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SLOW FOOD LESSONS IN THE FAST FOOD MIDWEST*

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ABSTRACT

During the latter half of the twentieth century, the American food system was transformed by a technological revolution in American agriculture. While these changes provided benefits such as lower-cost food, it also generated concerns that the unconditional embrace of technology would harm rural communities and the environment. Additional concerns were raised about food quality and food safety. Through a case study of a rural Midwestern farming community, this paper examines how direct consumer to producer marketing strategies such as community supported agriculture (CSA) and the public's current fascination with the heritage of farming may offer a subset of producers and consumers a sustainable alternative to large-scale production agriculture and the "fast" foods resulting from such production.

Introduction

During the latter half of the twentieth century, American agriculture underwent a technological revolution that transformed the American food system. While these changes provided benefits such as lower-cost food, it also generated concerns among many people who worried that the unquestioning embrace of technology would hurt rural communities and the environment, while raising questions about food quality and food safety. Walter Goldschmidt's oft cited work, *As You Sow* (1947), asked the seemingly simple question: "What difference does it make if the

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farm units are large or small?" His research showed that large-scale, corporately-controlled farming had a dampening effect on the welfare of workers and their communities. In a speech delivered at the American Anthropological Association meetings in 1993 Goldschmidt said, "The study showed unequivocally that the town surrounded by the small farms was far superior by every measure that I could devise." Simultaneously, a parallel study by C. Wright Mills and Melville Ulmer (1946) found similar results for the manufacturing sector. While Goldschmidt explained his results from a materialist perspective, Mills and Ulmer adopted what is best described as a civic community framework (see Tolbert, Lyson, and Irwin 1998). Decades later, Lyson's (2004) book builds on these concepts and defines civic agriculture as a locally-based agricultural and food production system that is closely linked to a community's social and economic development. This paper revisits the concept of a civic community framework by presenting a case study of how community supported agricultural (CSA) and an annual gathering centered around locally-grown food may offer a subset of producers and consumers a sustainable alternative to large-scale production agriculture, thereby reclaiming not only a diversity of locally-produced foods, but also building and strengthening the concept of community in the process.

This paper was inspired by the fact that western Illinois, the region in which we live, is dominated by industrial agriculture–primarily corn and soybeans. Despite this agricultural heritage, most farms are industrial farms and local consumers eat food that travels hundreds, if not thousands, of miles. Though surrounded by agricultural fields, the vast majority of the region's population is not engaged in agriculture. When asked, most people can neither identify local seasonal crops nor tell you where the food they do consume comes from. Other scholars have also identified this trend. "Every day more and more people eat more and more food that has been grown, processed, or cooked for them by fewer and fewer others" (Mintz 2006:5) thereby distancing ourselves from the farmers who produce our food and the way in which it is prepared. Eric Schlosser (2002) documented the myriad of problems of this form of "productivist" agriculture in his book *Fast Food Nation.* Schlosser (2002) describes how the drive to sell processed food of a uniform quality and low price has resulted in problems of food safety and quality, rural community decline, the loss of local flavors, and a disconnect between farmers and their community, among other problems.

Just as gainful employment in global agricultural has declined while agricultural productivity has risen (Mintz 2006), regionally we have noticed a similar pattern of the decreasing number of farmers and increasing farm size. Counter to this trend,

a rise of smaller farms dedicated to production of organically-produced heirloom crops have emerged in the Midwest. Showcasing alternatives to conventional agricultural eating patterns, we have been promoting our version of small-scale civic agriculture at an annual gathering showcasing locally-produced foods and arts. In doing so, we are cultivating the culture of our region and attempting to create a sense of "social embeddedness" (Hinrichs 2000) with the people, geography, and food of the region. The rise of "civic agriculture" coincides with the rise of the post-productivist "slow food" movement, which arose in Italy, but has now spread around the world.

The Slow Food Movement (2004) states that the focus on agricultural "productivity [and] the 'Fast Life' has changed our way of being and threatens our environment and our landscapes." As an antidote to the perils of Fast Food and the Fast Life, "Slow Food is working not only to protect the historic, artistic and environmental heritage of places of gastronomic pleasure (cafés, inns, bistros), but also to safeguard the food and agricultural heritage (crop biodiversity, artisan techniques, sustainable agriculture, rural development, food traditions)" (Slow Food Movement 2004).

In the spirit of civic agriculture and the Slow Food Movement, this paper reports on one research and one outreach activity designed to educate consumers about local produce. First, we present a brief overview of our current agricultural production system, followed by alternative forms of agricultural production. Next, we present a summary of the recent research on CSA farms in the U.S., including the wide array of direct marketing strategies used by CSA farms. Finally, we report on a specific strategy to promote local foods in western Illinois.

Understanding Our Current Food System

Past Trends

A food system can be defined as "the chain of activities connecting food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management" (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 2000). Over the last century the food system has changed the way farmlands are owned, who owns them, and how they are used. From 1940 to 1997 the number of farms in the United States decreased by 75 percent and the number of farm owners decreased by 50 percent. During the same period, the average farm size tripled (Economic Research Service 2002; Geisler and Daneker 2000). In 1998 the number of farms in the U.S. was 2.19 million with an average of 435 acres. In 2000 the total U.S. population engaged in agriculture was estimated at 275,000,000 (Economic Research Service 2007a). While the number of

individuals engaged in food production has plummeted, in 2003, 98 percent of all U.S. farms continue to be categorized as "family farms," in that they do not have hired managers (Economic Research Service 2007b).

These changes were driven in part by increasingly efficient technology that dramatically increased agricultural productivity. As technological advances allowed farmers to cultivate larger amounts of land with the same or decreased amount of labor, the relationship between the farmer, the land, and the consumer changed. Consumers expected more uniformity in produce, fewer blemishes, and increased access to once seasonal or regional food crops. Farmers obliged with increased production, but a decrease in crop varieties. Thus, as the U.S. farming system became more "productive," it also became more homogenous.

The homogenization of agricultural production also caused change in farming communities. Goldschmidt's (1947) study of two farming communities in California documented the varying socioeconomic differences that he credited to farming patterns, particularly the scale of operations (Lobao 1990). Two major structural changes in farming have affected the community. First, as production is concentrated on larger farms, both the number of people engaged in agriculture and the number of farms has decreased. Second, farms have become more industrialized. There are more hired laborers and farm managers, while traditional family farmers have decreased (Lobao 1990). The findings of the Goldschmidt and subsequent studies indicate that large-scale industrial style agriculture is generally related to worse socioeconomic conditions for rural communities than to smaller-scale family-based farms. We see these same trends in rural Illinois. The number of people living in the country has declined and our rural communities are eroding as young people leave their homes for employment in urban and suburban areas. Yet the embrace of technology has had many benefits. For example, wheat yields doubled between 1940 and 1970, from 15.4 to 31.8 bushels per acre. Corn yields grew from 34.4 to 80.0 bushels per acre during the same period (Cochrane 1979: 128). This lowered food costs for the American consumer. Many wonder if this system is sustainable, for the environment or the American farmer. Watts and Goodman (1997) pose several pertinent questions about the current food system including: (1) whether the environment is being damaged by the increased use of chemicals, antibiotics and genetic engineering; (2) how low commodity prices and the rising costs of technology are forcing farm consolidation; (3) if farm consolidation is leading to a loss of crop diversity; (4) if a decrease in the number of small farms reduces our land stewardship potential; and (5) if and how the loss of family farms is changing the character of rural communities.

Family farms are not only affected by pressures to consolidate. They are also affected by the vertical integration of commodity processing (Greider 2000; Grey 2000a). In 2000 four companies produced more than 60 percent of American flour. Four corporations also processed more than 80 percent of the cattle, 75 percent of the sheep and hogs and 50 percent of the chickens in the United States (Heffernan 1999). In vertical integration, the same corporations control every stage of food production from the production of seeds and fertilizers, raising crops and animals, processing, distribution, to owning the stores in which the products are sold. They make money at every stage of the food production process (Grey 2000a, 2000b; Halweil 2000). Vertically-integrated corporations have begun to consolidate and form alliances. The Phillip Morris and Nabisco merger, for example, created a corporate network that collected nearly 10 cents on every food dollar spent in the U.S. (Halweil 2000). By increasing their market power, these giant firms can increasingly dictate commodity prices and market conditions to farmers. Those farmers who have limited or restricted resources are often forced out of the market.

Vertical integration gives the independent farmer few options of where to buy inputs and sell outputs. The 1998 merger of Cargill and Monsanto created a near sales monopoly in seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, farm finance, grain collection, grain processing, livestock feed processing, livestock production and slaughtering, transportation, and the ownership of many well-known processed food brands (Greider 2000; Halweil 2000). Because of a lack of alternative markets, many independent farmers sign contracts offered by the integrated corporations. These contracts have the farmers produce a certain crop or type of livestock for a certain price and in turn give the corporations more control over the market (Greider 2000; Halweil 2000).

Grassroots Resistance

The Slow Food Movement and civic agricultural provide activist-based analytical frameworks for combating the global homogenization of food. The Slow Food Movement opposes fast food and seeks to preserve the cultural cuisine and the associated foods (both plant and animal) within a particular ecological region. Civic agriculture attempts to reestablish locally-based agriculture and food production that is tightly linked to a community's social and economic development. Both frameworks provide avenues for sustainable alternatives to the potentially destructive practices of conventional, large-scale agriculture. While these movements share similar goals, they manifest themselves differently. Civic agriculture is generally centered on the economic health of a region and is often

displayed through economic mechanisms like CSA farms, farmer's markets, alternative food stores, and/or consumer cooperatives. Alternatively, the Slow Food movement concentrates on the formation and preservation of heirloom seed varieties, educating the local public about local culinary tradition through regional celebrations of food, and encouraging ethical purchasing practices among consumers. We work within a combined framework of these two movements that offer alternatives to industrialized agriculture to rebuild some of our rural communities and celebrate our local heritage.

Concerns about Industrial Farming

Industrial agriculture as we know it today is one result of the Green Revolution. Between the 1940s and 1960s agricultural production underwent a global transformation that led to significant increases in the production of agricultural products. This change came about because of programs largely funded by the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations dedicated to agricultural research, extension, and infrastructural development. While the Green Revolution has allowed agricultural production to keep pace with the global population it has not come without major social and ecological challenges.

The criticisms of industrial agriculture include socioeconomic and ecological concerns. With the rise of industrial agriculture the world has seen a decrease in the number of small farmers. Of those still engaged in agriculture, many are facing large debt as a result of the inputs needed for agricultural production. The dominant agro-industrial food system is a very organized, centralized, efficient effort, which almost never sells its produce locally. It is dominated by a few multinational corporations that control food production and sell their produce to national grocery stores, which they might own, and their profits are measured in the billions of dollars (Greider 2000; Grey 2000a; Lacy 2000). Farmers who cannot continue farming are often unable to find work in rural areas and thereby contribute to the rural to urban migration continuum.

Ecologically, damage from early pesticides such as DDT has been shown to contribute to cancer in humans. In addition, the use of pesticides is a documented threat to wildlife. The use of chemical fertilizers along the upper Mississippi River in the U.S. contributes to the increased algae bloom in the Gulf of Mexico, thereby lowering the oxygen level in the Gulf resulting in decreased fish stocks (Bouwer 1990; Moody 1990). Finally, industrial agriculture has affected the biodiversity of agricultural crops and possibly wildlife biodiversity as well.

The Importance of the Small Farmer

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines a small farm as one with an income less than $ 250,000 a year (USDA 1997a). This describes more than 90% of the farms in the United States. These small farms contribute to the local economy and are also part of the social fabric of rural America. The USDA (NCSF 1998) confirms that small farms are important because they: contribute to biodiversity of plants, animals, culture and traditions; encourage more responsible use of the farm land; promote self-empowerment and community responsibility; provide places for families to pass on values of hard work and responsibility; and provide a human connection to food and the earth.

Over time small farms may be more sustainable economically and environmentally. Biologically diverse farms are more likely to succeed on a small scale and be operated by someone closely connected to the land. A farm with many different crops cannot be cultivated by heavy equipment moving at high speeds (Halweil 2000). Small farms help keep revenue within the local community, generating a larger economic multiplier than if goods are sold outside the community (Brussell 1999). Small local farms can save energy and decrease carbon dioxide emissions. By having small farms sell and distribute food locally, less fossil fuel is consumed and fewer carbon dioxide emissions are released into the atmosphere (Pirog et al. 2001).

Alternatives to Industrial Agriculture

Rebuilding the Food System through Direct Marketing

In the 1980s a new type of food distribution system emerged based on small farms. The new "direct market" system consists of multiple, decentralized groups of small farms that grow and sell directly to local consumers (Grey 2000a). This face-to-face interaction differs from the impersonal industrialized system of distribution and sales (Hinrichs 2000). Although price and marketability are motivators in all farmer-consumer relationships, direct-market agriculture can add more community and educational elements to the interaction. According to DeLind (2002:217), "civic agriculture can (and should) promote citizenship and environmentalism within both rural and urban settings not only through market-based models of economic behavior, but through common ties to place and physical engagement with that place."

Various types of direct-market agriculture include: Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), farmers' markets, roadside stands and you-picks, and food cooperatives (Andreatta 2000; DeLind 1999, 2000, 2002; Goland 2002; Gray 2000a;

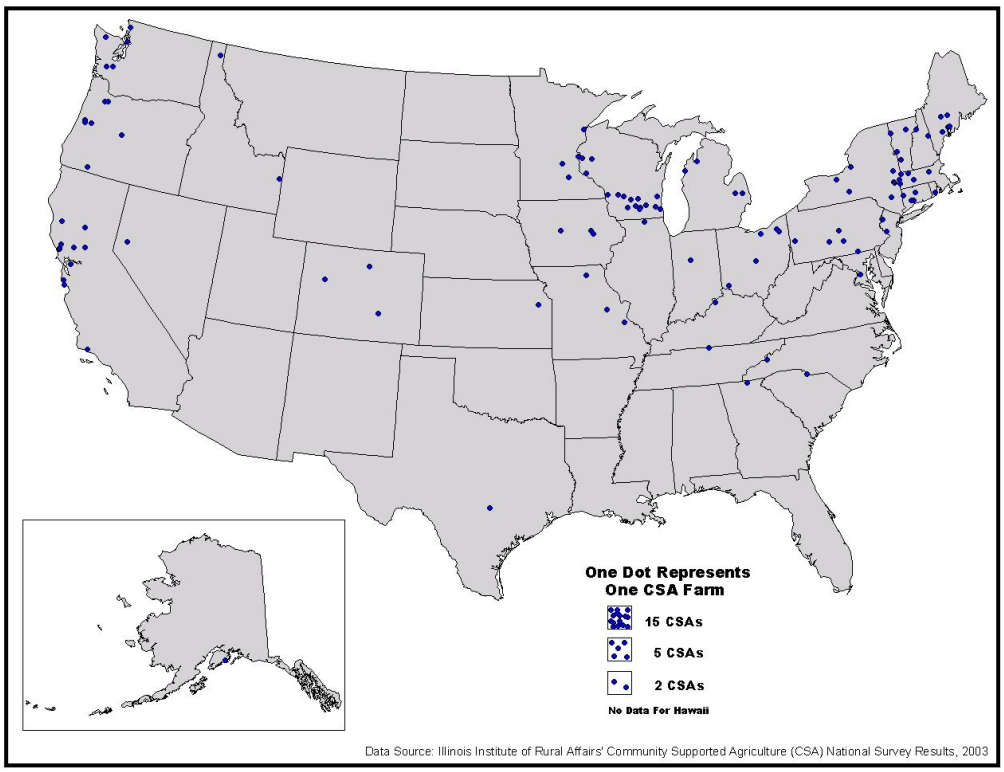
Groh and McFadden 1997; Henderson and Van En 1999; McIlvaine-Newsad, Merrett, and McLaughlin 2004). In our rural community there are manifestations of all the above. Though in a rural county, there are two CSA farms in the county and several others in neighboring counties. The Macomb Farmer's Market convenes twice weekly on the courthouse square from the end of May until the end of October and features local produce and live entertainment. The Macomb Munchers, a local alternative food buying cooperative, has been in existence since 1982 and offers community members the opportunity to purchase organic foods in bulk at reasonable prices (McIlvaine-Newsad, Light, and Orwig 2007).

CSA

The CSA idea originated in Japan more than thirty years ago and was originally called "Teikei," meaning "partnership" (Broydo 1997; Henderson and Van En 1999). A group of Japanese women concerned about a shrinking rural population, the use of pesticides, and increasing food imports developed the CSA concept. The first CSA in the United States started in Massachusetts in 1985 (Henderson and Van En 1999). According to Lass et al. (2003), in 1999 there were more than one thousand registered organic CSA farms across the United States. The number of unregistered, non-USDA certified organic farms in the U.S. is unknown. The vast majority of CSA farms are concentrated in three geographic regions – the Northeast, the West Coast and the north-central states. Most are near urban areas; fifty percent are in seven states and more than 80% are found in the mostly northern states. The findings of the Lass et al. (2003) survey conducted in 1999 mirrored additional nationwide CSA survey results in 2000 by McIlvaine-Newsad et al. (2004) as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2.

CSA represents a partnership between community members and local farms. The community member pays a "subscription" fee to the CSA farmer for an entire season's supply of produce and the farmers, in turn, give the subscriber fresh, local produce every week during the growing season. This agreement not only gives the local community fresh, locally-grown food, but it also gives the farmer a guaranteed market and startup capital to buy seeds, fertilizer and equipment (Andreatta 2000; Cone and Myhre 2000; Groh and McFadden 1997; Henderson and Van En 1999). The agreement allows for the risks and benefits to be shared between the subscriber/consumers and the farmer (Goland 2002; Henderson and Van En 1999; Hinrichs 2000).

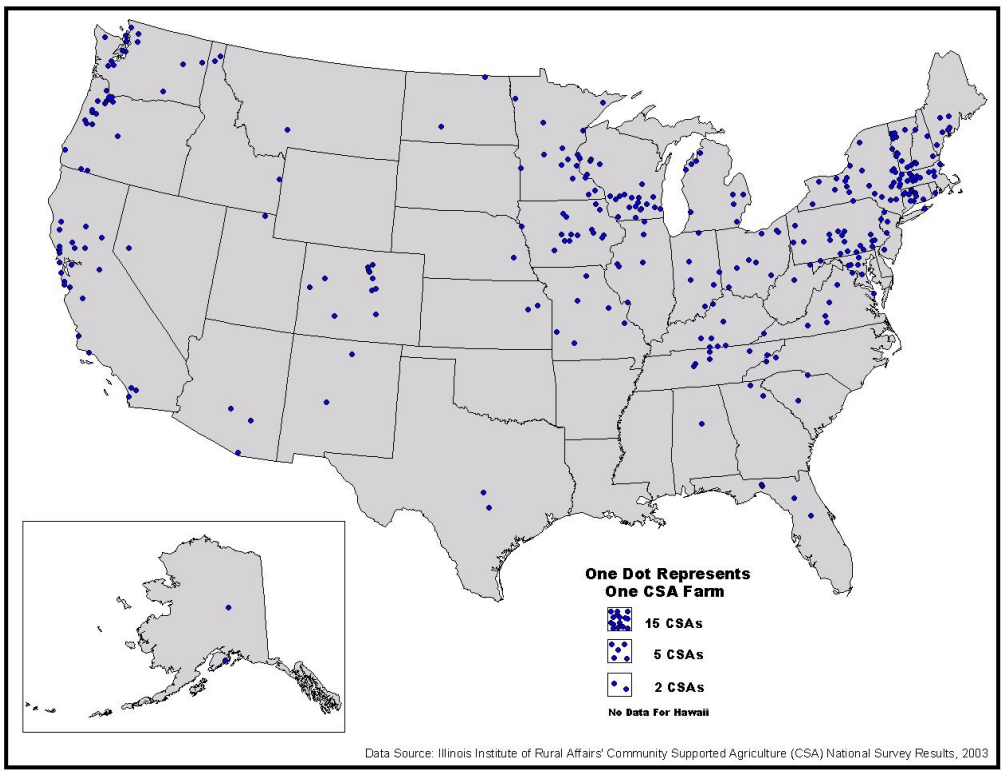
FIGURE 1. GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF CSAS, 1995



CSA producers in Illinois began their farms for two reasons: (1) as a direct marketing strategy by the farmer or (2) as the result of being approached by community members seeking locally produced organic foods (McIlvaine-Newsad et al. 2007). Nationally and regionally subscriber membership can range from a few subscribers to hundreds and usually starts with and continues to have a core group of active members.

The subscriber base for a CSA can vary, too. Variations on the CSA include "congregational supported agriculture" where a church congregation subscribes with a local farmer (Johansson 2000), "institutional supported agriculture" where schools and other government agencies contract directly with farmers, "restaurant supported agriculture" where chefs provision their kitchens with locally-grown produce, and even "union supported agriculture" where CSA subscribers all come from a particular labor union. One case study also explored the option of a gendered aspect to CSA in that women are more likely than men to participate in a CSA program (DeLind and Ferguson 1999).

FIGURE 2. GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF CSAS, 2002



During the growing season the harvest is divided among the shareholders and distributed weekly. Some CSAs deliver the produce door-to-door; others have subscribers pick up their weekly units. Still others deliver to a central location where members can pick up their share. Some CSA farms choose to divide the units before distribution and others let the members divide the units themselves, selecting the produce they would like. The produce that the CSA offers can be determined by a number of different ways, ranging from the farmer solely deciding what will be grown, the members determining, or a combination of the two. Items offered by a CSA also vary according to climatic constraints such as the length of the growing season.

CSA farm subscription prices vary. Our most recent survey of Illinois and neighboring Wisconsin-based CSAs showed prices ranging from $250 - $550 for a full share (McIlvaine-Newsad et al. 2007). The price depends upon the farmer, the number of subscribers, whether the members work on the farm, size of farm, weekly unit size, item variety, and the CSA location. Participants can pay (1) the whole

subscription at the beginning of the season, (2) by making monthly payments (with early payment discounts), or (3) on a sliding scale based on participation on the farm, family income, and number of shares. The subscription can be either a verbal or written agreement, depending on the CSA.

Many CSAs encourage subscribers to participate in farm activities. This participation can include working on the farm, helping with newsletters, or delivering produce. Some also choose to have on-farm activities and special events, including potlucks, cooking classes, farm celebration days, and seminars or other educational events. Many CSA farmers believe that members should participate in farm activities because it helps people understand where their food comes from, reconnects people to the land, and increases their knowledge of agriculture and land stewardship. These CSA activities can also promote community growth by prompting community members to work together, while helping establish a sense of place and appreciation of local natural resources.

Similar to conventional farmers, while most CSA farmers would like to fully support themselves through CSA farming alone, many do not make enough money on the CSA to do so. This is especially true in the first years of a CSA program's existence. In the Cone and Myhre (2000) study, supplementing their incomes by selling produce through other avenues besides the CSA was typical for CSA farmers and by working full or part time jobs on the side. The Lass et al. (2003) study found the medium gross CSA income to be $15,000. Perhaps more significantly, more than 60% of the survey respondents indicated off-farm income of $10,000 or more per year.

Many research findings (Lass et al 2003; McIlvaine-Newsad et al. 2004; Stanford 2006) indicated that many CSA farmers see their CSA farming jobs as morally important. They felt a purpose to farm in an environmentally sound manner while giving their local communities education about the environment and wholesome food. The CSA farms typically grew a diverse array of crops. Most of the farms grew at least 30 different types of produce (Cone and Myhre 2000). Some CSAs choose to expand their variety by collaborating with other local farmers or other CSAs (Gilman 1996).

Those who participate in CSAs have a variety of backgrounds. However, most of the farmers and subscribers are highly educated with more than 95% having attended or graduated from college (Lass et al. 2003). Studies have shown that subscribers were motivated to join CSA programs for several reasons. Many subscribed because of their concern for the health of the environment, a desire to know where their food was being produced, a wish to support local farms, and an

interest in eating fresh food (Cooley and Lass 1998; Cone and Myhre 2000; Kane and Lohr 1998; Stanford 2006). Many subscribers reported that getting cheap produce was not the major reason for joining the CSA, although it has been shown that produce received through a CSA farm is of better value than similar produce purchased at conventional retail stores (Cooley and Lass 1998). This is especially true for the subscribers to the two CSAs in McDonough County, Illinois. A recent year-end survey of one CSA showed that more than 50 percent of the subscribers joined and continued to belong to the CSA "not for the vegetables, but for the people." This CSA in particular has a strong community building component. While in-town delivery is available, more than 90 percent of the subscribers make the weekly thirty-two mile round-trip journey to pick up their baskets, let their children play in wide open spaces, and socialize with friends over a glass of homebrew beer or wine. Most of the subscribers to this CSA are young academic nomads who find themselves hundreds if not thousands of miles from friends and family. In the five years that this CSA has been in operation a "family" of sorts has formed establishing a sense of community and a quality of life that Goldschmidt's research addressed in the 1940s.

While the subscribers to the above CSA are mostly young professionals with young families, the other CSA maintains the sense of community for another important segment of McDonough County's population–aging farm families. Having come of age in the era of "victory gardens," aging farm families are often unable to continue to maintain their gardens. This CSA offers them the opportunity to continue to "eat from the land" long after they are physically able to garden. The subscription fees to this CSA also reflect this clientele's economic reality. Priced substantially lower than the other CSA, this CSA offers only home delivery or farmer's market pick-up. The CSA is owned and operated by a farm family who has been farming in the region since the early 1800s. Unlike the other CSA that is building a community, this one is maintaining one. As one owner-operator told me during an interview in 2004, "I don't mind the deliveries. Sure it takes time, but I also think it is important to check up on folks, especially if they live out there a ways. Sometimes I think they aren't really interested in the vegetables, but just want to talk."

Both of the above-mentioned CSAs share a similar marketing strategy – word of mouth. Previous research (McIlvaine-Newsad et al. 2004) showed that on the national level many direct marketing strategies exist. A promising finding is that the second most frequent strategy reported is to market over the internet (Table 1) (Holmes et al. 2003). Recent stories in *USA Today* and on CNN noted that many

small farms, especially those with an agritourism focus, find that a web presence is essential for success (Groppe 2004; Lefevre 1997). While some might find it counterintuitive to search for "fresh veggies on the web," in rural areas such as ours, the internet provides an information alternative to the local or regional newspaper. Given that the average CSA farmer and subscribers are also highly educated (Lass et al. 2003), the internet may become a more viable marketing tool in the future. While both of the CSAs in McDonough County use the internet as marketing tool, both would argue that their best form of advertisement continues to be a good recommendation from a current subscriber.

TABLE 1. MARKETING STRATEGIES USED BY CSA OPERATORS.

MARKETING STRATEGY	PERCENT OF CSAS USING STRATEGY
Word of mouth	88.8
Internet webpage	44.4
Farmers' market	38.2
Participating in community events (e.g., county fair)	35.6
Open house—inviting community to visit	35.3
Newspaper advertisements	27.5
Roadside stands	9.1
Radio	7.2

Taste of the Tri States

The fact that many CSAs have minimal or no formal marketing strategy raises questions. According to many scholars (Andreatta 2000; DeLind 1999, 2000, 2002; Goland 2002; Grey 2000a; Groh and McFadden 1997; Henderson and Van En 1999; McIlvaine-Newsad et al. 2004; Stanford 2006). CSA farmers are not farming only to make a living. They are driven by other factors such as providing good local food to a community, engaging in sustainable agricultural practices, and building community. The two CSAs in McDonough County illustrate that fostering a sense of community is a large component of both operations. Yet the question remains, how can such an undertaking survive with almost no attention to marketing? This is a particularly pressing issue because research suggests that CSA farm location may directly affect its viability, age, size and number of subscribers (Lyson and Welsh 1993). Lass et al. (2003) indicate that 50% of all CSA farms have been in business for five years or less and fewer than 2% longer than 15 years. CSA farms in more rural settings are more likely to have a harder time selling the CSA concept to the local community (Hendrickson and Ostrom n.d.). Because most CSAs are close to urban centers and because few researchers have fully explored the

marketing challenges facing CSA farms in rural regions, we set out to explore ways in which to promote locally-produced foods in a rural setting. Using a combination of the analytical frameworks from civic agriculture and the Slow Food Movement, we undertook a project to promote the CSA concept in rural western Illinois. We hope that the lessons learned from this one specific outreach activity will provide some insights into the challenges facing rural CSA farms that are not currently addressed by the literature.

The project we developed is called the *Taste of the Tri States (TOTTS): Food for the Body and Soul.* The subtitle of the event reflects a "slow food movement" ethos because we are trying to market the resources of our region including locally-grown food, local music and locally produced art. The *prix fixé* meal, including appetizers and salads, entrées, desserts and beverages are provisioned (to the greatest extent possible) from producers in the tri-state region of west-central Illinois, northeast Missouri and southeast Iowa.

We are in our fifth year of organizing the event, which takes place at a local upscale restaurant called Magnolia's. The chef and owner Lisa Ward works with all of the suppliers to ensure that ingredients are available for the planned menu. Last year, the menu included vegetarian and non-vegetarian entrées (Table 2). The meal began with salads and fresh bread. Fresh vegetables came from two local CSAs including *Good Hope Gardens* in Good Hope, Illinois and *Barefoot Gardens* in Macomb, Illinois. The vegetarian entrée included polenta and stir-fried vegetables. The dessert included an apple tart with homemade whipped cream. Apples came from a local orchard. The non-vegetarian entrée was a "reef and beef" dinner that included freshwater prawn produced in Illinois and Angus beef steak produced by a local livestock cooperative called *Illinois Crown Beef.* Beers included selections from Goose Island Brewery in Chicago. Wine came from wineries in Illinois, including Lynfred Winery in Roselle and Alto Vineyards in Alto Pass, which was favorably reviewed in the *New York Times* (see Figure 3) (Bluth 1997). We also offered locally-produced apple cider as a non-alcoholic alternative.

While our primary target is to help market locally grown foods, we are also interested in promoting artisans in related economic sectors. Macomb is a small college town and contains an active arts community. There is a nascent arts cooperative that is attempting to buy and refurbish space in the downtown area for studio and exhibit space. This effort is also part of a plan to revitalize the downtown area, which has lost significant retail business due to strip development at the outskirts of town. We provide space for members of the arts community to display their work, including paintings and photography. In addition, they are provided an

opportunity to discuss their progress and possibly to solicit funds to redevelop the regional arts center initiative planned for downtown Macomb.

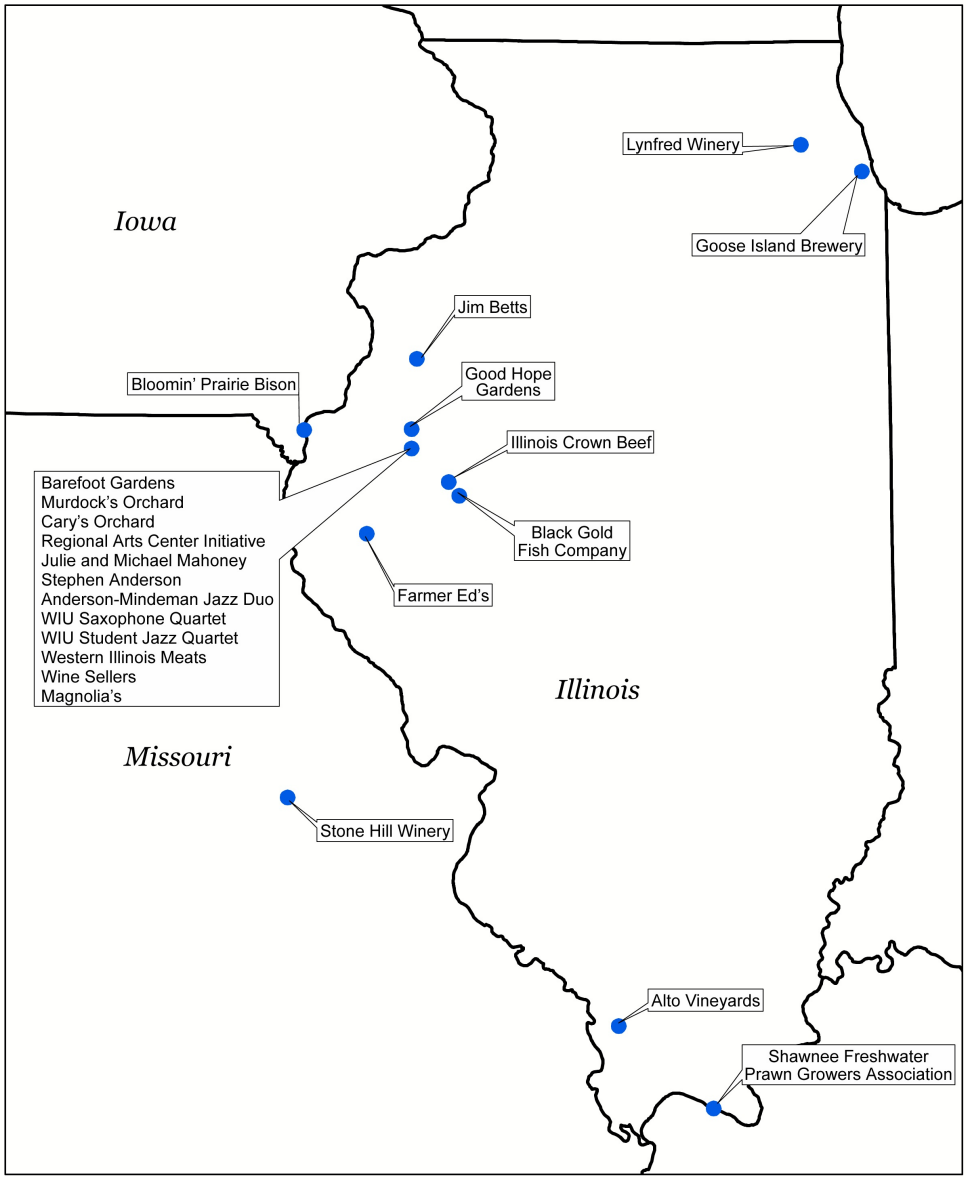
TABLE 2. LOCAL PROVIDERS OF INGREDIENTS FOR THE TASTE OF THE TRI STATES

LOCAL INGREDIENTS PROVIDED	ENTITY PROVIDING INGREDIENTS
Fresh Seasonal Vegetables.	Good Hope Gardens (CSA), Good Hope, IL
Salad Greens.	Barefoot Gardens (CSA), Macomb, IL
Angus Beef.	Illinois Crown Beef, Vermont, IL
Freshwater Prawn.	Shawnee Freshwater Prawn Growers Association
Apples.	Murdoch's Orchard, Macomb, IL
Wine.	Lynfred Winery (Roselle) and Alto Vineyards (Alto Pass)
Beer.	Goose Island Brewery, Chicago

Besides locally-produced food and art, we also invite several local musicians and groups to perform during the evening. In the past, we have had performers playing jazz piano, jazz and blues guitar, a jazz quartet, and a classical ensemble from Western Illinois University and Monmouth College. The music arrangements were completed by another local music group called Macomb Unplugged. The proceeds from the evening go to our local National Public Radio station, WIUM, which advertises itself as providing "Public Radio for the Tri States" because while it broadcasts from Western Illinois University, its coverage area includes parts of Iowa and Missouri. Note that while we undertook this venture in part to promote local foods and arts, we have done little ourselves in marketing the event. Since its inception, the event has grown annually and most of the new patrons know of the event via word of mouth. This is not unlike the most successful CSA marketing strategy. We believe that this speaks to the unique aspects of small rural communities. While many people dislike the reality that in small towns "everybody knows what their neighbor is doing," this energy can also be harnessed to promote and celebrate our cultural and culinary heritage.

By putting on this event, we can educate people about locally-grown food, the work of local artists, and the range of music played by local musicians while providing money for our local NPR station. The NPR station supports news coverage of the event and hence, provides further marketing for local producers. At a broader level, this event also brings together a range of people who might not ordinarily have a chance to meet. Farmers, artists, musicians, and fans of public

FIGURE 3. MAP OF CONTRIBUTORS TO THE TASTE OF THE TRI STATES



radio spend time celebrating the wealth of resources in the region. While perhaps not as exotic as a meal in Tuscany, Italy or the Napa Valley region of California, we are in our own way promoting the local cuisine of the area. Mintz (2006:5) writes that "cuisine is tied to regularity, to familiarity, to kin groups, and to the social use of local resources to meet the need for food." It is no surprise then that the regular attendees of TOTTS are largely members of two distinct "kin" groups – town and gown. While the size of the annual dinner has increased, those attending are all related by the common bond of belonging to the community of Macomb. By sharing food we share in something that is a cultural universal, the need to nourish our bodies. By adding local art, we are simultaneously nourishing our souls. We are creating our own place on the map for "culinary tourism" (Caldwell 2006) by claiming or reclaiming the locally-produced, seasonally-relevant food of our region.

Conclusion

In our rural area the CSAs seem to add a greater community development component than the other forms of direct marketing agriculture, perhaps because of the sense of community shared by members through their involvement in the CSA process. The thesis that farm size is an influential factor in the quality of life for rural communities that Goldschmidt (1947) and Mills and Ulmer (1946) wrote about decades earlier is reflected today in our own community. Our rural community has experienced a steady growth in socioeconomic relationships with small farmers and local artisans, thereby contributing to a higher quality of life not found in other communities our size.

On another level, the CSA concept presents the possibility that consumers and farmers can move away from the negative effects of and concerns about the current industrialized farm system, and toward a more community based, environmentally sound, sustainable practice of agriculture. The human interactions centered around the CSA help create and maintain a sense of "social embeddedness" (Hinrichs 2000) with the people, geography, and food of the region. For individuals and families new to the region who find themselves without the social support of friends and family the CSA allows them to "bloom where they are planted" and create a landscape and culture that meets their needs. For the aging rural population, being able to continue to eat locally produced foods and maintain social ties with the community is as important. Both are expressions of cultivating the culture of our region and celebrating it.

As a form of a direct agricultural marketing strategy, farmer to consumer-based organizations like the CSA are based on personal links that bypass existing

commercial market channels and integrate local food systems (Cone and Myhre 2000; DeLind and Ferguson 1999; Stanford 2006). The CSA idea allows for smaller, decentralized farms to move toward an agricultural system based on principles of land stewardship and local economic development. In addition, CSAs provide an avenue for education about issues like crop biodiversity, artisan food techniques, and regionally significant foods. The personal relationships developed between farmer and consumer challenge the "corporate vision of food as pure commodity," (Paxson 2006: 2001), which is at the heart of the Slow Food Movement and its "manifesto in defense of pleasure" (Parasecoli 2003:35). That is why CSA provides such a good foundation for the Taste of the Tri States event. Though the movement is not one that will replace the conventional agro-industrial system, it is one that most certainly can compliment it by providing a small niche of farmers with an opportunity to shift their efforts to a more locally-driven, ecologically-sustainable food system.

Though CSAs have been very successful in a short time, challenges need to be addressed. These challenges include a high member turnover and an increased work load for the farmer. These challenges can be overcome by an increase in member involvement and education. As Stanford (2006) suggests, identifying core members who share a broader vision may help figure out the limits of membership involvement and turnover. The two remedies seem to go hand-in-hand. Increased community involvement comes with education. It is and will continue to be the challenge of both the farmer and CSA farm members to develop innovative ideas to encourage this participation. For the goal is a "community" supported farm, where all members are active in supporting a food system, which is sustainable from an economical, social and environmental perspective.

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