides a suitable environment for farmers and food producers to sell their farm origin product and their associated value added primary products directly to customers.* (Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee, 2010: 73)

Thus local is embedded in the governance and practice of 'authentic' farmers' markets and these markets in turn inherit the manifold criteria of local (La Trobe, 2001) both as ideological position and as operational parameters. This is also somewhat reflected in the literature on farmers' market. Strategic approaches to incorporating local in farmers' markets (Conner et al., 2009) have been explored; as has the consumer perspective in the connection between local and farmers' markets (La Trobe, 2001; Smithers et al., 2008) and the market managers' perspective (Smithers et al., 2008). Much of this literature identifies, as we have, local as a complex and multi layered concept.

The purpose of this paper is to add to the literature and map some of the nuances of the evolving concept of local (Dunne et al., 2011) through the lens of a farmers' market. What is of interest here is how the market managers juggle these many and at times competing criteria of local in a way that ensures both differentiation from their more conventional competition and financial viability for longer term business sustainability. An analysis of this balancing act provides us with another perspective of the nuances of the local and the role it plays in food distribution systems. Specifically, we aim to explore the link between the management of farmers' market and the way in which the team manage and enact the local through operational practices. This will be achieved through the Capital Region Farmers' Market[1] (CRFM), which serves the local community of Canberra and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) region.

The CRFM is located in the Australian Capital Territory, which is a small self-governing territory located in the populous east of Australia. Its only city, Canberra, is also the capital of Australia. In 2011 the population was just over 367,000 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012a). The CRFM is run by a small non-profit organisation, Rotary Club of Hall. Rotary is an international organisation with over 1.2 million members. Its objective is service; members, organised in branches, enact this through various means but primarily through raising funds for projects (www.rotary.org.au). The Rotary Club of Hall is based in a semi-rural area on the outskirts of the ACT.

The CRFM is by all indicators an extremely successful enterprise. First, it is the largest farmers' market in Australia, generating AU $20 million per annum for the local economy (calculated by the CRFM committee using Ecoconsult's farmers' market economic impact measurement tool) as well as a range of direct and indirect benefits for producers, consumers and the ACT community.

The CRFM makes AU $500,000 per annum from stall hire, a percentage of which is set aside for regional and international community projects (Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water, 2011), while the rest is secured for and/or reinvested into the CRFM. Profit is significantly greater than the AU $15,000 per annum determined in the original CRFM Business Plan (Canberra Region Farmers' Market, 2004).

With regards to the financial success of the stallholders themselves, no data are available on stallholder revenue. Stallholders trade as private businesses under the umbrella of the CRFM and their profits (or losses) are considered commercially sensitive information. Thus no direct claims can be made regarding stallholder financial success or otherwise (p.c. with Clive Badelow, October 2010). However, some assumptions can be made based on the number of stallholders and the consistency of their attendance. The CRFM has nearly 200 stallholders on their books, with an average of 96 stallholders attending each week (Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water, 2011). Many stallholders attend weekly, while others come once a fortnight or monthly, and have been doing so for some time. This longevity, coupled with attendance consistency, implies that the markets must 'be worth it' for many stallholders.

The CRFM has also led to benefits outside of market revenue for stallholders, including business incubation. Examples of this include Choku Bai Jo, a farmers' retail outlet currently operating in two Canberra suburbs (North Lyneham and Curtin) and the Southside Farmers' Market operating on Sundays. Both of these enterprises resulted from the stallholder success of the CRFM. Supply chain opportunities have also been created as in the case of Boost Juice's arrangement with one of the CRFM's stallholders—a mandarin grower to supply citrus for several of their retail outlets (p.c. with Clive Badelow October 2010).

From a consumer perspective, the CRFM attracts 8,000 to 10,000 customers per week with 15,000 in attendance at peak times (Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water, 2011). Coupled with the increase in customer numbers is the data on CRFM loyalty and satisfaction. For example, nearly 50% of customers visit the markets weekly, with another 22.8% visiting on a fortnightly basis; 85.9% of customers have been visiting the market for at least 2–3 years, while 15.8% have been customers since the market began. A notable 44% of customers spend between AU $66 and AU $120 per visit, which is a substantial figure considering the average household spending on food is AU $204 (Australian Bureau Statistics, 2010); and the vast majority of customers are 'highly satisfied' to 'satisfied' with (a) the range of stallholders/growers; (b) the quality of the produce on offer; and (c) value for money of produce on offer (Capital Region Farmers' Market, 2012c).

It is therefore an example of effective social entrepreneurship in action. Mair and Marti define social entrepreneurship as that which "integrates economic and social value creation" (2006: 36). The CRFM encompasses social and economic value creation through its business model as is evidenced by its ability to generate significant funds for local, regional and international community projects; stallholder success and consumer loyalty.

Method

Our research on the Capital Region Farmers' Market, a farmers' market in Canberra, ACT, was enacted through a two-stage research process. Stage 1 involved in-depth interviews with past and present CRFM committee members as well as the inaugural paid CRFM manager. This included 11 interviews that were held between March 2011 and June 2012. In-depth interviews were chosen as these yield "rich descriptions and explanations of processes" (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 1) and enable researchers to "preserve chronological flow, assess local causality and derive fruitful explanations" (ibid: 15).

The interview guide included questions addressing the history of the CRFM and the current as well as future workings of the CRFM. All participants interviewed were either past or present members of the management team and the aim was to construct a narrative from the management perspective on the history, success and challenges of the CRFM and its relationship to 'locale'. Areas covered in the guide included: initial motivations for starting the CRFM; early initiatives within the market; an understanding of the process of expansion and the decision making surrounding its growth; development of rules, regulations and marketing; future issues and challenges; and the relationship between the market and the community.

Thematic analysis was used to identify themes emerging from the interview transcripts (Minichiello et al, 2008). These methods were chosen as such qualitative approaches because they are, as Mair and Marti note, effective for "efforts to uncover the dynamics of success and failure in social entrepreneurship" (2006: 13).

The specific participants (CRFM past and present committee members and the market manager) were chosen as our research aim was to investigate the institution from the management perspective in order to understand and illuminate the enacted concept of 'local'. Further, farmers' market management teams facilitate the 'farm-to-fork' relationship, decide what may be sold and by whom at the market, and where and how often the markets are held. These decisions essentially serve to enact local. To preserve the anonymity of interview respondents, pseudonyms are used throughout the document. These interviews are referred throughout the paper as the pseudonym and the date the interview took place, for example, Edward, 7 September 2011.

Stage 2 of the research involved a desktop analysis of existing industry and CRFM documents. These included government and industry reports as well as CRFM business plans and customer surveys and enabled a triangulation of the data in order to enhance interpretive rigour (Kitto et al., 2008). The research aim here was to establish the historical and geographical contexts within which the CRFM operates, although we take the position that while the CRFM is contingent on a range of environmental factors and set of relations, it is also a unique phenomenon that should be studied in and of itself. Here we accept Alasuutari's argument that in historical research "analysis and the argumentation of the suggested interpretations have to be based on analysing … one single case" (1995: 12). Our findings are integrated with discussion for the purposes of this paper.

Beginnings of the CRFM

In 2003, the Rotary Hall sub-committee undertook a scoping study to investigate the viability of the proposal to establish a farmers' market for the ACT region. The study involved an analysis of 40 farmers' markets in Australia and included an investigation of market business models and the terms and conditions for stallholders.

The study revealed that most farmers' markets "work with strict guidelines in relation to product origin". The analysis also established that a farmers' market offered a viable alternative to those small growers of "local seasonal products" who could not easily sell their produce through conventional supply channels because of "small volumes, seasonality or distance". For the Rotary Hall sub-committee it became evident that 'local' produce was one of the two key features—(the other one relating to the direct nature of the exchange, with food straight from producer to consumer)—required to call a retail outlet an authentic 'farmers' market'. As such CRFM business plan concluded that

> *The market will provide a permanent weekly consumer outlet for local producers, particularly growers of seasonal produce.* (Canberra Region Farmers' Market, 2004)

The study further made clear that 'local' and 'direct' served to engender "authenticity of product"– a factor that was "critical in a market such as Canberra", where the competition included two "fruit and vegetable markets" that sold a wide variety of produce, but all of which were sourced from Sydney and other wholesale markets. From the start the sub-committee recognised that local was key to farmers' market authenticity and that this authenticity in turn helped to ensure viability because it served as a key point of differentiation from competitors.

A "market assessment" in the CRFM scoping study (naturally) identified the residents of Canberra as the target market, and concluded from observation of other market activities in the region that there should be "major consumer interest" for a Canberra farmers' market. Had the scoping study extended to include more extensive analyses of farmers' market consumers, the Rotary sub-committee would have discovered that Canberra residents have the archetypal demographic characteristics of those who typically shop at farmers' markets.

Studies reveal that the primary farmers' market consumer is "educated, urban, middle-class and middle-aged" (Moore, 2006: 30). In particular, farmers' market customers are more likely to have a university degree or higher qualifications (Wolf et al., 2005: 194), be in the 45–65 year age bracket, live in the city and earn higher than average wages (Govindasamy et al., 1998: 18–19; Szmigin et al., 2003: 542–50). Furthermore, as with most household shopping, the greater majority of shoppers at these markets are women (Baker et al., 2009).

Residents of the ACT are the most highly educated population in the country, with 25% of 15–64 years olds holding a bachelor's degree (compared with 16.4% nationally) and 9.9% having some form of postgraduate qualification (compared with 4.1% national average) (ACT Government, 2012). Full time average weekly earnings in the ACT are the highest in the country. Female average weekly earnings, while still below male wages, are also higher than those in any other state or territory (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012b).

Rotary Hall's rural orientation as a club further augmented the case for running a farmers' market. In particular some club members ran agribusinesses and therefore had the appropriate agribusiness knowledge and social capital to further contribute to viable business practice. With all of this in mind, a briefing paper was presented in

December 2003 to the broader Rotary committee and approved (Edward, 7 September 2011).

This briefing paper made clear that the CRFM business plan met with the service criterion that underpinned all Rotary International activity: 'service as a basis of worthy enterprise' (Rotary International, 2012). In particular the business plan included 'three pillars', which were identified by Rotary Hall as the threefold social or 'service' purpose of the CRFM. Thus all CRFM activity should create social value for each of the three pillars in the following way:

> *(a) assist local farmers by providing a viable local distribution or farm-gate opportunity;*
> *(b) provide local consumers with direct and convenient access to fresh produce;*
> *(c) generate funds for Rotary, which would in turn be reinvested into the community (70% local and 30% overseas is the traditional Rotary figure).* (Bob, 6 April 2011)

Service to the first 'pillar'—provision of a distribution outlet to small local producers—arguably formed one of two key reasons underpinning Rotary Hall's decision to establish a farmers' market. Some of its committee members ran small local agribusinesses themselves and had experienced firsthand the difficulties associated with the conventional food supply chain. For example Edward, local food producer and the Rotarian credited with suggesting that Rotary Hall establish a farmers' market, was unable to sell his organic strawberries to either the supermarket chains or the two Canberra local fruit and vegetable markets. In the end, he was forced to:

> *…put them in expensive packaging and send them down to Sydney markets which was an absolute disaster. It cost us a lot and if you're a very small producer you're at their mercy and have no way of knowing if they're telling you the truth or what's going on. They could tell you they couldn't sell them and half of them went rotten and "the ones we could sell, this is all we got for them". So two or three weeks after you've sent them down you get a cheque for about a tenth of what you hoped for.* (Edward, 7 September 2011)

Authenticity, Compliance and Challenges

The first Capital Region Farmers' Market was held on 13 March, 2004 and consisted of 12 stallholders. From the outset, the CRFM committee built its market rules on the concept of the local. In the market's very early days, the need to navigate the many nuances of the term, or enforce the rule of local amongst stallholders, was unnecessary. The market was comparatively small both in terms of stall numbers, with those stallholders known to committee members because they were 'locals':

> *Initially we took only people who were vouched for by one of the Committee or someone we trusted. With so few, that was not too difficult! Most of them were known to either Felix or me. Basically, they were invited.* (Edward, 7 September 2011)

However, the CRFM grew swiftly in popularity, size and complexity of operation. This included an increase in participating stallholders from 12 to nearly 100 per week; and growth in customer numbers from 1,000 to approximately 7,500 per week, with these numbers peaking at 15,000 in times of high trade, such as pre-Christmas (Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water, 2011: 45).

The period from 2008 to 2010 in particular saw the CRFM double in stallholder numbers with a parallel rise in customers (Allan, 2 March 2011). As the market grew exponentially, the many new stallholder applicants were no longer known to committee members and thus beyond their regulatory purview. The outcome of this expansion was that the CRFM could no longer claim with absolute surety that its stallholders were local producers. Indeed, the only proof that the CRFM committee had of stallholder claims to 'local' were the words of the stallholders themselves. As committee member Harry noted:

> *if you think ensuring compliance is a stall front thing on a Saturday morning then the only test you've got is to say "Have you got an approved product?" What does that mean? Someone puts in an application and says they're going to grow beans and tomatoes and then you go along to the stall and they've got beans and tomatoes. Well, hooley dooley, they're compliant* [laughter] *but that*

> *doesn't say a thing. Unless you've actually been to their property, seen the beans, seen the tomatoes and more importantly you've walked them through their production process, their marketing and how they get to the market.* (7 October 2011)

The Committee knew that if its stallholders were not legitimately local then the authenticity and hence the viability of the CRFM was compromised (Allan, March 2 2011). The scoping study had firmly established that the authenticity of its claims to local and direct "was one thing that differentiated us from all other markets and that our whole market lived and died on" (Harry, 7 October 2011).

Thus the CRFM committee resolved to professionalise their approach to CRFM regulations and stallholder compliance (Allan, 2 March 2011; Edward, 7 September 2011; Harry, 7 October 2011). In particular, the committee focussed on refining its previously ad-hoc approach to ensuring that stallholders' claims to product provenance were legitimate. For as long as the CRFM's regulations and compliance measures remained 'ad-hoc', the committee struggled to convince stallholders to take the regulations seriously—some presuming they were just "lip service" (Allan, 2 March 2011).

To achieve this, the CRFM Committee gradually implemented a series of compliance strategies that were more consistent, comprehensive and targeted. The most explicit of these was the closure of any stall believed in breach of CRFM regulations. For example, one particular stallholder

> *was caught at Flemington Market buying… he used to have these magnificent capsicums and green peppers. No-one could grow this stuff, but… the volume that he had week after week… these are seasonal things, but no, they kept going…So eventually somebody went to Flemington Market and took a camera,* [and] *there he was. Gave me the shot, showed it to* [the stallholder]—*said is this you? Are these, your capsicums? And he said, 'Yep.' … And* [Bob] *said right, close down. And he said, 'Oh, what at the end of the Market?' No, now. 'You can't.' Watch me. …* [And we] *told the public I'm sorry, I've just closed*

> *this stallholder down, he's not trading anymore. He'll be out of here in 15 minutes. And it just sent a shiver through the Market.* (Allan, 2 March 2011)

Compliance also extended to regular farm visits, which required that members of dedicated Compliance committee visit stallholder properties in pairs for the purpose of inspection. The compliance visit involved documentation of

> *every product that you grow, the planting seasons that you put it in, the amount you will put in and the expected date that they will be ripe or ready to pick and the date that they will conclude in order to be able to know what stallholders should have at any particular time.* (Bob, 6 April 2011)

While the new CRFM compliance measures offered some assurance of product origin, the increasing scope, magnitude and complexity of the CRFM placed a range of mounting pressures on the Committee with regard to maintenance of its purity as purveyor of 'local' and 'direct' produce.

Development of Management Systems to Enact 'Local'

Once the CRFM grew in size and stallholders were no longer identifiably 'local' to Rotary Hall members, the committee found it had to consider more seriously the particular criteria for local and how this might be built into regulations. To manage these pressures, the CRFM committee referred to the 'three pillars' (focus on local farmers, consumers and community).

The CRFM committee at first defined its local production parameters in accordance with the 17 shires of the Canberra region (Edward, 7 September 2011). However, it soon became apparent that this system was unstable: not only did changes in the political landscape lead to reconfigurations of geo-political boundaries, but also these reconfigurations were contra to that other criterion of local—the distance to market. Thus for example, the two key areas of Gunning and Yass, both of which are just over 50 kilometres to market, were no longer shires of the ACT (Edward, 7 September 2011). Further, many residents of Gunning and Yass either work in or have strong social and/or economic connections with Canberra and as such consider themselves locals of the region.

An alternative framework for local was to operate within the footprints of the Canberra food bowl. Again, however, the committee found themselves questioning the legitimacy of this version of local, with certain regional production zones included (Batlow and Cowra), but others within arguably similar proximity to Canberra excluded (Leeton and Young) (Edward, 7 September 2011).

Thus while the CRFM committee clearly understood the importance of maintaining an authentic local and direct-to-customer market—as demonstrated by its more rigid compliance measures—it also learnt through experience that 'local' was a rather malleable term built on a range of at times competing criteria. This enabled what one committee member referred to as more room for movement "around the margins" of CRFM operations (Allan, 2 March 2011).

What this flexibility in local provided was an opportunity to go beyond the geo-political criteria and create levels of growth that were arguably not possible if the CRFM adhered purely to local as distance or place. The committee surmised that "growth would mean that we would be able to provide more variety for our customers" which they considered "important" for the longer-term sustainability of the CRFM (Allan, 2 March 2011).

This rather nuanced balance between the authenticity of the CRFM as a local food outlet, and as local food vendor in the broader sense of providing customers with access to 'quality' food and an alternative shopping experience was built into the CRFM regulations. Thus the local criteria of distance and place are prioritised in Item 1 of the CRFM Rules, with preference given to those "producers operating with the CRFM region" including:

> *1.1.The ACT and NSW Local Government Areas of Bega Valley, Bombala, Boorowa, Cabonne, Cooma-Monaro, Eurobodalla, Goulburn-Mulwaree, Harden,*

> *Palerang, Queanbeyan, Snowy River, Tumut, Upper Lachlan, Wollandilly, Yass Valley and Young (See attached map of CRFM region). This CRFM region includes the following key production clusters—MIA, Batlow, Cowra, Orange, Young-Temora, Western Sydney, Southern Tablelands, Goulburn-Crookwell, South Coast and Monaro.*

However, Items 1.2 to 1.5 provide room for a more nuanced interpretation of the concept of local:

> *1.2. Producers applying to sell products considered by the Market Management Committee to be in the best interest of the CRFM.*
> *1.3 Producers who it will be practical to ensure are authentic and compliant.*
> *1.4 Seasonal producers, who only come to the Market when they have produce to sell.*
> *1.5 'Producers only' who plan to attend the market and sell only their own products, rather than the products of other producers.* (Capital Region Farmers' Market, 2012b)

The CRFM Rules thus provide the regulatory framework within which the CRFM committee then considers each stallholder applicant on a product-by-product basis (Allan, 2 March 2011). This particular process is arguably the key strategy used by the CRFM committee to navigate the many criteria of the local. According to CRFM committee members it involves 'rigorous' discussion at weekly meetings of all new stallholder applicants against a range of criteria, including: the CRFM Rules, the current product balance at the CRFM, and service to the three pillars. As the following example of these discussions demonstrates, this service to the three pillars includes a more nuanced consideration of various criteria associated with local:

> *we've had cases where some of them have been argued long and hard when an application has come in from somebody in Southern Victoria who has a very good product and maybe one that would significantly add to the market. They're a resident in Canberra, the place they own is in Victoria. You think the product would be really, really good to have in the market but there is a precedent issue. You'd have to, if you decided to let them in, be aware of what that may generate in terms of other requests that use that as a precedent. There might be a reason you could find that you could sort of hang your hat on and say "It is wholly*

> *organic and we're short of organic" and that could be a reason.* (Edward, 7 September 2011)

Thus at times the CRFM committee has 'stretched' its rules on local production clusters by allowing producers from regions as far away as South Australia and Queensland to hold a stall. This has usually been to either support the farmer ('first pillar') or to offer produce not grown in the Canberra region ('second pillar'). Over time, the committee developed 'rule of thumb' exceptions to the cluster regulations. Thus an application may be considered outside of cluster as long as the applicant offers something extra that is not currently available at the CRFM so that (a) they do not take market share from local producers and (b) their product contributes to the diversity available for CRFM customers (Edward, 7 September 2011). Current examples include a banana grower from the Coffs Harbour region and an avocado and custard apple grower from the Northern Rivers region. Both these stallholders attend fortnightly when their produce is in season affording CRFM customers a wider range of produce than can be grown locally. Further, in the case of the banana grower, regular attendance enabled him to stay on his farm to continue doing what he loved best. Prior to becoming a stallholder at the CRFM, this grower was struggling financially and could see no future in agribusiness for either himself or his son (Charles, 31 May 2011).

The CRFM's navigation of the local is not unique. Smithers et al. comment on the complexity involved that transcends market rules:

> *Despite the evident certainty of various operational rules, the FM should be seen as a complex and ambiguous space where (contingent) notions of local, quality, authenticity and legitimacy find expression in communications and transactions around food.* (2008:337)

The aim of this analysis is to articulate and document the enactment of the local and its associated challenges from a market management perspective. The CRFM has succeeded in steering through the challenges of local to create a thriving and successful farmers' market.

Conclusion

The rise in consumer and producer interest in alternative food has manifested, in part, in a renewal of farmers' markets and attention to local food. Not surprisingly, this interest in local food has resulted in a detailed exploration and questioning of what constitutes 'local'. An examination of the academic literature and of farmers' market practices found that the term is multi-layered and entails often-competing perspectives. This paper explores these layers and nuances from the viewpoint of a successful farmers' market in Canberra, Australia and demonstrates the ways in which the CRFM committee navigate the local in order to facilitate and manage the market's success. The results indicate that the CRFM management committee understood the value of local as a point of differentiation from competitors and ensured that local was embedded in market governance and practice. However, the manifold criteria of local also provided the committee with the flexibility to meet competing needs of all three guiding 'pillars' of the CRFM: farmers, consumers and community.

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Endnotes

[1] The CRFM do not use an apostrophe in their name and thus we have followed their lead when referring to the Capital Region Farmers' Market by not using an apostrophe.

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