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The Politics and Ethics of Food Localism: An Exploratory Quantitative Inquiry

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Sociology at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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April, 2016

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I cannot begin an acknowledgement section without first thanking my fiancée Jordan for her unyielding support over the past 8 years of my life, especially as I transitioned into my master's studies, and now as I transition into my doctoral studies. While she was building her career, I was becoming a professional student. I also want to thank my parents for pushing me to pursue the things *I love* in life, and not settling for the mundanities of pragmatic occupational sacrifice, as well as my sister Erin and brother Ryan, who have been two of the most important people in my life, always showing me love and support. I wish that my sister Kaitlin had the opportunity to read this acknowledgement. She was one of the most selfless, kind, and genuine people I have ever been lucky enough to know. All she ever wanted was for her family to be happy and full of love, and she always made it known how much she wanted each of us to succeed. I also cannot thank Jesse Goldstein enough for all the guidance, mentorship, and opportunities he has provided me over these past two years. I entered this program right after the passing of my sister and immediately began working with Jesse. His conscientiousness, realness, and unwillingness to overburden me with GTA work allowed me to stay focused throughout my studies, and successfully integrate into the program as I dealt with the grief from the loss of my sister. I am also indebted to him for the two publication opportunities I have been lucky enough to enjoy. To Dr. Honnold and Dr. Hirsch, the both of you have been hugely inspiring to me throughout my graduate and undergraduate career, fundamentally shaping my understanding of the political and social world, and contributing to the development of my methodological proficiency. To everyone mentioned in this acknowledgement, thank you so much.

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ABSTRACT

The local food movement has become a prominent force in the U.S. food market, as represented by the explosive expansion of direct-to-consumer (DTC) marketplaces across the country. Concurrent with the expansion of these DTC marketplaces has been the development of the social ideal of *localism*: a political and ethical paradigm that valorizes artisanal production and smallness, vilifies globalization, and seeks to recapture a sense of place and community that has been lost under the alienating conditions of capitalism's gigantism. Supporters of localism understand the movement to be a substantial political and economic threat to global capitalism, and ascribe distinct, counter-hegemonic attributes to localized consumption and production. However, critics argue that localism lacks the political imagination and economic power to meaningfully challenge global capitalism, and that it merely represents an elite form of petite bourgeois consumption. While scholars have debated this issue feverishly, there is a dearth of empirical cases measuring whether or not *actual* local consumers understand their local consumption within the political and ethical frame of localism, leaving much of the discussion in the realm of esoteric theorizing. This study seeks to uncover whether or not local consumers interpret their local consumption habits within localism's moral framework by using an original survey instrument to gather primary data, and conducting an exploratory quantitative inquiry.

Keywords: Localism; eco-localism; local food; political economy; environmental sociology; farmers' markets; alternative food networks

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. food market is experiencing significant structural change. Direct-to-consumer marketing (DTC) – understood as commercial exchanges in which “transactions are conducted directly between farmers and consumers” (Martinez et al. 2010: 4) – is fundamentally reshaping American ideas about food. There has been an incredible expansion of commercial spaces that facilitate DTC transactions, resulting in the establishment of a plethora of “alternative food networks” (AFNs): specialized circuits of food distribution with an emphasis on regional production and localized consumption (Follett 2009). Within AFNs, there are three prominent modes of organizing DTC exchanges: community supported agriculture (CSA), which allows customers to purchase a proportion of a farmer’s harvest ahead of time, and either have the food delivered to them, or pick it up at the farm once its harvested and prepped; “U-pick” or “pick-your-own” (PYO) set ups that allow consumers to visit a farm and harvest their own produce; and farmers’ markets (Martinez et al. 2010). Without a doubt, farmers’ markets are the most popular and accessible manifestation of AFN. These DTC spaces have thrived since the latter end of the 20th century, growing by an impressive 372 percent between 1994 and 2014 (1,755 operations to 8,284 operations registered with the U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA]), and popping up in all fifty states (USDA 2014).

Historically, DTC marketing and AFNs are associated with the countercultural movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which gave birth to modern American environmentalism. This is the generation that experienced Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) and the Cuyahoga River Fire of 1969, and recognized these environmental crises

as stemming from what Matt Huber (2013) calls the “American way of life”: an unsustainable middle-class livelihood built on perpetual consumption, the unceasing exploitation of natural resources – especially petrol – and a cultural dependence on corporations to deliver the “good life.” To the counterculture, the American way of life represented an “idolatry of gigantism” (Schumacher 1973) that was predicated on a belief that *growth is always good* and cared not at all for externalities. Thus, those involved with the counterculture sought to escape the American machine of consumption, relying on publications like Stewart Brandt’s *Whole Earth Catalog* to provide amateur, do-it-yourself tutorials on how to live sustainably through individual initiative. Rejecting consumerism, they chased authenticity, establishing community housing, cooperative grocery stores, and amateur craft skills that lessened their connection to American capitalism through a voluntary asceticism (Rogers 2005).

Out of this counterculture came the development of DTC marketing and AFN spaces, and an associated diffusion of a new political and ethical ideal that attach themselves to these particular modes of exchange: that of *localism*. Localism provides interested parties – small-scale producers and consumers alike – with a moral frame in which to structure their behavior by acting as “localists,” *i.e.*, the actual agents *embodying, performing, and “doing”* localism. It exists simultaneously as a set of material social relationships and abstract political, economic, and ethical categories that are constantly engaging with – and informing – one another. To its adherents, localism represents more than a personal way of life: it is a force of history that has the potential to exact substantial political economic change (Gibson-Graham 2006; Ayres and Bosia 2011; Fairbairn 2012; Posey 2011). Indeed, localists understand themselves as belonging

to a legitimate progressive *social movement* of sorts (Schnell 2013; Sharzer 2012a, 2012b; DuPuis and Goodman 2005), one that positions itself as “non-global, non-corporate, environmentally sustainable, and community-building” (Schnell 2013:66-70), and encourages all to participate as equals in a transparent, direct democratic process of *space production* where the “local” is created *from the bottom up* according to the inputs of regionally specific collective participants (Srnicek and Williams 2015). Its antithesis is global capitalism, which is perceived as a top-down, authoritarian, and opaque set of social relationships *imposed* upon the masses by a multinational corporate hegemony legitimized by the state. Global capitalism’s gluttonous economies of scale have insatiable appetites for production and consumption, and are constantly metabolizing natural resources to fulfill their economic needs, leaving nothing behind but a scorched earth devastated by environmental crises, generalized alienation, and a globalized process of homogenization that is corrosive to local communities (Gould et al. 2008; Harvey 2014; Berry 2013; Lyson 2004; McKibben 2007).

Contemporary localism has largely been divorced from its countercultural heritage, and is now a tenant of mainstream American liberalism. It is driven by “pragmatic progressives” who are interested in achieving “realistic” political objectives that will empower locales, stimulate an ecological consciousness, and build regionally specific economies (Sharzer 2012a, 2012b; Srnicek and Williams 2015). In this context, “realistic political goals” is understood to mean “market friendly”: localism *does not* represent an inherently anti-capitalist politics (McKibben 2007). Instead, localism owes much of its popular acclaim to its co-option by entrepreneurs, who have used its ecological rhetoric and romantic images of communitarianism as a basis for establishing

a “green capitalism.” To the green capitalist, the environment and the economy are not necessarily contradictory entities, and benevolent technological fixes, confounded with market efficiencies, will all but ensure economic growth does not compromise the earth (Rogers 2005).

In its current form, then, localism is an attempt to *alter* – not *usurp* – current social relationships. Instead, it represents a *smarter* and *more humane* capitalism that limits economic growth to ecologically “sustainable” levels, privileges craft and small-scale proprietorship, values producer-consumer relationships, and fetishizes authenticity (Curtis 2003; Sharzer 2012b; McKibben 2007; Schnell 2013). Because of its non-revolutionary orientation, localism has received substantial criticism from radical scholars, who condemn the movement for representing the cultural and material interests of an elite class of high-income consumers, romanticizing petite bourgeois entrepreneurship, universalizing environmental values across racialized and class-specific experiences, embracing a neoliberal doctrine of “consumer choice” that individualizes social change, and failing to recognize that global capitalism has – and will continue to – adjust to particular localisms by appropriating their language and imagery (Sharzer 2012a, 2012b; Alkon and McCullen 2011; Guthman 2008a, 2008b; Slocum 2006, 2007; Srnicek and Williams 2015).

While contemporary sociological treatments of localism have contributed to impressive theorizing from a multitude of divergent perspectives, there is a surprising dearth of empirical cases exploring topics relevant to localist politics. One area in particular is how the individuals who are directly engaging with local spaces understand their participation in specialized circuits such as AFNs (i.e., do they embody the

language, rhetoric, and ideals that localist scholars argue are *ascribed* to things like farmers' markets, CSAs, and local enterprise more generally?). As such, much of the empirical literature on localism has been conducted in the broad field of agricultural studies, where there has been an emphasis on studying farmers' market participants via survey methods and quantitative analyses (e.g., Govindasamy et al. 2002; Velasquez et al. 2005; Wolf et al. 2005; Farmer et al. 2014; Lyon et al. 2009). These studies claim to capture the motivations driving consumers to engage with local food systems, but in reality merely describe shifting consumer preferences for organic, local, and healthier foods *without* adequately answering the question of "Why?". On the other hand, there is a small but growing interdisciplinary ethnographic literature that aims at answering the "Why?" of localism by conducting in depth interviews and robust field work to understand the deeper political, ethical, and moral foundations on which localist behavior is based. This effort is being spearheaded by urban geographers and anthropologists, although a few qualitative sociologists are also entering the field (e.g., Alkon 2008; Alkon and McCullen 2011; Slocum 2006; Hendrickson 2009).

These studies represent a substantial improvement over the superficial interpretation of localism offered by the aforementioned agricultural studies, made possible by the substantive richness offered by qualitative data. However, that does not mean quantitative treatments are not valuable, and as empirical studies of localism are still in their infancy, it remains to be seen which methodologies are most suitable for studying this phenomenon. In this thesis, I put forth an exploratory quantitative research design that aims to contribute to the empirical literature on the sociology of localism. I aim to address the looming empirical question of "What are the political and ethical

values of local food consumers?” My objective for this research is twofold: first, to determine whether or not quantitative methodological practices are appropriate to the study of localist political and ethical ideals; and second, to enhance the theoretical debates about localism with concrete empirical data. I do not approach this research project with any particular hypotheses in mind, and instead seek to uncover interesting patterns that might inform future directions for scholarly research. My findings are based on primary data collected through an exploratory survey instrument distributed and administered over the internet.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Problem of Production

Scholars and activists have long warned of the looming perilous consequences of uninhibited economic growth on the earth’s environment, with the global agricultural food system often serving as a central point of critique and pivotal example of dangerous ecological subjugation to the interests of the capitalist class (Baer 2008; Sharzer 2012a). For many, the crises embodied in the global food system are not unique, and merely reflect the destructive logic endemic to the capitalist mode of production. Smith and Sauer-Thompson (1998) emphasize the incompatibility of capitalism—which they argue operates on the principle of *infinite*, unconstrained production—with long-term environmental sustainability—which they argue depends upon curtailing the use of *finitely* distributed natural resources. Such a conclusion is analogous to Gould, Schnaiberg, and Pellow’s (2008) concept of the “treadmill of production” that proclaims that the unceasing productive imperative that fuels the engine of capital is in fundamental contradiction to the imposed natural limits of the earth’s environment. As Harvey (2014)

argues, there exists a crisis tendency in the “reckless appropriations and investments” that keep the current capitalist system in motion, appropriations that are made “regardless of the environmental or social consequences, *even threatening the conditions for the reproduction of capital itself* [my emphasis]” (p. 34). Capital, on the one hand, must ceaselessly grow so as to continuously accumulate value while, on the other hand, obliterating the *very source* of its wealth through its own expansionary logic.

These apocalyptic narratives capture what Schumacher (1973) terms “the problem of production.” The essence of the problem of production is eloquently described in Schumacher’s magna opus, *Small is Beautiful*, where he writes “the modern industrial system, with all its intellectual sophistication, consumes the very basis on which it has been erected” (1973: 19). The solution, Schumacher argues, rests not in some utopian socialist alternative or revolutionary *un-capitalism*: such systems themselves have propagated unsustainable productive arrangements that are predicated on the same ideology of gigantism that dominates global capitalism. What is necessary, in Schumacher’s eyes, is a turn towards “Buddhist economics” which sees “the essence of civilisation [sic] not in a multiplication of wants but in the purification of human character” (1973: 52). This sort of humanism requires man to minimize the scale of his endeavors, shrinking economic activity and social engagements to the local, and in effect, *community* level so as to foster organic social relationships and a sense of spiritual belonging and unity with nature, ecology, and humanity.

Schumacher’s book became a rallying call for anti-consumerism, and helped plant the seeds for alternative localist economic theorizing. Importantly, Schumacher’s unwillingness to valorize socialist and anti-capitalist economic alternatives as inherently

“superior” or even “different than” global capitalism allowed theoreticians to address the contradictions of the problem of production by conceiving of reformist economic logics that are not in and of themselves necessarily hostile to market arrangements. Thus, Bill McKibben asks us to consider how we might better structure social life within a *de-growth* economy. We do not need to abandon the fundamentals of capitalism – markets “obviously work” (McKibben 2007: 2), he tells us. However, we must reconcile the unavoidable truth that our globalized system of production and consumption is speeding towards self-destruction. He argues for a sharp reduction in the scale of economic transactions accomplished by building strong local supply chains conscientious of the limits of uncontrolled production. The important thing is to embed markets inside of human value systems that are not uninhibitedly oriented towards profit making, and adequately consider environmental and community needs and interests *without* comprising the efficiencies of capitalist proprietorship. Such a system echoes what Curtis (2003) terms an “eco-local” economy that “subordinates economic decision making to society and nature” so that desirable social and environmental outcomes can be achieved (p. 99). According to these ideals, the fundamental problem is not necessarily one of *free enterprise*, but one of *scale*, and an orientation towards *a virtuous political economy*.

These localist visions buck up against criticisms from Marxists who argue that these small-scale paradigms fail to offer compelling solutions to the problem of capital centralization. A historical movement of corporate capital accumulation has concentrated economic and social power into the authoritative grip of large, oftentimes multinational, firms that exercise substantial influence over governments and global markets (Sharzer 2012a, 2012b). How local economies will challenge this dominance remains an open

question. Small farmers and other local producers do not have the sorts of financial power – read *capital* – to engage in a price war with multinational firms, and cheap produce will almost win out (Sharzer 2012a, 2012b; also, see Mills 2002 for a review of the demise of the small American farmer). This does not mean that local spaces cannot find prosperity in specialized circumstances; they certainly do. Yet, this specialization is part of their limitation: they remain only influential in their particular situation, expressing no substantial influence over the global system of appropriation (Srnicek and Williams 2015; Sharzer 2012a, 2012b).

Moreover, fettering localism within the confines of market impulses results in a sort of “voluntary” environmentalism. As Albo (2007) writes: “Market actors are free to respond to market incentives or ignore them and go on polluting and consuming, depending on profit conditions and income constraints. The market ecology strategies of eco-transition literally depend on the ‘magic of the market’” (p. 10). Without some external force exerting control over producers (i.e., the state), even within localized arrangements, small-scale proprietors are free to *opt* in and *opt* out of the broader *eco*-local vision, the fundamental impetus for formulating localist alternatives. Under a regime of market localism, small enterprises and localists alike evade direct confrontation with global capitalism – the *real* enemy of the environment – choosing instead to operate *parallel* to the prevailing economic system in order to maximize the rational economic interests of local firms (Sharzer 2012b).

Beyond Production: Authenticity, Community, and Democracy

In spite of these criticisms, others see significant transformative potential in the turn toward localism. Similarly, several other scholars are enthusiastic about the counter-

hegemonic capacities that autonomous local circuits pose to centralized global capitalism if established on a sufficient scale (e.g., Fairbairn 2012; Posey 2011), while others argue that the close community involvement in local planning and political organizing results in a sort of communitarian solidarity that provides possibilities for overcoming global capitalism (Gibson-Graham 2006; Ayres and Bosia 2011; Wright 2010; Alperovitz 2011). Indeed, Lyson (2004) theorizes about a “civic agriculture” that stems from localizing food systems, in which he attempts to broaden the local social imaginary beyond the instrumental concerns of production and ecological harmony. Downscaling production will certainly achieve ecological objectives, but it will also breed socially engaged communities of consumers and producers with a reciprocal sense of duty to each other’s livelihood, facilitating the development of a collective political consciousness that marshals particular localities to secure the vitality of their autonomous social and economic wealth (Lyson 2004).

According to many, localism fundamentally transforms the alienating conditions of mainstream market exchange—where consumers and producers are anonymous to one another, relating only indirectly through the exchange of commodities—into *authentic* economic transactions that are embedded within meaningful social engagements between people in a shared geography (Schnell 2013; Berry 2013; Gagné 2011; Lyson 2004). These embedded exchanges are part of a broader process of “defetishization” supposedly initiated at local food markets (Alkon and McCullen 2011) in which the “commodity fetishism” that Marx describes in *Capital: Volume One* (where economic exchanges are depersonalized as relationships between commodities—money as the *all-powerful* commodity for acquiring the necessities and useful things of life—and not as social

interactions between people) is widely overcome. Global agriculture stretches the distance between producer and consumer, resulting in a “systemic placelessness” (DuPuis and Goodman 2005:360) that obfuscates the relationship between the two. At local DTC markets, the *makers* of goods are often the same people that bring them to market and sell them to customers, thus facilitating personalized human experiences, and undermining the fetishism of the commodity form that food takes under global capitalism (Feagan 2008).

However, critics question the legitimacy of the “defetishization” argument posited above. Shoppers often expect that the same people operating local market vendor stands are the ones out tilling the fields, and thus romanticize their interactions with these people. However, it is often true that vendors are working on behalf of a local producer—a wage relationship—and know very little about the production process of the commodities they are selling (Alkon and McCullen 2011).¹ There is also a “valorization” process as Alkon and McCullen (2011) describe it, where local farmers are heralded as exceedingly hardworking individuals who spend their every waking moment out tending to their produce. Such a description often evades the reality of farm work, where even local “family size farms” employ a mass of waged workers that labor in the fields and perform the drudgery of production, yet remain invisible to local consumers (Alkon and McCullen 2011; Brown and Getz 2008). Thus, scholars warn against an “unreflexive localism” (DuPuis and Goodman 2005) that assumes the local is a normatively better

¹ Even in DTC spaces, the sellers are not necessarily the same people who *actively labor in the field*, and absentee ownership does not disqualify one from participating in DTC markets. Their existence as an owner of a local enterprise, however detached they may be from the site and processes of production, is all that is necessary to legitimize their status as a “direct seller.”

space attached to an enlightened politics without adequately considering the underlying social processes that allow that space to exist in the first place.

More pointed critiques of localism question its validity as a genuine progressive political orientation. Localists are vocal in their support for token progressive political ambitions—from fair-trade product certification that labels products as sourced from an equitably treated and fairly paid workforce, to a commitment to an autonomous self-determinism whereby localities ought to manage their own political, economic, and social trajectories (Brown and Getz 2008; Alkon and McCullen 2011; Lyson 2004; Alperovitz 2011). Yet, as Holt-Giménez and Wang (2011) argue, this dominant progressive narrative is only “skin deep” and materializes in ways that reflect “social hierarchies of race and class” (p. 86). Critics argue that local sites of consumption are exceedingly exclusionary along racial and class lines—setting up privileged spaces that serve a predominantly white, wealthy, liberal class (Slocum 2007; Alkon 2008; Alkon and McCullen 2011; Guthman 2008a; Sharzer 2012b). Empirical inquiries into the demographics of local food consumers support these critiques, finding that they are overwhelmingly highly educated suburban whites with high incomes, and often female (Byker et al. 2012; Velasquez et al. 2005; Wolf et al. 2005).

Further complicating the narrative of localism is the paradoxical reality that the local has been the site of resistance and empowerment on the behalf of the very people localist critics say are marginalized by mainstream localist praxis. Poor people of color, commonly the victims of “environmental racism” (a term that describes how spaces that are predominantly occupied by the non-white working-class are often “dumping sites” (Bullard 2002) for pollution, waste, and environmental externalities), have organized

resistance campaigns against numerous environmental hazards—from opposing zoning ordinances that would place toxic waste disposal sites within working-class neighborhoods (Rogers 2005), to revealing negligent state childhood blood screening practices that contributed to the disproportionate rise in lead poisoning among black children. In their resistance, they invoke the language of the local to defend *their neighborhoods, their communities, and their space* from the external abuses of industry and society. Moreover, several community food organizations are working towards building local food systems with the specific intent of servicing low-income people of color, who have historically been denied access to fresh groceries, and whose voices have been widely suppressed in the mainstream local food movement (Slocum 2006). Not all local spaces, then, can be conceptualized as elite “white space” (Guthman 2008a; Slocum 2007), although it is true that low-income people of color are organizing *in response* to a system of privilege that has allowed middle and upper-class whites to distance themselves from the harmful ecological consequences of their consumer livelihood (Bullard 2002; Taylor 2000; Rogers 2005).

Statement of the Problem

My purpose in announcing the critiques of localism is not so much about delegitimizing or taking a hard stance on localist objectives so much as it is about revealing the dialectical nature of the issue. Localism remains a severely divisive issue in the interdisciplinary literature, even amongst radicals who share a generalized antipathy for capitalist production at large (e.g., Sharzer 2012a, 2012b; Gibson-Graham 2006; Srnicek and Williams 2015; Wright 2010). In general, it can be said that localist sympathizers emphasize the transformative political potential latent in a move towards

localized production and consumption by privileging environmental and community needs over the dictates of uninhibited market forces. Critics, however, question localism's seriousness by accusing its adherents of fetishizing niche pockets of downscaled market exchanges, evading confrontation with the broader crisis of global capitalism, and carving out spaces of privileged class consumption. These debates have generated substantial theoretical discussion, but these conversations very much remain insulated in the esoteric realm of abstraction. For a topic that has attracted such vigorous scholarly attention, there is a surprising absence of empirical inquiries investigating the ethical and political motivations inspiring the *actual* participants in these local spaces of consumption. Instead, it is assumed by localist scholars that those who take the time to participate in local food systems are attaching the same political and ethical meanings to this activity that localist scholars themselves do.

This dearth of empirical investigation is improving as interdisciplinary ethnographers have begun studying diverse local food markets and the sorts of political and ethical values attached to these particular spaces (e.g., Slocum 2007; Alkon 2008; Alkon and McCullen 2011; Guthman 2008a, 2008b; Hendrickson 2009; Gagné 2011). In addition to these studies, there is an existing quantitative literature on local food systems. However, most of these studies depend upon dull survey instruments that do not measure the more dynamic political and ethical motivations compelling people to engage with these local spaces, and are reminiscent of consumer surveys. For example, Govindasamy et al. (2002) find that the principal reason that shoppers choose to engage in farmers' markets is because of the perceived freshness and superior quality of groceries to those offered at mainstream supermarkets. Wolf et al. (2005) reach similar conclusions about

customer preference for quality food, and research by Velasquez et al. (2005) and Lyon (2009) shows that shoppers are willing to pay a premium for local goods. Yet, none of these scholars attempt to get at the “Why?” of these preferences and choices, skipping over the most interesting dimensions of localism.

My approach to studying the political and ethical dimensions of localism both borrows from – and differentiates from – these existing studies. From the qualitative cases, I adopt the understanding that localism represents a distinct political, ethical, and moral response to global capitalism, and should be treated as such. That is, it is not merely a different way of organizing production and consumption, but a political ideal. Thus, I seek to find out whether or not the actual participants in local food economies themselves understand their consumption practices as fitting in with a larger political and ethical program. From the quantitative studies, I borrow the survey methodology. While there is a growing qualitative empirical literature on localism, scholars could benefit from a quantitative intervention to increase generalizability and answer the question of whether or not quantitative treatments of localism are warranted and fruitful. However, existing surveys do not account for the political discourses at the heart of localist theorizing. Thus, the main benefits of quantitative methodology – notably the ability to amass large datasets and provide generalizable responses – have not been realized by localist scholars. This project represents a first attempt at trying to fill this void. Although exploratory, the findings of this research have the potential to inform sociologists on how to best study the burgeoning phenomenon of localism.

METHODOLOGY

I gathered primary data using an original anonymous survey, which was administered via Virginia Commonwealth University's (VCU) Red Cap survey software. The survey gathered information on respondents' local shopping habits, including where they purchase local produce and what proportion of their total purchased groceries are locally harvested. It also: asked them to identify how important 18 different measures of political and ethical factors associated with localism are in their decision to buy local produce; assessed how positively or negatively they feel about large agricultural corporations and local food producers; measured how positively or negatively they feel about government intervention into the economy; measured how much responsibility they feel rests with individual consumers in performing localism; measured how accessible they feel local food is year-round in their particular area; measured how inclusive they feel the local food movement is in general; and gathered general demographic data.

Purposive sampling was employed to recruit respondents. The instrument was shared to various public discussion boards on the website Reddit called "subreddits" (essentially online forums) which related to local food, as well as to one ecological and ethical eating group on Facebook.² As such, sampling is not random. In statistical terms, this limits the generalizability of the data to the cases present in my dataset. However, local food consumers are not an inherently readily accessible group, and there is no existing dataset with cumulative information on this population. Furthermore, existing studies of this population all unambiguously rely on some sort of convenience sampling

² The particular subreddits are: r/localfood; r/organic; and r/ColumbusFood, which is dedicated to the local Columbus, OH food culture. I intended to distribute the survey to more subreddits, but did not receive support from enough moderators. Additionally, the survey was distributed to r/SampleSize, which is a public forum dedicated to sharing scholarly surveys with targeted populations.

(e.g., Alkon and McCullen 2011; Govindasamy et al. 2002; Wolf et al. 2005; Velasquez et al. 2005). Importantly, my survey was, theoretically, able to sample local food consumers from across the country, and therefore potentially increases the geographical footprint of my sample beyond the hyper-specific cases of existing studies (a “non-local” analysis of localism). This opens up the possibility that my study’s results are more representative of the actually existing local food consumer population than previous efforts, although I took no steps to measure one’s specific geographic location.

There is also the concern of the overall representativeness of these discussion boards for local consumers as a whole. It is likely that those participating in the local food related subreddits and Facebook group are extremely committed to localism. However, this does not pose a serious threat to the legitimacy of my study, as I am principally concerned with how the political and ethical ideals of localism are understood by participants themselves. Thus, the most committed local food consumers will provide unique insight into how localism’s ethical and political values are being interpreted by localists themselves. Moreover, those who are less committed to localism and choose not to actively engage in the production of the movement’s politics are not likely to be important actors in shaping localist logics. For example, Alkon and McCullen (2011) found that many shoppers at farmers’ markets are what they call “tourists,” people who simply stroll through the marketplace as a method of relaxation, soaking in the pleasantries of the communitarian aura, and oftentimes never purchasing any groceries. Similarly, Farmer et al. (2014) talk about localism as a form of “agrileisure,” a sort of middle-class *escape* to nature on the weekends, and thus not an inherently political task that requires one to fundamentally reshape their way of life in accordance with some set

of localist ideals. Including *all* people who ever purchase local produce or step into a farmers' market, therefore, is not necessarily the most effective way at studying the politics and ethics of localism.

Analysis

This is a quantitative study design that relies on statistical inference to test for relationships between variables. All statistical testing was conducted in the IBM SPSS software package, version 23. My method of analysis involved univariate and bivariate inference. Univariate analysis was employed to describe the distributions of isolated individual variables in order to determine the proportion of responses across specific categories. For bivariate inquiries, I computed basic correlation matrices that tested for significant statistical associations between two variables at a time. In interpreting correlations, I depend upon Cohen's (1988) specification of effect size, where a correlation of .10 – .29 represents a small effect, a correlation of .30 to .49 represents a medium effect, and a correlation of .50 or greater represents a large effect. For categorical associations, it is possible that chi-square tests of independence could have been used in place of correlations. However, due to my restricted sample size (N=41), the expected cell count in many of my tables was less than 5, thus violating a key assumption of the test, and therefore invalidating my results.³ Correlations, contrarily, allow me to test for linear relationships (i.e., associations where an increase or decrease in the value

³ It is true that in SPSS a Fisher's exact test could be used in such a circumstance. However, SPSS only allows researchers to use this technique on a 2x2 table, which makes for incredibly inefficient statistical inference. It is much more efficient to use correlation analysis, in which dummy variables can be computed for nominal level and categorical variables. Some statisticians also argue that chi-square tests and Pearson's correlations, when testing the same variables, arrive at similar results (Newsom 2013).

of one variable is associated with an increase or decrease in the value of another) without violating statistical assumptions. Importantly, while I will rely upon a p-value of up to .05 to determine statistically significant relationships, there is still an increased risk that the correlations I do find in my dataset are occurring by chance due to my small sample size (Schutt 2015). There is also built in limitations to bivariate analysis, notably the possibility that these relationships are spurious, and that a third variable is necessary to expound the statistical relationship. Thus, multivariate analyses such as stepwise regressions are often employed to provide more detailed explanations of social phenomenon (Schutt 2015; Babbie 2016). This sort of multivariate analysis, however, is beyond the capacities of this project.

These concerns are diminished somewhat when the goals of this research are brought back into the spotlight. It cannot be underestimated that this is an exploratory project. I am not approaching this research with any particular hypotheses or assumptions about localism, and instead am seeking to find interesting statistical relationships to inform future directions for research on issues pertaining to localism, while also determining whether or not quantitative methodological procedures are useful for studying the politics and ethics of localism. Bivariate relationships are sufficient indicators of association, and are important to the foundation of any causal model (Babbie 2016). For the purposes of this research, my bivariate analyses will serve as starting points to inform future directions for research relevant to the study of localism.

Variables

Respondents were asked five questions about their local consumption habits. The first asked respondents to identify what percentage of their total purchased groceries are

locally produced, with the potential values: Less than 25%; More than 25% but less than 50%; 50% to 75%; and More than 75%. The other four questions asked respondents to identify how often they purchased groceries from four specific venues: *local farmers' markets*, *small grocery stores*, *CSA subscriptions*, and *large supermarkets*. The possible answers included: Once a week or more often; About once every two weeks; About once a month; Less often than once a month; and Never. Importantly, the CSA question proved to be ambiguous, as some CSAs do not operate year round, and do not make weekly or biweekly deliveries (Martinez et al. 2010). Therefore, the variable was not included in analysis.

There were also 18 measures of political and ethical factors related to localism, and respondents were asked to indicate how important each was to their decision to shop locally. Possible responses included: Very Important; Somewhat Important; Somewhat Unimportant; and Very Unimportant. The measures include: *supporting my personal/family health*; *supporting my local economy*; *developing meaningful relationships with the producers of my food*; *supporting sustainable environmental practices*; *learning about the process behind the making of my food*; *supporting fair labor practices*; *helping to keep economic resources under the control my local community*; *supporting ethical treatment of animals*; *avoiding genetically modified (GMO) food*; *supporting small businesses*; *strengthening my connection to my community*; *limiting my carbon footprint*; *helping to keep financial investment within my local economy*; *reducing my level of consumption*; *helping to combat global warming*; *strengthening my connection to nature*; *supporting my local farmers*; and *purchasing high quality products*.

These measures were informed by the scholarly literature on localism and past empirical investigations. Although the literature emphasizes the political and ethical ideals of localism, I included health concerns – from deliberately avoiding genetically modified (GMO) food to supporting personal and familial health – as measures because past research shows these are points of concern for local shoppers who, generally, perceive local food as more wholesome, fresh, and healthy than traditional produce (Velasquez et al. 2005). The other measures speak broadly to scholarly emphasis on ecological concerns and communitarian ideals, *i.e.* combatting global warming and establishing autonomous local economies (Alkon and McCullen 2011; Alperovitz 2011; Brown and Getz 2008).

I accounted for criticisms of localism that emphasize its relative exclusivity and elite insularity by having respondents answer questions about their perceived accessibility to local foods in their *immediate* area, and also having them reflect on how effective they feel the local food movement has been *in general* at including various social groups into its spaces. Four measures of respondent access were constructed, including: *in my area, there is a wide variety of local food available year round*; *in my area, local food is widely available to people regardless of their income*; *in my area, local food is widely available to people regardless of their race*; and *in my area, local food is just as affordable as conventional groceries*. Respondents could strongly disagree, disagree, agree or strongly disagree. They were also asked to evaluate how effective they believe the local food movement has been *overall* at including *people from poor areas*; *people from middle-class areas*; *people from rich areas*; *people of color*; *people who are college educated*; *people who live in urban areas*; and *people who live in suburban areas*. Possible

responses were: very ineffective, somewhat ineffective, somewhat effective, and very effective.⁴

Respondents were also asked to indicate their warmth toward agricultural corporations and local food producers (small farmers), arch nemeses according to localist logic (e.g., Alkon and McCullen 2011; Posey 2011). For both agricultural corporations and local food producers, they were asked to indicate how strongly they agree that each *place profits over food safety; practice farming habits that are harmful to the environment; are mostly trustworthy; receive adequate government support; share enough information about their farming practices with the public; provide a lot of necessary, good jobs for people who need them; and produce efficiently and at low cost, making food broadly accessible*. They were also asked to indicate how strongly they agree that *agricultural corporations have too much control over the food system*, and that *local food producers are unfairly disadvantaged by agricultural corporations*. Potential responses included strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree.

Additionally, survey takers were asked to share their opinion on what responsibility the government has in supporting local food economies, as the literature suggests that government intervention into the market is a necessary precondition for decentralizing economic control (Alperovitz 2011; McKibben 2007; Wright 2010). Respondents were asked to identify how strongly they agree that *the government has a*

⁴ Initially, I had additional measures, which asked respondents how effectively they feel liberals, conservatives, and rural residents have been incorporated into the movement, but I dropped these variables from my analysis, as my political orientation variable proved to be a sufficient measure of political values, and due to the fact that most of my respondents are liberals, skewing results. Moreover, most of my respondents are urban or suburban dwellers, thus representing a potentially bias view of rural availability.

responsibility to help small-scale local food producers stay in business; the government should provide cash subsidies to local food producers to help offset the costs of small-scale production; and the government should break up large agricultural corporations to help make local food producers more competitive. These measures were transformed into a three-item scale, where a higher score indicates increased support for government intervention. A Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis was conducted, resulting in an alpha score of .835, indicating strong internal consistency, thus justifying the scaling of these items.⁵

In addition to measuring attitudes towards government intervention, I asked respondents to assess how strongly they agree that individual consumers have a personal responsibility to engage with the local food system. Such a point of view has been critiqued by Sharzer (2012b), who argues that individualizing the issue of localism to one of consumer choice results in a sort of reductionism that shifts the blame away from global capitalism and onto individual consumers, regardless of class position, therefore ignoring inequalities in access to local food. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statements: *if they really wanted to, most people could choose to buy all their groceries locally; if consumers feel like large agricultural corporations are unethical, then they should make the choice to only buy local groceries; if everyone chose to only buy local food, then large agricultural corporations would go out of business; and the best way to strengthen local food economies is for consumers to choose*

⁵ Initially, I had a fourth item: *The government should prevent local food producers from growing their businesses too large.* However, this variable dragged down the alpha score, and was removed. This suggests that this question did not effectively measure attitudes toward government intervention, and is therefore an ineffective survey item.

to only do business with local producers. These four questions were transformed into a scale where a higher score is indicative of stronger support for the idea that individual consumers have a personal responsibility to deliberately consume locally. A Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis revealed an alpha score of .726, above the accepted level of .70 (Mottaz 1981; Tavakol and Dennick 2011).

Finally, general demographic data was collected about respondents, which included their age, gender identity, racial identity, education, income, household size, political views, and the urbanity of their living area. Age was collected as a basic integer, asking respondents "What is your age?" and subsequently recoded into a set of ordinal values, where 1=18 – 24, 2=25 – 34, 3=35 – 44, 4=45 – 54, 5=55 – 64, and 6=65 or older. Gender includes three categories: Male, Female, and Other. Zero cases identified as "Other," and thus it was treated as a missing value, resulting in a binary coding where 1=Male and 2=Female. Race was measured by asking "Which best describes you? Select all that apply." The categories available include White or Caucasian, Black or African-American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian, American Indian or Alaskan Native, and Other. Responses were later collapsed into a dummy dichotomous variable for the purposes of analysis, where 1=White and 0=All other non-white racial categories. Education is a basic ordinal measure with the categories: Less than a high school degree; High school degree or GED equivalent; Some college, no degree; Associate's degree; Bachelor's degree; and Graduate degree. Income is measured in a basic ordinal fashion, with the possible values: Less than \$20,000; \$20,000 to \$34,999; \$35,000 to \$49,999; \$50,000 to \$74,999; \$75,000 to \$99,999; and \$100,000 or more. Household size includes possible values of 1 person, 2 people, 3 people, 4 people, and 5 or more people. Political views are

measured in an ordinal fashion, where moving from a lower to higher value indicates increasing conservatism. It is measured with the following categories: Very Liberal; Liberal; Moderate; Conservative; and Very Conservative. *Living area* was measured by asking “How would you categorize the area in which you live?” There were three possible responses: Urban; Suburban; and Rural.

RESULTS

Demographic Data, Food Shopping Habits, and Local Accessibility

The distributions of the demographic variables are represented in Table 1 (N=41). A substantial proportion of the sample is female (N=27, 65.9 percent), skewing the results along the basis of gender. This sample is also skewed in terms of age, where 70.7 percent of the respondents are captured between the values of 18 and 34 (N=29, $m=32.27$, $s=12.38$). Almost all respondents are White (38 of 41, 92.7 percent). Most have at least some college experience (92.7 percent of respondents are accounted for between the categories of some college and a graduate degree), and 100 percent of respondents have at least a high school degree. 65.9 percent of the respondents either have a bachelor’s degree or a graduate degree. The incomes are skewed in a high direction, with over a quarter of respondents earning \$100,000 or more (N=11, 27.5 percent), followed by 40 percent earning between \$20,000 and \$49,999, and 17.5 percent earning between \$50,000 and \$74,999. In terms of geographic locale, almost all respondents live in urban or suburban settings (88.8 percent), with only 5 (12.2 percent) respondents residing in rural areas. In terms of political orientation, there was a tendency towards liberalism, with close to 60 percent of all respondents identifying as either liberal or very liberal. Only 10 percent of respondents identified as conservative, and zero identified as very

Table 1: Sample Demographics

		N	%
What is your preferred gender identity?	Male	14	34.1%
	Female	27	65.9%
Age	18 - 24	11	26.8%
	25 - 34	18	43.9%
	35 - 44	7	17.1%
	45 - 54	2	4.9%
	55 - 64	1	2.4%
	65 or older	2	4.9%
Race	White	38	92.7%
	Black	0	0.0%
	Hispanic/Latino	1	2.4%
	Asian	1	2.4%
	American Indian	0	0.0%
	Other	1	2.4%
What is the highest level of education you have completed?	Less than a high school degree	0	0.0%
	High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)	3	7.3%
	Some college, no degree	10	24.4%
	Associate's degree	1	2.4%
	Bachelor's degree	20	48.8%
	Graduate degree	7	17.1%
What is your approximate yearly household income?	Less than \$20,000	2	5.0%
	\$20,000 to \$34,999	8	20.0%
	\$35,000 to \$49,999	8	20.0%
	\$50,000 to \$74,999	7	17.5%
	\$75,000 to \$99,999	4	10.0%
	\$100,000 or more	11	27.5%
How would you categorize the area in which you live?	Urban	15	36.6%
	Suburban	21	51.2%
	Rural	5	12.2%
Which best describes your political orientation?	Very Liberal	11	27.5%
	Liberal	12	30.0%
	Moderate	13	32.5%
	Conservative	4	10.0%
	Very Conservative	0	0.0%

conservative. These sampling characteristics are consistent with findings by other scholars who argue that participants in local food systems are overwhelmingly white, wealthy, politically liberal, and female (e.g., Byker et al. 2012; Slocum 2007; Alkon 2008; Alkon and McCullen 2011; Guthman 2008a; Sharzer 2012b).

Table 2 presents the zero-order correlation matrix for my demographic variables.

Table 2: Zero-Order Correlation Matrix for Demographic Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6
What is your current age?	0.155	-0.074	.435**	0.026	0.08	-.365*
What is your preferred gender identity?		0.189	-0.081	0.173	-0.174	-0.125
2 Race (1=White)			-0.123	-0.2	-0.033	-0.018
3 Which best describes your political orientation?				-0.068	0.238	-.410**
4 What is the highest level of education you have completed?					-0.09	0.2
5 What is your approximate yearly household income?						-0.256
6 Area						

** p<.01, * p<.05 (two-tailed)

Age is significantly related with political orientation ($r=.435$) in a positive direction at the .01 level, which indicates that older respondents are more conservative (political orientation was measured on a five-point scale, where 1=Very Liberal and 5=Very Conservative). Age is also inversely related with area ($r=-.365$) at the .05 level, which indicates that younger respondents are more likely to live in urban areas (area was coded as a dummy ordinal measure, where 1=Rural, 2=Suburban, and 3=Urban). Gender and race did not relate significantly with any of the demographic variables (although for race, this likely has to do with the overwhelming presence of white respondents). Political orientation is significantly related with area ($r=-.410$) at the .01 level, which suggests that liberals are more likely than conservatives to live in urban areas. Income and education did not significantly relate to any of the demographic measures.

Table 3 presents data on my sample's shopping habits across three shopping venues: farmers' markets, small grocery stores, and large supermarkets. Interestingly, 83 percent of my sample shop at farmers' markets only once a month or less. This can further be broken down to 43.9 percent shopping less than once a month, and 9.8 percent opting to never shop at farmers' markets. This finding contradicts previous scholarship that has consistently emphasized the importance of farmers' markets in distributing local produce and reproducing localist ethical values (Lyon et al. 2009; Velasquez et al. 2005; Gagné 2011; Alkon 2008; Alkon and McCullen 2011). There was more variation in terms of shopping at small grocery stores, with just over 51 percent shopping at least once a month. Still, of the respondents who choose to shop at small grocery stores, the largest proportion did so less often than once a month (39 percent).

What is most surprising is the concentration of local consumption that occurs in traditional supermarkets and large grocery stores. Fully 100 percent of my sample buys local produce at a traditional, large grocery store *at some time* during the year, with 14.6 percent doing so at least once a month, and 70.7 percent doing so at least every two weeks. Indeed, 36.6 percent of respondents choose to buy local groceries at large supermarkets once a week or more often, representing the largest proportion of supermarket shoppers in my sample. This development mirrors current market trends that have seen large food retailers, grocery store chains, and supermarkets incorporate local produce into their stock in order to respond to increasing customer demand for locally

sourced food products (Dunne et al. 2010). It also provides evidence of a process of cohabitation – or in this case, total co-option – of ‘*local particulars*’ with capitalism’s ‘*global universalism*.’ Across time and space, capitalism is able to accommodate any

Table 3: Frequency Distributions Across Local Food Venues

		N	%
How often do you buy groceries from local farmers’ markets?	Never	4	9.8%
	Less often than once a month	18	43.9%
	About once a month	12	29.3%
	About once every two weeks	3	7.3%
	Once a week or more often	4	9.8%
How often do you buy local groceries from a small grocery store?	Never	4	9.8%
	Less often than once a month	16	39.0%
	About once a month	4	9.8%
	About once every two weeks	6	14.6%
	Once a week or more often	11	26.8%
How often do you buy local groceries at a supermarket or large grocery chain?	Never	0	0.0%
	Less often than once a month	6	14.6%
	About once a month	6	14.6%
	About once every two weeks	14	34.1%
	Once a week or more often	15	36.6%

number of particularisms, either by living alongside competing institutions, or by injecting itself into – and overthrowing – the alternative institutions themselves (Srnicek and Williams 2015; Chibber 2014). In the case of localism, corporate grocery brands

have been quick to respond to shifts in consumer demands, and thus have forged contracts and commercial agreements with regional producers in which they source from what might be called “family-scale farms” (Dunne et al. 2010; Brown and Getz 2008).

In many ways, corporate co-option of local produce seems like an efficient way to quell the supposed looming “counter-hegemonic” potentialities of localism (Fairbairn 2012; Posey 2011). Already built upon mounds of accumulated and concentrated capital, large grocery store chains have the capacity to sell local produce *below* the prices available at local food vendors and DTC sites like farmers’ markets. This has the potential to cofound with a speculated decrease in locally operated marketplaces. Sharzer’s (2012a) data show that, in the long-run, farmers’ markets and other locally operated DTC sites appear unlikely to be able to afford rising rents for their overwhelmingly urban spaces, and that in their place, more wealthy and traditional commercial actors will set up shop. This further conflates with problems of local and artisanal production, intensive entrepreneurial endeavors that do not always reward producers with significant returns on their costly commercial investments (Sharzer 2012b). Thus, they may feel pressured to exchange with powerful and rich firms that can promise better margins for their businesses. Ironically, this does not necessitate the evisceration of the local farmer, but it does appear to paralyze the expansion of local marketplaces. If one of the main objectives of localism is to “defetishize” economic relationships so as to put producers into direct contact with their consumers, then this trend among my sample represents a substantial departure away from the DTC marketing practices at the heart of much localist theorizing.

Another interesting observation concerns the proportion of groceries purchased by my sample that are locally produced, as well as overall perceptions of accessibility in my respondents' areas. As Table 4 shows, nearly 59 percent of my sample indicated that less

Table 4: Respondents' Perceived Access to Local Food in Their Area

		N	%
About what percent of your total purchased groceries are locally produced?	Less than 25%	24	58.5%
	More than 25% but less than 50%	10	24.4%
	50% to 75%	7	17.1%
	More than 75%	0	0.0%
In my area, there is a wide variety of local food available year round.	Strongly Disagree	2	4.9%
	Disagree	11	26.8%
	Agree	18	43.9%
	Strongly Agree	10	24.4%
In my area, local food is widely available to people regardless of their income.	Strongly Disagree	11	26.8%
	Disagree	19	46.3%
	Agree	10	24.4%
	Strongly Agree	1	2.4%
In my area, local food is widely available to people regardless of their race.	Strongly Disagree	4	9.8%
	Disagree	13	31.7%
	Agree	17	41.5%
	Strongly Agree	7	17.1%
In my area, local food is just as affordable as conventional groceries.	Strongly Disagree	11	27.5%
	Disagree	14	35.0%
	Agree	14	35.0%
	Strongly Agree	1	2.5%

than 25% of their groceries are locally produced. The next largest category was between 25% and 50%, with 24.4 percent of respondents falling into this distribution.

Finally, only seven respondents (17.1 percent) indicated that 50% to 75% of their

groceries are locally produced. Zero respondents reported that local produce accounts for greater than 75 percent of their total grocery purchases. A majority of my sample (68.3 percent) either agree or strongly agree that there is a wide variety of local food available year round in their area, however, most do not believe it is equally accessible to all. As Table 4 shows, 73.1 percent of respondents either disagree or strongly disagree that local food is widely available in their area regardless of income, and close to half (41.5 percent) believe that race limits people's access to local food in their areas.

These perceptions of unequal access to local food become more obvious when respondents were asked to evaluate how effective the local food movement has been at including a variety of disparate groups, from the poor, to people of color, to the rich. Table 5 shows that 67.5 percent of my respondents do not feel that the local food movement has effectively included people living in poor locales, a finding that is consistent with the results from Table 4 where respondents indicated that income is a barrier to local food access in their particular areas. Contrarily, 85 percent of my sample feel that the local food movement has effectively served middle-class areas, and 92.5 percent of my sample feel the local food movement has effectively served rich areas. 65 percent of my sample feel that the local food movement has not effectively included people of color overall – a departure from the findings in Table 4, which found that only 41.5 percent of respondents felt that race was a barrier to local food access in their particular areas. My sample also feels that, overall, college educated people have been effectively included in the local food movement (95 percent), urban areas have been effectively included (77.5 percent), and that suburban areas have been effectively included (80 percent).

Table 5: How effective do you think the local food movement has been at including the following groups of people?

		N	%
People who live in poor areas.	Very Ineffective	12	30.0%
	Somewhat Ineffective	15	37.5%
	Somewhat Effective	12	30.0%
	Very Effective	1	2.5%
People who live in middle-class areas.	Very Ineffective	0	0.0%
	Somewhat Ineffective	6	15.0%
	Somewhat Effective	19	47.5%
	Very Effective	15	37.5%
People who live in rich areas.	Very Ineffective	1	2.5%
	Somewhat Ineffective	2	5.0%
	Somewhat Effective	10	25.0%
	Very Effective	27	67.5%
People who are non-white racial minorities.	Very Ineffective	7	17.5%
	Somewhat Ineffective	19	47.5%
	Somewhat Effective	13	32.5%
	Very Effective	1	2.5%
People who are college educated.	Very Ineffective	0	0.0%
	Somewhat Ineffective	2	5.0%
	Somewhat Effective	12	30.0%
	Very Effective	26	65.0%
People who live in urban areas.	Very Ineffective	1	2.5%
	Somewhat Ineffective	8	20.0%
	Somewhat Effective	18	45.0%
	Very Effective	13	32.5%
People who live in suburban areas.	Very Ineffective	0	0.0%
	Somewhat Ineffective	8	20.0%
	Somewhat Effective	16	40.0%
	Very Effective	16	40.0%

Access to local food is hugely important, as it significantly affects the quantity of local foods consumed, as well as participation in DTC marketplaces. Indeed, as my findings in Table 6 indicate, those who live in areas where local food is widely available

year round are more likely to purchase a higher proportion of locally produced groceries ($r=.496$, $p<.01$), and are also more likely to shop at farmers' markets ($r=.386$, $p<.05$).

Year round availability of local foods does not affect one's engagement with small

Table 6: Zero-Order Correlation Matrix for Accessibility Measures, Proportion of Groceries Locally Produced, and How Often Respondents' Shop at Specific Grocery Venues

	1	2	3	4
In my area, there is a wide variety of local food available year round.	.496**	.386*	0.301	-0.15
1 About what percent of your total purchased groceries are locally produced?		.646**	.558**	-0.28
2 How often do you buy groceries from local farmers' markets?			.553**	-0.20
3 How often do you buy local groceries from a small grocery store?				-0.06
4 How often do you buy local groceries at a supermarket or large grocery chain?				

** $p<.01$, * $p<.05$ (two-tailed)

grocery stores, and while there is a slight negative correlation between widely available local produce and buying local food from supermarkets ($r=-.15$), this relationship is not statistically significant. There is a strong positive correlation between the amount of local groceries purchased and how often one purchases local groceries from farmers' markets ($r=.646$, $p<.01$), as well as small grocery stores ($r=.558$, $p<.01$), and increased purchasing of local produce at farmers' markets is associated with an increase in purchasing local produce at small grocery stores ($r=.553$, $p<.01$). There are slight inverse correlations between buying local produce at farmers' markets and supermarkets and buying local produce at small grocery stores and supermarkets ($r=-.28$ and $r=-.20$, respectively), although these relationships are not significant. It is important to note that I ran subsequent statistical tests to determine whether or not my demographic variables were

associated with my accessibility measures and where my sample purchases local groceries. My findings found no significant relationships between the variables, with the exception of one: women are less likely than men to buy local produce at large supermarkets ($r = -.346$, $p < .01$, where 1=Male).

Political and Ethical Dimensions of Localism

The results from by bivariate correlation analysis of my 18 measures of localist political and ethical factors and their importance in informing respondents' decision to buy local goods are presented in the zero-order correlation matrix in Table 7. The measures of the various dimensions of localism correlate rather consistently and strongly with one another, as shown in Table 7. Most of the relationships are significant at the .01 level, with a few at the .05 level. Interestingly, supporting one's personal or family health is not significantly related with supporting one's local economy, developing relationships with local producers, supporting sustainable environmental practices, helping to keep economic resources under local control, supporting small businesses, strengthening one's connection to their community, reducing one's level of consumption, helping to combat global warming, or strengthening one's connection to nature. This suggests there is a divergence between those who buy local produce for health purposes and those who purchase local products as a means of *doing* localism. Thus, the realm of health and the realm of localist ethical ideals do not seem to be mutually reinforcing.

Developing meaningful relationships with the producers of one's food does not significantly relate with supporting the ethical treatment of animals, avoiding GMO food,

Table 7: Zero-Order Correlation Matrix For 18 Measures of Political and Ethical Factors

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Supporting my personal/family health.	0.257	0.038	0.231	.363*	.354*	0.202	.327*	.454**	0.257	-0.05	0.204	.318*	0.095	0.102	0.161	.363*	.488**
1 Supporting my local economy.		.565**	.574**	.534**	.601**	.783**	.511**	.421**	.802**	.726**	.553**	.727**	.467**	.501**	.406**	.682**	.310*
2 Developing meaningful relationships with the producers of my food.			.450**	.636**	.427**	.556**	0.285	0.299	.528**	.605**	.483**	.465**	.461**	.472**	.595**	.454**	0.261
3 Supporting sustainable environmental practices.				.620**	.625**	.496**	.548**	.420**	.616**	.381*	.795**	.539**	.610**	.685**	.576**	.482**	.371*
4 Learning about the process behind the making of my food.					.446**	.394*	.331*	.352*	.501**	.457**	.582**	.525**	.487**	.536**	.679**	.467**	.338*
5 Supporting fair labor practices.						.638**	.413**	.378*	.674**	.427**	.587**	.454**	.522**	.469**	.370*	.437**	0.181
6 Helping to keep economic resources under the control of my local community.							.501**	0.226	.783**	.652**	.512**	.676**	.521**	.462**	.337*	.661**	0.245
7 Supporting ethical treatment of animals.								.407**	.596**	.377*	.447**	.547**	.363*	.415**	.354*	.463**	.352*
8 Avoiding genetically modified (GMO) food.									.359*	0.195	.339*	0.264	0.222	0.157	.349*	0.192	.363*
9 Supporting small businesses.										.616**	.553**	.727**	.503**	.501**	.438**	.769**	.359*
10 Strengthening my connection to my community.											.524**	.524**	.393*	.522**	.558**	.535**	0.225
11 Limiting my carbon footprint.												.543**	.725**	.856**	.689**	.408**	.366*
12 Helping to keep financial investment within my local economy.													.429**	.668**	.411**	.713**	.366*
13 Reducing my level of consumption.														.684**	.644**	.378*	0.217
14 Helping to combat global warming.															.724**	.376*	0.229
15 Strengthening my connection to nature.																.380*	.354*
16 Supporting my local farmers.																	.600**
17 Purchasing high quality products.																	

** p<.01, * p<.05 (two-tailed)

or purchasing high quality products. It is strongly related with the other measures, including the ecological and political and ethical measures, which suggests that those interested in “defetishizing” economic relationships do not necessarily emphasize health goals, which are associated with concerns over product safety and superiority to conventional items (e.g., Velasquez et al. 2005; Wolf et al. 2005; Farmer et al. 2014; Lyon et al. 2009).

Overall, the results for avoiding GMO foods are a bit ambiguous, as it does not significantly relate to strengthening one’s connection to their community, keeping financial investment in local economies, reducing one’s level of consumption, combatting global warming, or supporting local farmers. However, avoiding GMOs does significantly relate to supporting one’s local economy, supporting sustainable environmental practices, learning about the process behind the making of one’s food, and supporting the ethical treatment of animals. It also relates to supporting small businesses, limiting one’s carbon footprint, strengthening one’s connection to nature, and purchasing high quality products. The variable’s relation to some – but not all – of the ecological and political measures of localism indicate that there might be an intervening variable (or variables) that are complicating the results.

Table 8 displays the correlation matrix for my demographic variables and 18 measures of political and ethical values. Age is only associated with one measure, where the older one becomes, the more important avoiding genetically modified (GMO) food becomes in motivating one to buy local produce ($r=.345$, $p<.05$). Gender is significantly related with several dimensions, with my findings suggesting that there is divergence between men and women in what they perceive to be important motivating factors for

Table 8: Zero-Order Correlation Measures Between Political and Ethical Categories and Demographics

	Age	Gender (2=Female)	Political Orientation	Education	Income	Area
Supporting my personal/family health.	0.214	0.144	0.193	.364*	0.114	-0.213
Supporting my local economy.	-0.003	0.182	-0.201	-0.179	-0.026	-0.034
Developing meaningful relationships with the producers of my food.	-0.053	0.228	-0.128	-0.288	-0.069	-0.218
Supporting sustainable environmental practices.	0.091	.342*	-0.273	-0.169	-0.288	-0.041
Learning about the process behind the making of my food.	0.047	0.231	-0.074	-0.005	-0.006	-0.182
Supporting fair labor practices.	-0.024	.313*	-.457**	-0.074	-0.249	0.002
Helping to keep economic resources under the control of my local community.	0.103	0.228	-0.256	-0.116	0.13	-0.189
Supporting ethical treatment of animals.	0.168	.447**	-0.141	-0.111	-0.049	-0.03
Avoiding genetically modified (GMO) food.	.345*	0.144	0.07	-0.157	-0.144	-0.013
Supporting small businesses.	0	.329*	-0.201	-0.123	-0.113	-0.087
Strengthening my connection to my community.	-0.017	0.287	-.325*	-0.115	-0.126	0.077
Limiting my carbon footprint.	0.054	.434**	-.355*	0.012	-0.208	-0.089
Helping to keep financial investment within my local economy.	0.048	0.197	-0.037	-0.029	0.033	-0.195
Reducing my level of consumption.	-0.013	0.177	-0.262	-0.209	-0.13	-0.214
Helping to combat global warming.	-0.086	0.171	-0.302	-0.096	-0.115	-0.104
Strengthening my connection to nature.	-0.071	0.249	-0.195	-0.1	-0.08	-0.07
Supporting my local farmers.	0.033	.332*	0.024	0.127	-0.197	-0.112
Purchasing high quality products.	0.239	.378*	0.256	0.276	-0.087	-0.113

** P<.01, * p<.05 (two-tailed)

buying local produce. For example, women are more likely than men to view supporting sustainable environmental practices as an important reason for shopping locally ($r=.342$, $p<.05$), view supporting the ethical treatment of animals as an important reason for shopping locally ($r=.447$, $p<.01$), view supporting small businesses as an important reason for shopping locally ($r=.329$, $p<.05$), view limiting their carbon footprint as an important reason for shopping locally ($r=.434$, $p<.01$), view supporting local farmers as an important reason for shopping locally ($r=.332$, $p<.05$), and more likely to view purchasing high quality products as an important reason or shopping locally ($r=.362$, $p<.05$). Indeed, these findings indicate that women place a higher value on localist ethical categories, from ecological considerations, to visions of economic subordination to communities, a finding consistent with scholarship that has shown women are more invested in localism than men (for a review, see Byker et al. 2012).

Education is only significantly related with one measure: those with higher educations are more likely to view supporting their personal or family health as an important reason for shopping locally ($r=.364$, $p<.05$). Surprisingly, income has no statistically significant relationship with any of the variables. Political orientation is associated with three variables in the matrix. Unsurprisingly, conservatives are less likely than liberals to view supporting fair labor practices as an important reason for buying local produce ($r=-.457$, $p<.01$). Conservatives are also less likely than liberals to view strengthening their connection to their community as an important reason for buying local groceries ($r=-.325$, $p<.05$), and less likely to view limiting their carbon footprint as an important reason for purchasing local produce ($r=-.355$, $p<.05$). One's area (rural,

suburban, urban) does not have any effect on the importance of any variables in my matrix.

Warmness Towards Agricultural Corporations and Local Food Producers

Table 9 reports the univariate descriptive statistics of my 8 measures of warmness towards large agricultural corporations. Interestingly, 65 percent of my sample either agrees or strongly agrees that agricultural corporations place the safety of their products above their profits. This finding suggests that a strong majority of my sample do not perceive agricultural corporations to be producing inherently toxic produce for the purposes of extracting mass profits, as some suggest (e.g., McKibben 2007). However, this finding is potentially contradicted by the fact that 75.6 percent of respondents either strongly disagree or disagree with the statement “Agricultural corporations are mostly trustworthy,” indicating strong levels of mistrust among my sample. Similarly, over 80 percent of my sample either agree or strongly agree that agricultural corporations possess too much control over the food system. 78 percent either disagree or strongly disagree that agricultural corporations share adequate information about their farming habits with consumers, and most (75.6 percent) agree that agricultural corporations receive too much financial support from the government. Most of my sample (nearly 83 percent) either agree or strongly agree that agricultural corporations practice farming habits that are harmful to the environment. This suggests overall negative perceptions among my sample towards agricultural corporations.

Table 9: Warmness Towards Agricultural Corporations

		N	%
Agricultural corporations place the safety of their food products above their profits.	Strongly Disagree	7	17.5%
	Disagree	7	17.5%
	Agree	17	42.5%
	Strongly Agree	9	22.5%
Agricultural corporations practice farming habits that are harmful to the environment.	Strongly Agree	23	56.1%
	Agree	11	26.8%
	Disagree	7	17.1%
	Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%
Agricultural corporations are mostly trustworthy.	Strongly Disagree	15	36.6%
	Disagree	16	39.0%
	Agree	7	17.1%
	Strongly Agree	3	7.3%
Agricultural corporations have too much control over the food system.	Strongly Agree	22	53.7%
	Agree	11	26.8%
	Disagree	6	14.6%
	Strongly Disagree	2	4.9%
Agricultural corporations receive too much support from the government in the form of cash subsidies.	Strongly Agree	15	36.6%
	Agree	16	39.0%
	Disagree	6	14.6%
	Strongly Disagree	4	9.8%
Agricultural corporations share adequate information about their farming habits with consumers.	Strongly Disagree	16	39.0%
	Disagree	16	39.0%
	Agree	8	19.5%
	Strongly Agree	1	2.4%
Agricultural corporations provide a lot of necessary, good jobs for people who need them.	Strongly Disagree	2	5.0%
	Disagree	14	35.0%
	Agree	22	55.0%
	Strongly Agree	2	5.0%
Agricultural corporations produce efficiently and at low cost, making food broadly accessible.	Strongly Disagree	1	2.5%
	Disagree	8	20.0%
	Agree	21	52.5%
	Strongly Agree	10	25.0%

My sample is relatively split on whether or not agricultural corporations provide a lot of good and necessary jobs for people who need them, with a slight majority (60 percent) agreeing, and 40 percent disagreeing. Moreover, most of my sample (77.5 percent) express some level of agreement that agricultural corporations are able to produce efficiently and cheaply, thus making food widely available. These variables were devised in order to capture the contradictions embedded within capitalism, in which an entrenched class system ensures that a mass of wagedworkers are dependent upon a capitalist class in order to reproduce their material livelihood, while, concurrently, that same capitalist class is able to produce commodities under conditions of extreme efficiency, thus distributing consumables across the class spectrum (Sharzer 2012a, 2012b). Of course, this is a condition of exploitation, because the prosperity of the capitalists is predicated on the relative powerlessness, impoverishment, and propertyless condition of the masses. Nevertheless, it is a significant contradiction, and a point of emphasis for critics of localism who argue that simply localizing production without dismounting global capitalism and its associated inegalitarian social relationships is an insufficient political strategy (Sharzer 2012b; Srnicek and Williams 2015).

My sample's warmness towards local food producers is presented in Table 10. A large proportion of my sample feels that local food producers place the quality of their products above their profits (75.6 percent). In a fascinating departure from Table 9, 80.5 percent of my respondents do *not* agree that local food producers use farming practices that are bad for the environment (this compares to the findings in Table 9 where 82.9 percent of my sample agreed that large agricultural corporations *do* use farming practices that are destructive to the environment). Close to 90 percent of my sample expresses

Table 10: Warmness Towards Local Food Producers

		N	%
Local food producers care more about their profits than they do about the quality of their products.	Strongly Agree	1	2.4%
	Agree	9	22.0%
	Disagree	28	68.3%
	Strongly Disagree	3	7.3%
Local food producers use farming practices that are bad for the environment.	Strongly Agree	1	2.4%
	Agree	7	17.1%
	Disagree	28	68.3%
	Strongly Disagree	5	12.2%
Local food producers are mostly trustworthy.	Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%
	Disagree	5	12.2%
	Agree	29	70.7%
	Strongly Agree	7	17.1%
Local food producers are unfairly disadvantaged by agricultural corporations.	Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%
	Disagree	8	19.5%
	Agree	19	46.3%
	Strongly Agree	14	34.1%
Local food producers receive the same financial support from the government that large agricultural corporations do.	Strongly Agree	1	2.4%
	Agree	6	14.6%
	Disagree	22	53.7%
	Strongly Disagree	12	29.3%
Local food producers share enough information about their farming practices with consumers.	Strongly Disagree	1	2.4%
	Disagree	8	19.5%
	Agree	19	46.3%
	Strongly Agree	13	31.7%
Local food producers provide a lot of necessary, good jobs for people who need them.	Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%
	Disagree	17	41.5%
	Agree	19	46.3%
	Strongly Agree	5	12.2%
Local food producers produce efficiently and at low cost, making food broadly accessible.	Strongly Disagree	1	2.4%
	Disagree	23	56.1%
	Agree	16	39.0%
	Strongly Agree	1	2.4%

agreement with the statement “Local food producers are mostly trustworthy,” and 78 percent of respondents agree that local food producers share sufficient information about their production practices with consumers. Most (80.4 percent) agree that local food producers are unfairly disadvantaged by large agricultural corporations, a finding that is consistent with the data from Table 9, in which a large proportion of my sample expressed concerns that agricultural corporations have too much control over the food system. 83 percent of respondents do not agree that local food producers receive the same sorts of financial support from the government that large agricultural corporations do, which is consistent with previous findings that show relatively negative attitudes towards large firms. Just over half (58.5 percent) agree that local food producers provide a lot of necessary and good jobs to people who need work, however, an analysis by Sharzer (2012b) shows that this is not necessarily true. Moreover, research by Litwin and Phan (2013) show that jobs created by small entrepreneurs are overwhelming poor: they do not pay well, and most do not offer health coverage or retirement benefits. Finally, a slight majority (58.5 percent) do *not* feel that local food producers produce efficiently and at low cost, thus making food widely accessible. This is consistent with previous scholarship that highlights the price premium of local goods (Sharzer 2012a, 2012b; Velasquez et al. 2005; Lyon 2009).

Government Intervention and Consumer Responsibility

The final point of analysis has to do with how supportive my sample is of government intervention into the economy in order to support local firms, as well as how much responsibility my sample believes individuals ought to take on in reshaping their own consumption habits in accordance with localism. As was described in the previous

methods section, I computed a scale for warmness towards government intervention (where higher values indicate more support of government intervention) and consumer responsibility (where higher values indicate more support of individual consumer responsibility). The findings from my zero-order correlation analysis of my government intervention scale, consumer responsibility scale, and demographic variables are presented in Table 11.

As can be seen, there is a dearth of significant relationships between these measures. There is one notable exception, as political orientation correlates significantly with the government intervention scale ($r=-.494$, $p<.01$), suggesting that liberals are more likely to support government intervention into the economy, while conservatives are more likely to oppose government intervention into the economy. Such a finding

Table 11: Zero-Order Correlation Matrix For Government Intervention Scale, Consumer Responsibility Scale, and Demographics

	Government Intervention Scale	Consumer Responsibility Scale
What is your current age?	-0.062	0.061
What is your preferred gender identity?	0.236	0.184
Race (1=White)	-0.115	-0.19
What is the highest level of education you have completed?	-0.23	0.035
What is your approximate yearly household income?	-0.19	0.046
Which best describes your political orientation?	-.494**	0.275
Area	0.072	-0.207
Government Intervention Scale	-	0.124
Consumer Responsibility Scale		-

** $p<.01$ (two-tailed)

confirms intuitive ideas about American politics, where conservatives are much more hostile than liberals to state interference with market forces. One might expect that the government intervention and consumer responsibility scales would be inversely related,

however, this is not the case. In fact, there is a slight positive correlation, although it is not statistically significant.

It is difficult to say whether the lack of significant relationships in this particular matrix has to do with the instrument itself. Indeed, the relative homogeneity and smallness of my sample could be skewing the results, concealing significant relationships where they actually might exist. Importantly, non-white local food consumers are severely underrepresented in my sample; it is possible that the presence of more racially diverse respondents could alter these findings. Of course, it is also possible that these findings reflect the attitudes of a population that has been categorized as highly educated, homogenously white, and economically elite. Further testing is necessary to see whether these results can be replicated in future studies.

DISCUSSION

This project was designed to accomplish two primary goals: (1.) contribute to the empirical scholarly literature on the politics and ethics of food localism, and (2.) explore whether or not quantitative methodologies are appropriate to the study of the political and ethical dimensions of food localism. In so doing, I designed a survey instrument that attempted to measure several crucial elements at the theoretical, moral, and political core of localism, asking respondents to identify the importance of 18 ethical categories in informing their decision to buy local produce, evaluate how warm they feel towards large agricultural corporations and local producers, share their opinions on how inclusionary or exclusionary they believe the local food movement to be, and indicate how much responsibility for supporting local economies they feel rests with the government and individual consumers. To the first goal, I feel that this project has provided meaningful

empirical insights into the political and ethical dimensions of localism. To the second point, I think the usefulness of quantitative designs for studying this type of social phenomenon is ambiguous, as I will discuss below.

My findings reaffirm theoretical insights from literatures *supporting* localism as a political and ethical ideal, while also reaffirming literatures *criticizing* localism. My data show that local food consumers *do* attach distinctive ethical and political ideals to local food consumption, and that these ideals in turn shape how they understand their local consumption habits. They also express overall negative feelings about large agricultural corporations, while contrarily holding small-scale producers in high regard. The correlation matrix presented above in Table 7 shows that many of the canonical localist categories – from supporting sustainable environmental practices, to subordinating economic control to local communities, to defetishizing economic transactions – are significantly related with another, many at the .01 level, which suggests that the political and ethical ideals ascribed to localism by theoreticians and academics are, indeed, shared by local food consumers themselves.

I did find evidence of cleavages within the localist population. The first has to do with gender differences. Indeed, my findings suggest that women are more likely than men to hold localist political and ethical ideals in high importance, which is consistent with literature that has shown female demographic dominance in local spaces. The second has to do with a split between the health measures and political and ethical measures. The sparsity of statistical relationships between the health variables and the political and ethical variables suggest that *personal wellbeing* and *localism* are not

necessarily co-reinforcing, suggesting a divergence between *health* localists and *political* localists. Future research should pay attention to ideological rifts among local consumers.

Additionally, my data show that criticisms of a local elitism – i.e., a local consumer base composed of privileged middle and upper-class whites who are politically liberal and highly educated (e.g., Sharzer 2012b; Alkon and McCullen 2011; Slocum 2006, 2007; Guthman 2008a, 2008b) – are not unfounded. My sample is overwhelmingly white, college educated, politically liberal, middle to high income, and clustered in urban and suburban geographies. However, statistical testing showed no significant association between any of these variables – i.e., whiteness, income, education, or political orientation – and how often one purchases locally produced groceries. Nor do these elite variables predict how often one will purchase locally produced groceries from the primary DTC space: the farmers’ market. And while scholars have argued that this population of white, wealthy, educated liberals is at risk of doing an “unreflexive” localism (DuPuis and Goodman 2005) that ignores inequities in local commodity access and inclusivity, or performing a “universalist” localism (Guthman 2008a) that generalizes the virtues of a whitewashed *eco*-localism to all consumption behaviors without considering dynamics of racial and class marginalization, my findings complicate this narrative.

Indeed, when I asked my respondents to evaluate how effective they feel the local food movement has been at including people from non-elite backgrounds, most do not feel the movement has sufficiently incorporated these groups into its spaces. Contrarily, there is a strong consensus among my sample that the middle and upper classes, the highly educated, and whites have been sufficiently included. Moreover, there is

overwhelming agreement that the local food movement has clustered itself into urban and suburban locales, the very types of spaces that have been problematized for entrenching exclusionary localist practices (Alkon 2008; Alkon and McCullen 2011; Sharzer 2012b). These findings suggest that, even among a relatively well-off sample of local food consumers, they are not *necessarily* ignorant of the inequities entrenched within the material actuality of localist practices, suggesting they are aware of the complex social dynamics surrounding the praxis of localism.

A finding of this research that has substantial theoretical (and practical) implications surrounds the reality that among this sample of local food consumers, most do not purchase large amounts of locally produced groceries, nor do they frequent specialized local marketplaces. Data from Table 3 show that nearly 60 percent of my sample indicated that locally produced food made up less than 25% of their total purchased groceries, while nearly 83 percent of my sample indicated that less than half of their total purchased groceries are locally produced. Moreover, close to 10 percent of my sample *never* shops at farmers' markets for local produce, and nearly 74 percent shop at farmers' markets for local produce once a month or less often. Fully 100 percent of my sample buy local produce from a large grocer or supermarket, with close to 71 percent doing so *at least* every two weeks, and nearly 86 percent doing so at least once a month. Nevertheless, as Table 7 shows, there was a strong presence of localist political and ethical ideals and values among this sample.

This is significant for a couple of reasons. First, if localism is to be thought of as a counter-hegemonic developmental strategy with the central purpose of dissolving global capitalism, as many scholars theorize (Gibson-Graham 2006; Posey 2011; Gagné 2011;

Ayres and Bosia 2011), then the fact that local food products are sold by corporate grocery chains (Dunne et al. 2010) and frequently purchased by consumers at these supermarkets (as my data shows) challenges the core premise of localist political economy that demands a *boycotting* of large, corporate retailers. Instead of *disempowering* corporations, the distribution of locally produced commodities within supermarkets assists in the *reproduction* of corporate hegemony. Much of this has to do with contradictions endemic to the capitalist mode of production, expounded on by Sharzer (2012a, 2012b). Local producers, even if attached to a valorizing communitarian ideal of localism, are nevertheless entrepreneurs. They lack the capital to effectively compete with entrenched, corporate grocery chains, and have taken advantage of a cultural shift towards a romanticized vision of local food consumption, which has resulted in traditional grocers building commercial contracts with regional producers (Dunne et al. 2010). By sourcing to supermarkets, local producers are able to forge lucrative partnerships that increase their margins above and beyond what could be earned at specialized DTC sites like farmers' markets. It also speaks to capitalism's dynamic and flexible nature, in which it is able to respond to particularized local resistances with ease, either by simply coexisting alongside fractured locales, which lack the economic heft to significantly dent the corporate centralization of capital, or by fully *co-opting* local insurgencies, fully incorporating their language, imagery, and values into the existing mode of production, even if only superficially (Srnicek and Williams 2015).

Second, this finding shows that the ideals of localism are attached to local food consumption, as well as small-scale producers, *irrespective* of whether or not one purchases large quantities of local food or frequently engages in direct social interaction

with their local producers in DTC marketplaces. Thus, what it *means* to be local (that is, the political and ethical ideals assigned to local producers, commodities, and spaces) is transmitted into the imagination of consumers whether or not they are consistently and actively *doing* localism. It is possible, then, to *feel* that localism represents some substantial set of alternative – perhaps even *better* – values than the prevailing mode of production without significantly reorienting one’s personal consumption and material living habits to operate in specific agreement with localist practice. This is a substantial departure from previous scholarly work, which has emphasized the role of local spaces – especially farmers’ markets – in facilitating the production of localist ideals and attaching them to the consumption habits of individual consumers (Alkon 2008; Alkon and McCullen 2008; Gagné 2011). This suggests that there are other mechanisms through which local values are disseminated, potentially through advertising and marketing (see Schnell 2013), or corporate “greenwashing” (Rogers 2005). While this study cannot explain these additional factors, it provides the momentum for future research to take off in this direction.

Importantly, this instrument does not account for *why* people purchase their local produce at supermarkets instead of farmers’ markets, or small grocery stores instead of some other commercial space. It merely measures how *often* they do so. Thus, the question of why this sample, even though they ascribe the political and ethical values discussed in localist literature to local food consumption, frequently purchases local produce from supermarkets remains an open question. Much of this might have to do with accessibility, although this was not a serious issue in this sample, as Table 4 shows. It is possible that convenience is an issue, as venues like farmers’ markets often only

convene at rigid set days and times, usually once a week (and sometimes not year round), whereas large grocery store are open daily and for long hours, accommodating people's diverse schedules. This instrument does not account for this dimension, however. There is also the issue of price, as local produce does cost more (Velasquez et al. 2005; Lyon et al. 2009). Yet, price is closely related to income, and in this study, income did not significantly correlate with how often one purchases local produce – or where. Moreover, this sample was generally well-off in terms of income, and *still* chooses to buy local produce from supermarkets. This implies there is a variable causing this behavior that is not accounted for in this study.

Future Directions and Methodological Reflections

Prior to this project, no substantial quantitative investigation into the politics and ethics of localism existed, and the quantitative studies that did only concerned themselves with consumer preferences about local groceries that had little to do with what motivated people to *engage* with local produce in the first place. Many qualitative studies – most of which are case studies of farmers' markets – emerged to contextualize local consumption within a burgeoning ideological framework of localism that valorizes artisanal production, romanticizes the idea of small, and seeks to resist the power of global capitalism as manifested in the multinational corporate firm. These studies are theoretically rich and empirically grounded, and represent substantial contributions to the localist literature. Yet, they lack generalizability, as they merely describe the characteristics of hyper-specific cases. Thus, this study was designed to determine whether or not a quantitative study of the politics and ethics of food localism was

possible, with the end goal of increasing the generalizability of the results of localist scholarly inquiry.

My instrument was able to yield results that are consistent with much of the literature on localism, as discussed in the previous section, suggesting that it is, indeed, possible to capture the political and ethical categories of localism in a quantitative framework. Moreover, the descriptive data I presented found interesting new patterns that need more attention. Indeed, while scholars have focused on farmers' markets and DTC spaces as sites of *doing* localism and *resisting* corporate hegemony, my data found that most people are not likely to frequent local markets (even when accessibility is not an issue), are much more likely to purchase their local produce from supermarkets, but *still* attach the ethical ideals of localism to their consumption of locally produced goods. My data suggests that the practice of localism differs substantially from the theory, and that, therefore, localism is a theoretical abstraction – a justificatory frame of discourse, perhaps – and not a categorically counter-hegemonic threat to global capitalism. Future research should build on work such as Dunne et al.'s (2010) inquiry into supermarket co-option of local produce to better understand how consumers interpret their local consumption habits within the context of a corporate grocery chain, and to further theorize *how* local ideals are being transmitted *outside* of explicitly local spaces.

Even in the presence of these findings, this instrument has several limitations. One of the most obvious weaknesses is the small sample size, which significantly limits the generalizability of these results. Similarly, the lack of random sampling also abridges the generalizability of this data to my specific sample. Another limitation is that survey instruments of this sort are inherently very specific. While there are tests in place to

verify the internal consistency of aggregate measures, for example, there is always the possibility that a researcher failed to account for a particular measure in their instrument. This became apparent in this study when it was revealed that most of my sample purchase local produce from supermarkets without accounting for *why*. Further limitations include relying on univariate and bivariate statistical associations for analysis. The limits in the number of variables being analyzed at a given time always risks generating spurious relationships, which can be expounded on when a third (or fourth, etc.) variable is introduced. In small samples, these concerns are amplified.

The cross-sectional nature of this research means that this data represents a specific snapshot of localism frozen in time and space. However, the qualitative studies cited earlier require the researcher to immerse themselves into a specific environment for long periods, where they make observations and conduct interviews, thus accounting for shifting dynamics over time. While these qualitative studies lack generalizability, they are much more fluid and dynamic than quantitative instruments, able to account for spontaneous developments that are missed by quantitative methodologies that must define all variables that are to be included and measured *before* the study. Field work, however, allows the researcher to respond to ever-changing inputs, thus enabling them to *add* new elements into their analysis as they make new observations.

Despite these limitations, this does not mean that quantitative methods are useless. My descriptive statistics were important in revealing discrepancies in localist values and localist practice – an element missing in the current literature. Of course, the actual bivariate statistical tests merely reaffirmed the scholarly literature on which my survey instrument was grounded, without revealing anything new or particularly

groundbreaking. Put another way, the most interesting finding of this study – a divergence between local practice and local ideals – came not from complicated statistical tests, but from an analysis and comparison of univariate frequency distributions. Even so, I do believe there is a space – and need – for *specific* quantitative elements in the localist literature. In my view, the sorts of descriptive statistics I gathered – i.e., how often one shops locally, where they buy local produce, consumer demographics – are quite important in order to contextualize the more dynamic qualitative studies, and to give actual empirical evidence to theorists who depend upon, in several cases, inadequately supported assumptions about consumer habits and demographics. Yet, the most meaningful findings of this study came not from complicated methodological procedures, but from a rather unsophisticated analysis of proportions and frequencies.

Going forward, scholars should try and triangulate their methodologies. Quantitative treatments should be employed to gather relevant descriptive data, but much of the theorizing and observation of local praxis is probably best served by qualitative methods, which, as discussed above, are much abler to respond to the dynamics of abstract social categories such as “politics” and “ethics,” while subsequently accounting for subtle nuances that are missed in rigid, closed-ended quantitative designs. It would also be a substantial methodological contribution to work towards establishing a national dataset of local food consumers that measures crucial demographic data, shopping habits, and frequency of participation in DTC spaces. This will provide a much needed generalizable context in which to nestle more specific, theoretically rich, and observationally dense qualitative research. Such a nationally representative sample will

further help the local food movement reflect on itself, allowing its participants to evaluate how inclusive they *actually* are, and make adjustments to their messaging and strategies accordingly.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Consent Page

You are being invited to participate in a research study titled “**The Politics and Ethics of Food Localism.**” This study is being conducted by Sean Doody under the advisement of his mentor, Jesse Goldstein, from Virginia Commonwealth University. You were selected to participate in this study because you were participating in one of the forums that this survey was shared to and chose to click on the link.

The purpose of this research study is to gather information on peoples’ perceptions of locally produced foods. If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete a survey/questionnaire. This survey/questionnaire will ask about your opinions on a number of issues related to local food production and consumption, your grocery shopping habits, your racial identity, your gender identity, your age, your yearly income, and your educational background. It will take you approximately 10 minutes to complete.

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope that your participation in the study may inform scholars on the perceptions of local food production, which is a burgeoning social phenomenon. This data is important in evaluating whether or not the ideas and ethics behind local food production are shared by the public.

We believe there are no known risks associated with this research study; however, as with any survey related activity, the risk of a breach of confidentiality is always possible. To the best of our ability your answers in this study will remain confidential. We will minimize any risks by never asking for your name, address, phone number, email, or other personal identifiers. Moreover, your responses will not be individually evaluated. Instead, the responses of all survey participants will be aggregated and examined together. The summary of my results will be available on my webpage once data analysis is completed: www.rampages.us/sdoody.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. You are free to skip any question that you choose with the exception two screening questions: one verifying that you purchase local foods, and another verifying your age. Once the survey is complete, you will be able to navigate to different webpage to enter into a raffle for a \$50 Amazon gift card. The information you enter into for the raffle will in no way be associated with your survey responses.

If you have questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the researcher(s), Sean Doody, at doodyst@vcu.edu. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Virginia Commonwealth University Office of Research Subjects Protection – Human Research Protection Program (ORSP) at (804) 828-0868 or ORSP@vcu.edu.

By beginning the survey below, you are agreeing that you are at least 18 years old, have read and understood this consent form, and are voluntarily participating in this research study.

{CONTINUE}

SHOPPING HABITS

This section deals with your personal grocery shopping habits. Please read the questions carefully, and select the response that best describes you.

1. Do you ever buy locally produced groceries?
 - Yes
 - No **[end survey]**

2. About what percent of your total purchased groceries are locally produced?
 - Less than 25%
 - More than 25% but less than 50%
 - 50% to 75%
 - More than 75%

3. How often do you buy groceries from local farmers' markets?
 - Once a week or more often
 - About once every two weeks
 - About once a month
 - Less often than once a month
 - Never

4. How often do you buy local groceries from a small grocery store?
 - Once a week or more often
 - About once every two weeks
 - About once a month
 - Less often than once a month
 - Never

5. How often do you buy local groceries through a consumer supported agriculture (CSA) subscription?
 - Once a week or more often
 - About once every two weeks
 - About once a month
 - Less often than once a month
 - Never

6. How often do you buy local groceries at a supermarket or large grocery chain?
 - Once a week or more often
 - About once every two weeks
 - About once a month
 - Less often than once a month
 - Never

OPINIONS ON LOCAL QUALITIES

This next section deals with your opinion on qualities associated with local food. How important are the following factors in influencing your decision to buy local food: **very important, somewhat important, somewhat unimportant, or very unimportant?**

1. Supporting my personal/family health.
2. Supporting my local economy.
3. Developing meaningful relationships with the producers of my food.
4. Supporting sustainable environmental practices.
5. Learning about the process behind the making of my food.
6. Supporting fair labor practices.
7. Helping to keep economic resources under the control of my local community.
8. Supporting ethical treatment of animals.
9. Avoiding genetically modified (GMO) food.
10. Supporting small businesses.
11. Strengthening my connection to my community.
12. Limiting my carbon footprint.
13. Helping to keep financial investment within my local economy.
14. Reducing my level of consumption.
15. Helping to combat global warming.
16. Strengthening my connection to nature.
17. Cheaper prices/more economical.
18. Purchasing high quality products.

OPINIONS ON CORPORATIONS

This section deals with your opinion on agricultural corporations. Agricultural corporations are sometimes referred to as “multinational food corporations,” or “global food suppliers,” and they provide most of the groceries in the United States. Based on your experience and knowledge, would you say you **strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree** with the following statements?

1. Agricultural corporations place the safety of their food products above their profits.
2. Agricultural corporations practice farming habits that are harmful to the environment.
3. Agricultural corporations are mostly trustworthy.
4. Agricultural corporations have too much control over the food system.
5. Agricultural corporations receive too much support from the government in the form of cash subsidies.
6. Agricultural corporations share adequate information about their farming habits with consumers.
7. Agricultural corporations provide a lot of necessary, good jobs for people who need them.
8. Agricultural corporations produce efficiently and at low cost, making food broadly accessible.

OPINIONS ON LOCAL PRODUCERS

This section deals with your opinion on local food producers. Local food producers are often called other names, such as “local farmers,” “small-scale farmers,” or “family farms.” Based on your experience and knowledge, would you say you **strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree** with the following statements?

1. Local food producers care more about their profits than they do about the quality of their products.
2. Local food producers are unfairly disadvantaged by agricultural corporations.
3. Local food producers receive the same financial support from the government that large agricultural corporations do.
4. Local food producers provide a lot of necessary, good jobs for people who need them.
5. Local food producers use farming practices that are bad for the environment.
6. Local food producers produce efficiently and at low cost, making food broadly accessible.
7. Local food producers are mostly trustworthy.
8. Local food producers share enough information about their farming practices with consumers.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

This section deals with what role the government should have in providing support to local food producers. Would you say you **strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree** with the following statements?

1. The government has a responsibility to help small-scale local food producers stay in business.
2. The government should provide cash subsidies to local food producers to help offset the costs of small-scale production.
3. The government should prevent local food producers from growing their businesses too large.
4. The government should break up large agricultural companies to help make local food producers more competitive.

ROLE OF CONSUMER

This section deals with your opinion on what responsibility consumers/shoppers should have in supporting the local food economy. Would you say you **strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree** with the following statements?

1. It is the responsibility of the consumer, not the government, to support their local food economies by choosing to purchase locally produced food.
2. If they really wanted to, most people could choose to buy all of their groceries locally.
3. If consumers feel like large agricultural corporations are unethical, then they should make the choice to only buy local groceries.

4. If everyone chose to only buy local food, then large agricultural corporations would go out of business.
5. The best way to strengthen local food economies is for consumers to choose to only do business with local producers.

ACCESSIBILITY

This next section deals with how effective the local food movement has been at increasing accessibility to local foods within your area. The local food movement is a broad term that generally refers to a push by people to expand the accessibility of local food by increasing the number of farmers' markets, local food suppliers, or including local food in supermarkets. Based on your experience and knowledge of the local food movement in your area, would you say you **strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree** with the following statements?

1. In my area, there is a wide variety of local food available year round.
2. In my area, local food is widely available to people regardless of their income.
3. In my area, local food is widely available to people regardless of their race.
4. In my area, local food is just as affordable as conventional groceries.

INCLUSIVENESS

This next section deals with how effective you believe the local food movement has been at including people from different backgrounds into the movement. Based on your experience and knowledge, how effective do you think the local food movement has been at including the following groups of people – very effective, somewhat effective, somewhat ineffective, or very ineffective?

1. People who live in poor areas.
2. People who live in middle-class areas.
3. People who live in rich areas.
4. People who are non-white racial minorities.
5. People who are college educated.
6. People who are politically liberal.
7. People who are politically conservative.
8. People who live in urban areas.
9. People who live in suburban areas.
10. People who live in rural areas.

DEMOGRAPHICS

In this final section, I am going to ask about social characteristics. As stated in the introduction, responses are aggregated into groups for analysis. Please select the responses that best describe you.

1. What is your current age? _____
2. What is your preferred gender identity?
 - Male

- Female
 - Other
3. Which best describes your political orientation?
- Very Liberal
 - Liberal
 - Moderate
 - Conservative
 - Very Conservative
4. Which best describes you? Select all that apply.
- White or Caucasian
 - Black or African-American
 - Hispanic or Latino
 - Asian
 - American Indian or Alaskan Native
 - Other: _____
5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
- Less than a high school degree
 - High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
 - Some college, no degree
 - Associate's degree
 - Bachelor's degree
 - Graduate degree
6. What is your approximate yearly household income?
- Less than \$20,000
 - \$20,000 to \$34,999
 - \$35,000 to \$49,999
 - \$50,000 to \$74,999
 - \$75,000 to \$99,999
 - \$100,000 or more
7. How many people live in your household, including you?
- 1 person
 - 2 people
 - 3 people
 - 4 people
 - 5 or more people
8. How would you categorize the area in which you live?
- Urban
 - Suburban
 - Rural

{SUBMIT RESPONSES}

Thank you page

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. We understand that your time is valuable, and we appreciate your participation in this research project. When the study is complete, the results will be available online at: www.rampages.us/sdoody.