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SANTA CRUZ

**The Internationalization of Alternative Food Networks: Farmers' Markets,  
Community Gardens, and Agricultural Exchange**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

SOCIOLOGY

by

**Kevin Cody**

September 2015

The Dissertation of Kevin Cody is  
approved:

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Professor Julie Guthman, Chair

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Professor Walter Goldfrank

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Tyrus Miller,  
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate  
Studies

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Professor Ben Crow

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF ALTERNATIVE FOOD NETWORKS: FARMERS' MARKETS, COMMUNITY GARDENS, AND AGRICULTURAL EXCHANGE**

Focusing on various sites of an international farmer exchange program, this research examines the geographic, socioeconomic, and cultural relevance of Northern-based alternative food networks in the context of a less developed country, specifically Peru. In theory, alternative food networks (AFNs) revalorize small-scale farmers, rebuild local food systems, and strengthen ties between consumers and producers. Efforts to promote AFNs and scholarship exploring these efforts are largely confined to the global North, despite the common challenges facing small-scale farmers in both more and less developed countries. In an attempt to bridge the scholastic and geographic gap between North and South, this dissertation examines AFNs from a global perspective, focusing on the mechanisms best suited to facilitating the diffusion of ideas and practices associated with AFNs, and revealing how initiatives like farmers' markets and community gardens may serve similar functions in diverse settings.

This research promotes the internationalization of AFNs in three distinct case studies, each corresponding to a separate chapter. The first case study, based on research conducted with Peruvian and Ecuadorian exchange participants in the U.S, explores perceptions of transferability regarding organic farming systems. I argue that the most valuable elements of this international agricultural exchange reside not with

the diffusion of agricultural innovations, but with how cross-cultural experiential learning promotes critical reflection on place-appropriate production. In the second case study, I argue that an organic farmers' market in Lima, Peru, despite replicating many of the troubling exclusionary characteristics of similar markets in the U.S., demonstrates the potential to improve rural livelihoods while raising consumer awareness about the benefits of organic agriculture. Here I suggest that expanding the scope of analysis to encompass the global South requires reconceptualizing the workings and implications of AFNs in a global context. In the third and final case study I argue that three key factors have influenced the emergence of what I refer to as "organic subjects" in a community garden (CG) in rural Northern Peru: increased conventional farming practices; the influence of a garden organizer as the agent of an organic ideology; and the material practices associated with participating in the garden. The actions taken by the women of the *Club de Madres* that created this garden reinforce the idea that CGs produce subjects, and that such subjects may well be oriented towards an agenda of agrarian change that promotes environmental awareness and ecological farming practices, key elements of emerging alternative food networks in the global North and South. As the three case studies together show, examining AFNs in a Southern context presents opportunities to "theorize back" to the North to consider the historical contexts from which AFNs have emerged; how so-called "developing world issues" of poverty and inequality can be transformed into globally relevant issues; and how AFNs North and South can address global and increasingly acute issues like food insecurity and food justice.

## **DEDICATION**

To Lauren, Leah, and all the stewards, host farmers, and supporters of the  
Multinational Exchange for Sustainable Agriculture.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am sincerely grateful to a number of people and organizations that have made this dissertation a reality. First and foremost I thank Julie Guthman for her relentless and tireless constructive criticism that has made me the scholar and writer I am today. Other committee members also helped significantly shape this dissertation: Ben Crow provided thoughtful feedback that has helped make my claims all the more defensible. Wally Goldfrank provided inspiration and encouragement by reminding me how far I've come, and that I was indeed making progress even when I felt impossibly stuck. I am also grateful to Melanie DuPuis who opened my eyes to the inspiring field of sociology of agriculture.

This research would not have been possible without funding from two primary sources at UC Santa Cruz. The Chicano and Latino Research Center funded an early exploratory round of data collection in Peru and Ecuador that served as the impetus for this dissertation. The Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems provided a subsequent grant to conduct research in Peru and the US. I'm grateful for both centers' willingness to see value in such a project even when there was so much work to be done.

I am also deeply grateful to the MESA staff, especially Lauren and Leah, for opening their doors to an inexperienced researcher, and to the MESA stewards and host farmers that form the core of this dissertation. Thank you for welcoming me onto your farms and into your homes.



Finally, as much as I might like to think of this dissertation as something I have accomplished on my own, I am in fact deeply indebted and grateful for the support I have received from my friends and family. In graduate school and in life, I am thankful for the enduring empathy and friendship I've shared with Melina Kozanitas, Ariana Kalinic, and Christie McCullen. Daljit Singh shared with me teachings that kept me healthy, happy, and holy. And thanks to all my Santa Cruz people who never stopped asking when I was going to finish. I am especially thankful for my loving parents whose unwavering support and encouragement strengthened my resolve and commitment and made me feel like there was nothing I couldn't accomplish. Lastly, I am deeply grateful for the love and support of Sarah Romano, an extraordinary editor who, with an open mind, an open heart, and a seemingly endless amount of patience was the true midwife of this dissertation.

The third chapter of this dissertation is an adaptation of the following previously published material:

Cody, K (2015). "La misma realidad de cada lugar es diferente" ("The same reality of each place is different"): A case study of an organic farmers market in Lima, Peru. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(3), 53–69. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.052.011>

## **PROLOGUE**

In the swanky lodge of a Northern California farm/non-profit educational center, nestled in a valley dwarfed by redwoods, a man from Kenya spoke passionately about how he hoped to learn about organic agriculture in order to help farmers back in his home village. He would be spending the next nine months on a farm in Minnesota. It was March. Then a woman got up to speak to the small crowd of fellow incoming “stewards,” to use the parlance of the Multinational Exchange for Sustainable Agriculture (MESA), who brought these individuals together from countries around the world to place them with internships on organic farms around the U.S. This woman spoke mostly Quechua, her native tongue in Peru. Fortunately, there was another Peruvian Quechua speaker who volunteered to translate into Spanish, and yet another Ecuadorian who would translate the Spanish into English. Her message was similar to the Kenyan’s message: she was here to learn about organic farming practices that she could pass on to farmers back in Peru. For an hour of presentations during this orientation weekend I heard people from Ghana, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Georgia, Peru, and Ecuador talk about the hardships facing farmers in their home country and how they hoped to find ways to serve their local communities. Despite the variety of languages and nationalities, they shared a common interest, one readily translatable: the desire to improve farmers’ livelihoods in a manner that was environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable. They weren’t alone.

I have approached this research not only as a scholar interested in sustainable food systems, but also as a one-time farmer acutely aware of the economic difficulties of making a living as a small-scale organic producer. During the years I worked as a small-scale market farmer in Northern California, my off seasons were punctuated by excursions to South America where I worked in the agri-tourism sector and saw first-hand what subsistence farming can look like in a developing country. The romantic sheen of subsistence agriculture, not uncommon among aspiring farmers, at least in alternative Northern California enclaves, was quickly worn away. It seemed everywhere, albeit to different degrees and with different stakes involved, to be a farmer is to struggle for survival. Understanding why this was the case, in addition to what could be and is being done to improve the sustainability of farmer livelihoods and food systems became the central focus on my research. MESA, then, provided the context from which to explore the transferability of ideas and practices associated with alternative food networks.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction: Challenge and response in global agro-food systems**

The three chapters that make up this dissertation explore the globalization of alternative food networks (AFNs) and the transferability of the ideas and practices that underpin these networks between the global North and South. This research helps reimagine the global agro-food system as one where sustainability and improved farmer livelihoods are the driving force—not corporate profit, efficiency of scale, and technological innovation. Agro-industrialization poses similar challenges for farmers in both more and less developed countries (Stringer, Twyman, & Gibbs, 2008), raising the questions: How might specific Northern-based alternative food initiatives be adapted and applied to developing country contexts, and how might the results look similar or different from what we see in places like the U.S.? What are the implications for expanding the geographic frame of reference of alternative food networks? In an effort to determine the global relevancy of AFN ideas and practices this dissertation examines these questions through three different case studies exploring an international farmer exchange program in the U.S., an organic farmer’s market in Lima, Peru, and an organic community garden in a remote rural town in Northern Peru.

This thesis examines the geographic, socioeconomic, and cultural relevance of Northern-based alternative food strategies in the context of a less developed country,

specifically Peru. In so doing, it contributes to emergent theories of alternative food geographies by providing opportunities to “theorize back” (Hughes 2005) to the North with empirical evidence from Peru. The ultimate goal of this research, however, is to generate “globally useful conceptualizations” (Abrahams, 2007) of alternative food networks (AFN) that improve the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of small-scale farmers and food systems in the North and South.

### **Family and Peasant Farmers in the Global Food System**

While farming for livelihood has never been easy, contemporary global agro-food industrialization has made it even more difficult for small-scale peasant and family farmers to persist. Structural changes at the global scale include the concentration of large-scale agri-business at every point in the commodity chain: from seeds and other agricultural inputs, to food processing, distribution, and retail (Carolan, 2012; Weis, 2007). Technological changes, as in the case of genetically modified seeds, have further concentrated profits and power among multinational agri-businesses. The results of these changes often mean debt and dispossession of smaller-scale farmers unable to compete with larger-scale agrarian capital (McMichael, 2005). Inexpensive processed food made increasingly available through the spread of supermarkets in less developed countries further jeopardize the viability of small-scale farming sectors (Reardon & Berdegue, 2002).

While these changes have arguably had a more detrimental impact on farmers in the global South where subsistence livelihoods are more common, small-scale farmers in the North are not immune to such restructuring and corporate consolidation. Over the last century, farmers in the U.S. underwent similar processes of deagrarianization and rural to urban migration as a result of increasing mechanization and corporate consolidation of agri-business (Cochrane, 1993). Diminished viability of rural livelihoods as a result of processes of capitalist agro-industrialization threaten the survival of traditional ways of food provisioning, cultural practices surrounding food and agriculture, and biological diversity as more farmers resort to growing only the most marketable commodity crops (Weis, 2007).

At a time when family and peasant farmers are facing these significant challenges, mainstream development institutions have begun framing their contributions to rural development and food systems sustainability in a new light. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) declared 2014 the International Year of the Family Farmer<sup>1</sup>. This declaration marks a significant shift in development discourse; a shift that began with participatory farmer-first programs in 1980s and 90s (Chambers, & Thrupp, 1994; Ellis & Biggs, 2001) that recognizes the value of this traditionally marginalized population. In sheer numbers, the most current data based on analysis of numerous rounds of the World Census of Agriculture suggests that of the 570 million farms worldwide, 500 million are family farms. And

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<sup>1</sup> They define family farmer as relating to any agricultural activities “managed and operated by a family and predominantly reliant on family labor, including both women’s and men’s” (FAO, 2014). This definition could be expanded to include intern and apprentice labor that often fulfill similar functions of family members on small-scale farms in North America—namely inexpensive labor.

of those, 475 million farm less than 2 hectares (Lowder, Scoet, & Singh, 2014). Furthermore, family farmers are said to contribute to food security and community development while also promoting biological diversity and mitigating the effects of climate change (Altieri, & Koohafkan, 2008; FAO, 2014).

The field of agroecology has reinforced the importance of maintaining and supporting a small-scale farming sector that can be just as productive as more modern forms of input-intensive agriculture, while also supporting rural livelihoods and the environment (Altieri, & Toledo, 2011; Wezel, & Soldat, 2009). Such claims are not merely the opinions of activist/academics on the fringes of the development sector. The United Nations Environment Program, FAO, and the World Bank have all signed on to development reports that come to similar conclusions: agroecology as a methodology of production (some prefer a more expanded definition that integrates social and economic components [see Gliessman, 2012]), can improve food security and farmer livelihoods, as well as promote more sustainable methods of production in regard to environmental, social, and economic impacts (De Schutter, 2010; IAASTD, 2008; De Schutter, & Vanloqueren, 2011). These shifts in development discourse regarding the functionality of peasant and family farmers indicate a growing recognition that the current global industrial agro-food system is in many ways unsustainable and in need of fundamental change.

### **Alternative Food Networks**

In direct response to the challenges posed by the dominant agro-food system alternatives have emerged in the global North and South that seek to revalorize small scale agriculture, rebuild local food systems, and strengthen ties between consumers and producers. Despite these similar overarching goals, alternative food networks<sup>2</sup> tend to be isolated within either more or less developed countries. Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) are defined by processes that reorient social and spatial dimension of food systems, bring producers and consumers into closer contact, provide economic opportunities for small-scale farmers, and support visions of economic, social, and environmental sustainability (Goodman & Goodman, 2009; Jarosz, 2007; Renting, Marsden, & Banks, 2003; Watts, Ilbery, & Maye, 2005). While such networks are more often referenced in scholarship from and about the global North, there is an increasing recognition that AFNs are becoming global in scope (Abrahams, 2007; Friedberg & Goldstein, 2011). However, neither activists nor academics have made many attempts to integrate lessons and experiences of those attempting to build more sustainable food systems.

Elucidating key differences as well as commonalities of AFNs in the global North and South can contribute to what Abrahams (2007) calls “globally useful conceptualizations” of AFN. I contend that despite the obvious differences between places like Peru and United States in regards to agricultural histories, practices, cultures, and economies, that alternative food networks can effectively bridge those

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<sup>2</sup> In what follows I use the term Alternative Food Network (AFN) instead of alternative food *movement* because allows for greater flexibility in describing the loose assortment of strategies and processes, organizations, and institutions striving for progressive agrarian change.



divides by suggesting how certain ideas and practices have global applications. In the U.S., the wealth of scholarship, knowledge, and experience accumulated over the past two decades on direct marketing strategies and local food systems can help inform and shape efforts underway to promote domestic markets for organic produce in Peru. Conversely, the long history of development interventions in Peru could inform NGO efforts in the U.S. to promote community food security. These are just two examples, both of which are relevant to the subsequent chapters of this dissertation that suggest a need for greater dialog among AFN advocates and practitioners in the North and South.

AFNs in the global North<sup>3</sup> are a response to global agrarian crises that pose challenges to farmers' livelihoods and to human and ecological health. These networks tend to be consumer-driven, are closely aligned with an organic farming movement, and are associated with direct marketing initiatives that many claim build social ties and strengthen local food systems (Goodman & Goodman, 2009). More recently, critical food studies scholarship has helped drive a food justice discourse that may prove relevant for less developed countries.

Northern AFNs tend to be consumer-driven where consumer preferences for organic and locally grown food, purchased through various direct marketing schemes have become defining features of these networks (Goodman & Goodman, 2009;

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<sup>3</sup> In the discussion that follows the global North encompasses North America, Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand, although I will be focusing mostly on developments in the U.S. where a portion of this research was conducted.

Jarosz, 2007). Small-scale producers recognized early on that there was price premium to be had for organic produce, and their economic needs remain a focal point of the organic movement (Allen, 2004; Guthman, 2003). Many scholars have attempted to shift the focus from the production-consumption dynamic to one based on civically engaged agriculture (Lyson, 2004) or food justice (Alkon, & Mares, 2012) that emphasize the socio-political as well as economic dimension of AFNs. Ultimately, for most people involved in these networks their participation can be measured in dollars spent on local and organic food.

Grounded in counter-culture sensibilities, organic agriculture in the U.S. emerged in opposition to an industrializing food system perceived as destructive to the environment and family farms. The epitome of what Belasco refers to as the “countercuisine,” the notion of organic was able to encompass “the three stands of therapeutic self-enhancement, consumerist self-protection, and alternative production,” all under one banner (1989, p. 69). Organic in this sense was a catch all for alternative living that was socially conscious, beneficial to one’s health and the environment, and supported a mode of production that favored small-scale farmers. In this earliest phase of the movement, the perception was that organic farms were diversified and built soil through composting and green manures; they provided a fresher product by necessity, without the distribution infrastructure of large operations, or the chemicals used to preserve a products shelf life (Belasco, 1989).

While such perceptions still exist, the conventionalization of organic agriculture—industrial methods of production by large-scale corporate interests—brought about a need for a shift of movement framing accomplished through an emphasis on local food systems. In Northern-based AFN “the global becomes the universal logic of capitalism and the local the point of resistance to this global logic” (DuPuis, & Goodman, 2005, p. 359). With the meaning of organic becoming lost in the corporate milieu, the local became the new rallying point, offering consumers greater assurance of the qualities and values of their produce by “knowing their farmer”. The local also holds the promise of rural economic development by keeping money circulating in a circumscribed within a distinct geographic region of producers. However, just as the meaning of organic has become contested with the conventionalization thesis (Buck, Getz, & Guthman, 1997; Coombs, & Campbell, 1998), so too with singular interpretations of “the local,” thus resulting in the call for a “reflexive localism” that acknowledges social, cultural, and economic distinctions across local geographies (DuPuis, & Goodman, 2005). Critical interpretations of the local notwithstanding, direct marketing initiatives are still primary means through which AFN can promote rural economic development.

Northern AFNs have focused on direct marketing initiatives whereby farmers sell produce directly to consumers. Such initiatives thereby shorten the supply chain, allowing farmers to capture more of the profit from their produce that would otherwise go to intermediaries. Such and promoting social embeddedness in economic transactions. Farmers’ markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

box schemes, and community gardens are also said to promote a more civically engaged agriculture where social relations play a greater role in economic transactions (DeLind, 2002; Lyson, 2004). These are the spaces where alternative marketing arrangements and engagements with the food systems are made visible.

Importantly, such critical interpretations of the local paved the way for broader social and economic justice critiques of AFN that began to question normative assumptions about things like the social embeddedness of direct marketing initiatives (Hinrichs, 2001). Critical food studies question the ability of market-oriented agrarian change to address structural challenges in the food system related to racial and class inequalities (Alkon & Mares, 2012; Allen, 2000; 2004; Guthman, 2008). This area of scholarship has also put forward the concept of food justice as a way to critically examine how AFN could be expanded to provide greater food security to low income neighborhoods, and affect broader political changes regarding things like farm and food system worker rights. A critical approach to studying and promoting AFNs is arguably even more relevant in the global South where affluent consumers are scarce, poverty and inequality relatively commonplace, and markets for organic produce inaccessible both geographically and economically for many rural producers.

Southern AFNs are under-theorized, as most Southern-based scholarship is still firmly rooted in development studies and less so in the sociology of agriculture that was the foundation of AFN scholarship in the North. There are, however, parallel

developments taking place in the South promoting local food systems and farmer livelihoods that warrant similar examination. Politically engaged transnational agrarian movements employing the concepts of food sovereignty and agroecology have made enormous strides in securing access to land for dispossessed farmers and inspiring national legislation that promotes the development of local and regional food systems (Edelman, & Kay, 2008; McMichael, 2008; Wittman, Desmarais, & Wiebe, 2010). Supporting small-scale farmers and local food systems are just two commonalities between movements in both more and less developed countries. The differences between peasant-based movements of the South and consumer-driven movements of the North are as obvious as the distinctions between more and less developed countries. Less obvious, and what this research aims to make clear, are the opportunities that emerge for creating more sustainable food systems through the cross pollination of ideas and practices associated with AFN. Fortunately, small but growing fields of scholarship have set the precedent for research that attempts to bridge academic and geographic divides.

#### Bridging Theoretical and Practical Divides in AFN

All too often, disciplinary divides exacerbate North-South dichotomies where distinct methodologies and theoretical frameworks are used to understand and address similar problems like poverty, inequality, livelihood vulnerability, and environmental justice. Making a call for increasing cross fertilization among academic disciplines, Buttel (2001) writes:

Individual sociologists of agriculture largely remain specialists in developed-country or Southern agri-food systems. The bulk of the rural sociology-driven work in agrarian studies is quite Eurocentric or U.S.A.-centric. Little groundwork has been laid for a sociology of agriculture that addresses simultaneously the agrarian change issues of both North and South. This is a particularly discouraging state of affairs given the numerous common trends in and interchanges between the sociology of agriculture and sociology of development (Buttel, 2001, p. 30).

One way to effectively close this gap and create a more unified theory of (progressive) agrarian change, is to apply scholarship on alternative food networks in the global North to Southern contexts where some farmers' markets and community gardens closely resemble those in the North. Furthermore, it is important to theorize how ideas and practices related to AFNs move from one place to another, the mechanisms by which ideas and practices are most effectively transferred (Stringer et al, 2008).

This dissertation explores the transferability of AFN ideas and practices by applying theoretical frameworks from AFN in the North, to the developing country context of Peru. It is a distinct approach to theory building that has precedents in development studies (Maxwell, 1998; Wilson & Rigg, 2003), and has been carried out more recently by agro-food scholars studying geographic contexts in both the North and South. Concepts like food sovereignty, developed in the South by primarily

peasant-based movements have been adopted by local food system advocates in the North (Fairbairn, 2012; Block, Chávez, Allen, & Ramirez, 2012; Alkon & Mares, 2012), while specific AFN direct marketing strategies most common in the North are being implemented in very different Southern contexts (Abrahams, 2007; Cody, 2014; Friedberg & Goldstein, 2011). Expanding the geographic frame of reference of AFNs allows for a more nuanced understanding of their origins, salience, and potential success.

Spurred in part by increasing interconnectivity resulting from economic globalization, scholars in the late 1990s began to consider the potential of breaking down the North-South divisions that have isolated the sociology of development from the sociology of agriculture. Studies range from the examination of poverty and social exclusion indicators<sup>4</sup> in the North (Maxwell, 1998), to the application of Northern-based post-productivist frameworks in the South (Wilson, & Rigg, 2003). Others attempt to apply Southern-based development sector methodologies in the North (Korf, & Oughton, 2006; Goodman, & Goodman, 2009). Common threads in each of these studies are how to understand and address rural poverty in both the North and South and the possibilities that emerge from opening a dialog between North and South in academic scholarship and development sector interventions.

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<sup>4</sup> Poverty and social exclusion in this context encompass material well-being in the form of relative income, as well as measurements of inequality, political participation, education, and employment (Maxwell, p. 21, 1998).

As a way to spur “fertile dialog between North and South,” Maxwell (1998) considers a series of questions that suggest poverty and social exclusion (PSE) are concepts with universal relevance. He asks:

First, are there new comparisons, or lessons to be drawn across geographical boundaries, about the characteristics, causes and remedies of PSE? Second, does the rapid increase in PSE in the North signal a new convergence between North and South? And third, are there theories to hand which will expose connections between PSE in North and South (1998, p. 20)?

While cautioning against a grand meta-theory that would encompass all aspects of PSE in the both North and South, the author does suggest that increasing levels of PSE in the North “blurs the boundary” between North and South, while also challenging existing theory (1998, p. 28). The point is not to simply export theory from North to South, or vice versa, but rather to acknowledge the common challenges in pressing issues like food insecurity and to compare and contrast interventions in more and less developed countries. These studies describe attempts to interrogate poverty and social exclusion indicators (Maxwell, 1998), post-productivist discourse (Wilson, & Rigg, 2003), and participatory rural appraisal and livelihood analysis (Korf, & Oughton, 2006) in a global context. A similar approach is taken in this dissertation where ideas surrounding farmer’s market participation and subject formation in community garden settings, developed and applied in Northern contexts, are applied instead to a developing country. Expanding the geographic scope of



scholarly research in this way opens up possibilities for reflexive learning opportunities between the North and South. Development studies are not the only field where this kind of work is taking place. Similar work is being done with AFN scholarship.

Research questions in recent literature exploring the relevance of food sovereignty in the North ask how the concept is being reframed (Fairbairn, 2012), how it might be applied to community food security projects (Block et al., 2012), and whether in fact food sovereignty shares common political goals with an emerging food justice movement (Alkon, & Mares, 2012). Findings from my research reinforce critical interpretations of AFNs in the US by highlighting how food sovereignty, at least in discourse if not in practice, opposes neoliberalism and the corporate food regime. In this way, researchers have heralded this concept as a way to “facilitate attention to structural discrimination of all kinds” (Fairbairn, 2012, p. 227) that “would allow food activists to truly locate sources of injustice in the corporate food regime and its intersection with local, national, and global policy food justice more broadly” (Alkon, & Mares 2012, p. 358). The application of food sovereignty, a concept clearly rooted in Southern AFN, to Northern research sites highlights the need for deeper political engagement among Northern food system scholars and practitioners.

Attempts to theorize the emergence of Southern AFN are sparse. There are, however, two notable examples of scholarly research based on empirical data from

the South that examine direct marketing strategies and local food movements through frameworks developed in the North. Friedberg and Goldstein (2011) investigate an attempt to develop a CSA box-scheme in Nairobi, Kenya. Abrahams (2007) develops a conceptualization of alternative food networks specific to the global South (using data from South Africa). These studies opens up discussions of poverty, development, and the “historical forces” and “contemporary conditions” under which alternative food initiatives either “take root of whither” (Friedberg, & Goldstein 2011), and are increasingly relevant as AFN become more globalized.

Studying the emergence of AFNs in the developing world allows for scholars to reflect on the particularities of these contexts, what makes them distinct from Northern sites, in addition to what they have in common. According to Abrahams, debates around AFN in the North have been mired in talk of consumption and the local, to the exclusion of “developing world issues” such as “poverty, food security, and cultural diversity” (2007, p. 98). Yet these “developing world issues” are not in fact limited to countries in the South. According to Abrahams:

...beyond the consumption debate, emergent themes in a study on AFN in the south have relevance to agrofood studies in an era of urban poverty and cultural diversity in the south and the north. Alternative food networks articulated in the south do not simply offer a developing world perspective on AFN, but should challenge a hitherto northern and exclusionary conception of

AFN and propose a globally usefully conception of alternative geographies of food. (2007, p. 98).

The dual foci on urban poverty and cultural diversity in the context of South African alterative food networks allows for a “theorizing back from South to the North” (Hughes, 2005, p. 502).

Initiatives to support food justice in the US, like those described by Alkon and Mares (2012), would seem well aligned with this “developing world articulation,” because:

AFN in the south illustrate that while it is crucial to examine the geographic, socio-economic and institutional contexts from where particular types of AFN emerge, issues like cultural food networks and accessible, alternative food provisioning for poorer populations are increasingly applicable to other contexts (Abrahams, 2007, p.109).

A more in depth look into the agrarian political economy of different context also provides insights in the potential for AFNs in the North and South to continue to support small-scale farmers and consumers of diverse economic, racial, and cultural backgrounds.

In their emblematic study of AFN in the South, Friedberg and Goldstein (2011) present a case study of a CSA box scheme introduced by an NGO in Nairobi to link local producers with mostly affluent development sector workers and

expatriates in the city. This study raises important questions about development sector institutions, interventions, and histories within a given region. These insights, similar to those of Abrahams (2007), could be applied across dramatically different geographic contexts. It is the authors' approach to theory building, and to conceptualizing globally useful ideas and practices in AFN, I have found most useful in developing my own research agenda.

These studies and others that attempt to integrate scholarly research from across geographic and academic divides lay the foundation for much of the theoretical work in the following chapters and the conclusions I drawn from this research. Ultimately, close attention to the context in which AFN are being implemented is a prerequisite for success, something long understood, at least in theory, among development circles and a useful lesson for AFN practitioners in the North. Other lessons learned by examining AFN in the South that could be applied in the North: community participation is key to any development initiative; scholars, advocates, activists must maintain a reflexive awareness as to our own positions in these initiatives; attention needs to be paid to the cultural and historical forces that shape food systems where alternatives are being implemented or researched; and lastly, the insight that culturally diverse communities and the urban poor face similar challenges in North and South around issue of food access and culturally appropriate food.

## **MESA and Methodology**

My involvement with MESA began in 2009 when I contacted the executive director about a conducting a possible research project. I had found MESA on the internet, and was interested in exploring questions related to the transferability of ideas and practices associated with organic agriculture. MESA saw my research as an opportunity to receive feedback about the efficacy of the program, although my research was not designed to be evaluative. My research with MESA has been ongoing ever since and has included three separate rounds of data collection, two in South America and one in the US. I have also taken part in numerous orientation weekends with newly arriving stewards, and exit seminars, the two times a year when all the stewards are together in the same place.

My relationship with the organization and staff has evolved over time, and in 2011 I accepted a position on MESA's board of directors, a position that I continue to hold to this day. Understandably, there will be concerns among readers about a conflict of interests between my position as a researcher, and as a board member committed to promoting the goals of the organization. Firstly, my research was not designed solely to evaluate program efforts, although data collected has provided opportunities for reflection by MESA staff on the efficacy of the program and how it might be improved. Secondly, the following data is less about MESA per se, than it is about alternative food systems and organic agriculture in international perspectives. Lastly, I believe I have maintained a necessary degree of objectivity in designing, collecting, and presenting this data that has in no way been biased towards presenting MESA in a positive light regardless of outcomes. That said, being able to work

closely with staff, getting involved in program development, and having access to host and stewards applications, as well as a relatively unexplored trove of survey data, has been invaluable in informing this current work. These close ties have given me extraordinary insights into the organization and the progressive agrarian change they have facilitated in communities around the world.

Fieldwork consisted of numerous structured and semi-structured interviews conducted in Spanish and English; participant observations working in the fields, farms, or gardens; and extensive field notes based on long conversations with stewards, community and NGO leaders, *campesinos*, and pioneers of “organic” agriculture. The first round of exploratory research was conducted in Peru and Ecuador in 2009. I sent an email to a list of approximately fifty MESA alumni in Peru and Ecuador, explaining my interest in meeting individuals who were actively engaged in agricultural pursuits. This round of data collection was meant to get a sense of what kinds of activities MESA alumni were engaged in that built off their experience in the US. Particular focus was paid to individuals who received funding from MESA to develop what the organization calls Home Country Projects<sup>5</sup>. After receiving responses from seven individuals (many of the email addresses were inactive), I ultimately met with five different stewards, and visited four potential research sites, three in Peru and one in Ecuador, over the course of four weeks. Each of the sites in Peru is featured in chapters three and four respectively.

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<sup>5</sup> The Home Country Projects are designed to facilitate the transfer of knowledge back to the participant’s home country by providing seed capital for MESA participants. In this way, the project can be specifically catered to meet the needs of a community, as defined by a community member who has been through the program.

In the second round of data collection in 2010, I spent two months conducting interviews on MESA host farms, with hosts and stewards, in order to better understand motivations of both parties and to see first-hand the kinds of farms involved in the exchange. I was particularly interested to know what stewards imagined they were going to take back to their home communities, their impressions of their experience in the US, and what similarities and differences they were finding with their communities back in Peru and Ecuador.

During this round of fieldwork I traveled to 12 out of 28 active host farms (43%) in California, New Mexico, Arkansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New York. On these farms I met with 17 out of 34 (50%) stewards from either Peru or Ecuador, amounting to 25 semi-structured interviews with both hosts and stewards. These data are analyzed within the contexts of experiential learning and on-farm apprenticeships in chapter two, where I examine the elements of the exchange stewards perceived as most transferable, and why.

The third round of data collection forms the core of the data presented in the case studies from Peru. I returned to Peru in 2011 and arranged extended stays with alumni in three different parts of the country who were actively engaged in organic farming in some fashion. In the North, I returned to Lamud and the community garden where Maria teaches organic farming to the local Club de Madres, the focus of the first case study. The second research site was in Lima, and a region to the south of the city with a large concentration of MESA alumni. Here I lived and worked on a

small organic farm with two MESA alumni, and conducted interviews with three others, one of whom was working with a local “organic” NGO, and helping organize a cooperative of organic farmers.

In Lima I conducted additional interviews with a steward selling valued-added dairy products at the farmers’ market, who I met initially in 2009; the head of the organic agriculture department at La Molina; farmers in the organic cooperative; and with leaders of two different “organic” NGOs. These interviews flesh out the context for the emerging market for organic produce in Peru. These data are used to illustrate commonalities and differences between the burgeoning domestic market for organic produce in Peru, and the scholarship on farmers’ markets and market-based alternative food initiatives in the US.

Interspersed throughout these rounds of extended fieldwork, I attended annual meetings with MESA staff, numerous steward orientations at a farm in the California Bay Area, and exit seminars with departing stewards. I used these opportunities to meet a diverse constituency of MESA stewards, and made contacts I would ultimately see again in Peru. These events also provided opportunities to get an overall impression of the organization. MESA and the kind of agricultural exchange they promote is one possible venue for building on the “alternative geographies of globalization.” This research serves as a starting point for exploring the relevance of particular alternative food strategies in an international context.

## **Chapter Overview**



The three case studies presented here contribute to “globally useful conceptualization of AFN” by demonstrating how organic agriculture, farmer’s markets, and community gardens, have similar effects in more and less developed countries. Adding a Southern perspective sheds new light on issues related to agrarian change, rural livelihoods, and transferability of organic farming practices. Each chapter presents distinct research questions and theoretical frameworks relevant to their specific contexts.

Chapter 2 explores MESA stewards’ perceptions of transferability related to organic farming ideas and practices they experienced on their host farms. Institutions of higher education and work-study abroad programs have been instrumental in internationalizing sustainable agriculture education. Informal educational opportunities in the form of internships and apprenticeships have become relatively common features of the organic agriculture landscape in the United States. My research examined an international agricultural exchange program that effectively combines these two emerging fields of study exploring how exchange participants perceive the transferability of their organic farming experience in the U.S., to their home countries in Peru and Ecuador. While the cross-border/transnational nature of the exchange program examined is not unique, the inverse flow of people in the exchange (from South to North) examined in this study allows for a new perspective on the value of agricultural exchanges. Learning experiences and host farms vary considerably, leading some participants to be more optimistic than others about how well organic farming practices on their respective farms could be adopted to their

home country contexts. Ultimately, this study suggests that the most valuable elements of international agricultural exchange reside not with the diffusion of agricultural innovations, but with how cross-cultural experiential learning promotes critical reflection on place appropriate production.

In chapter 3, an organic farmers' market in Lima, Peru, serves as a case study to examine developments in the domestic market for organic produce in Peru. Drawing from interview data and participant observations with pioneering organic farmers and NGOs affiliated with the farmers' market, this chapter investigates how a developing country context reaffirms and/or challenges alternative food network (AFN) conceptualizations derived from Northern research sites. The aim of this chapter is to expand our understanding of alternative food networks in a global context. Findings suggest that while the farmers' market in Peru replicates many challenges and opportunities ascribed to similar market-based initiatives in the global North, the developing country context encourages a different reading of these similarities. This exploratory examination of an AFN in Peru suggests that this organic farmers' market has created novel economic opportunities for ecologically-minded entrepreneurs and organic farmers in rural communities far from the point of sale. Although constrained by a relatively small demographic of affluent, conscientious consumers, the organic market demonstrates the potential to improve rural livelihoods while raising consumer awareness about the benefits of organic agriculture.

Chapter 4, the final case study, explains the emergence of what I call “organic subjects” in the context of a community garden (CG) in a rural community in Northern Peru. I draw on existing theories of subject formation to consider how the intersection of ideology and practice within a particular socio-historical context produces an organic subjectivity. I argue that the making of organic subjects in the CG in Peru is the result of three primary influences: 1) the changing agrarian context in the community marked by the recent rise of conventional farming practices, 2) the influence of the garden organizer as the agent of an organic ideology, and 3) the material practices associated with CG participation which include attending educational workshops and the workings of a voluntary association. The CG in Peru reinforces the idea that CGs produce subjects, and that such subjects could well be oriented towards an agenda of agrarian change that promotes environmental awareness and ecological farming practices, key elements of emerging alternative food networks in the global North and South.

Applying scholarship on alternative food movements from the global North to rural contexts in the global South provides “globally useful” theoretical insights in addition to potential material benefits for small-scale farmers through economic gains and improved food security. The Peruvian contexts where I conducted this research contribute to broader understandings of alternative food initiatives and to agrarian change more broadly. Ultimately, these case studies suggest there are benefits to this kind of North-South exchange of ideas and practices related to sustainable/organic agriculture.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Organic farming transferability and international exchange: A case study of the Multinational Exchange for Sustainable Agriculture**

#### **Abstract**

Institutions of higher education and work-study abroad programs have been instrumental in internationalizing sustainable agriculture education. Informal educational opportunities in the form of internships and apprenticeships have become relatively common features of the organic agriculture landscape in the United States. This research examines an international agricultural exchange program that effectively combines these two emerging fields of study exploring how exchange participants perceive the transferability of their organic farming experience in the U.S., to their home countries in Peru and Ecuador. Learning experiences and host farms vary considerably, with some participants more optimistic than others about how well organic farming practices on their respective farms could be adopted to their home country contexts. While the cross-border/transnational nature of the exchange program examined is not unique, the inverse flow of people in the exchange (from South to North) examined in this study allows for a new perspective on the value of agricultural exchanges and the perceived transferability of organic farming ideas and practices. Ultimately, this study suggests that the most valuable elements of international agricultural exchange reside not with the diffusion of agricultural innovations, but with how cross-cultural experiential learning promotes critical reflection on place appropriate production.

Alternative food networks, like the conventional agri-food systems to which they are opposed, are becoming increasingly global in scope. Notably, efforts to promote the “internationalization” of sustainable agriculture education have begun to gain traction in institutions of higher education, mostly in the global North (Bruening & Frick, 2004; Schroeder-Moreno, Clark, Byker & Zhao, 2012). Across North America and Western Europe, colleges and universities have begun incorporating sustainable agriculture/food systems and agroecology into their curricula, oftentimes accompanied by experiential learning components (Francis, Jordan, Porter, Breland,

Lieblein, Salomonsson, & Langer 201; Parr & Trexler, 2011). International work-study abroad programs are one such component, promoted as a way to highlight—indeed, to have participants experience—the interconnectivity of global agri-food systems, and to provide students with valuable cross-cultural experiences (Jones & Bjelland, 2004; McLaughlin & Johnson, 2006; Zhai & Scheer, 2002).

Focusing on international agricultural exchange participants from the global South, this paper examines how participants perceive the transferability of their organic farming experiences in the U.S. to their home communities in Peru and Ecuador. In so doing, this research engages with a growing scholarship on the internationalization of agricultural education while also drawing conclusions relevant to the literatures on farming apprenticeships and work-study abroad programs. While the cross-border/transnational nature of the exchange program examined is not unique, the inverse flow of people in the exchange (from South to North) examined in this study allows for a new perspective on the value of agricultural exchanges and the perceived transferability of organic farming ideas and practices.

In operation since 1997, the Multinational Exchange for Sustainable Agriculture (MESA) places international exchange participants (“stewards,” in the parlance of the organization<sup>6</sup>) on a variety of organic host farms in the U.S. With partner organizations in countries like Peru, Ecuador, Thailand, and Ghana, MESA is one of the few non-profit organizations in the U.S. that offers J-1 visas for training

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<sup>6</sup> I use the term “stewards” throughout this study to refer specifically to participants in the MESA program.

and cultural exchange related to sustainable and organic agriculture. Stewards typically spend from nine months to one year on their respective host farms, enabling them to experience a full growing season and become steeped in the culture of organic farming as practiced in the U.S. The overall intent of the program is to assist stewards in their efforts to build more sustainable food systems in their home countries and communities. In effect, MESA combines elements of a work-study abroad program with that of an on-farm apprenticeship, both of which are key elements of a growing movement to promote and internationalize sustainable agriculture education (Shroeder-Moreno et al. 2012; Parr & Van Horn, 2006).

In addition to this dual character, MESA's uniqueness is reflected in the population whom it seeks to support—and the resulting direction of knowledge flows: stewards come from countries with populations still largely dependent on their agricultural livelihoods where certified organic agriculture, if it exists at all, is mostly for export markets. These individuals often enter the program with at least some higher education in agronomy or related fields, and with a strong commitment to serve their home communities, usually in some advisory capacity.<sup>7</sup> Rarely do they imagine farming as being their primary livelihood strategy. Moreover, because the exchange is facilitated by a U.S.-based non-profit organization, it differs from U.S.-based institutions of higher education administering study/work abroad experiences. These notable distinctions present an opportunity to examine how participants

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<sup>7</sup> In some instances stewards are recruited through MESA partnerships with universities or NGOs affiliated with these universities. Others in more remote locations discovered MESA through radio broadcasts sponsored by partner organizations in these countries.

perceive the compatibility of organic agriculture as practiced in the U.S. with the agrarian contexts in their respective countries.

Examining a 2010 cohort of MESA participants, this paper asks: what ideas and practices did stewards perceive as transferable? What did they see as obstacles to the transferability of certain ideas and practices, and why? And what then, can be considered the most valuable aspect of the exchange? Stewards did indeed perceive a degree of compatibility between organic agriculture in the U.S. and certain agrarian contexts in Peru and Ecuador, especially where there are pockets of relatively affluent consumers willing and able to a price premium. However, I argue that what stewards perceive as being most readily transferable are the non-profit driven beliefs and values associated with organic farming they experienced on their host farms, a way of living that revalorizes the rural and seeks to provide healthy food grown without chemicals to local communities. Ideas and values regarding organic agriculture are more fluid and adaptable than production techniques that require costly inputs like drip irrigation, or niche marketing strategies that require populations of affluent consumers, both of which are relatively difficult to come by in less developed countries. Ultimately, this study suggests that the most valuable elements of international agricultural exchange reside not with the diffusion of agricultural innovations, but with how cross-cultural experiential learning promotes critical reflection on place appropriate production.

### **Sustainable Agriculture Education and International Exchange**

The literature on agricultural exchange is primarily concerned with demonstrating the potential benefits of higher education programs that support such exchanges, how they complement sustainable agriculture education by providing an experiential learning component to the curriculum, the potential barriers to implementing such programs, and/or the logistic and cultural challenges associated with sending university students from the global North to work/study in less developed countries (Bruening & Frick, 2004; Epprecht, 2004; Irani, Place & Friedel, 2006; Schroeder-Moreno et al., 2012; Wingenbach et al., 2003). Research on these kinds of international agriculture programs has found that students expand their perspective on global agriculture, gain knowledge and skills related to their specific farming interests, and become more self-confident and culturally aware (Chrisman & Ruland 2001; Wingenbach, Boyd, Lindner, Dick, Arispe, & Haba, 2003; Zhai & Scheer, 2002). Furthermore, service-learning and/or work-study programs provide learning experiences whereby students become more aware of site appropriate sustainable agriculture practices, and of the moral and ethical dilemmas associated with working-studying in a developing country (Bruening & Frick, 2004; Epprecht, 2004; Wingenbach, 2006).

A different approach to learning about sustainable agriculture, one not necessarily affiliated with intuitions of higher education, is that of on-farm apprenticeships. Student-run farms, affiliated mostly with land-grant universities, are a mainstay of sustainable agriculture education and have received significant attention in the scholarship (Reeve, Hall, & Kalkman, 2014; Sayre, 2011; Parr & Trexler,



2011; Parr, Trexler, Khanna, & Battisti, 2007). Relatively little attention, by comparison, has focused on farming apprenticeships on production farms that provide valuable learning opportunities and points of entry for beginning farmers (Barnett, 2012; Carey, Kelly, Hendrickson, Nagengast, Quinn, Volland, & Kumar, 2006; MacAuley, 2014). Instead, research on organic farming apprenticeships has focused on the legal ramifications for farmers who “employ” intern labor (Kalyuzhny, 2011), and the rise in beginning farmer training programs that attempt to provide greater structure to the learn-by-doing model of apprenticeships (Niewolny & Lillard, 2010).

A subset of the literature on farming apprenticeships focuses on less formal training opportunities on organic farms within an international context, making it particularly relevant for this study. The most notable organization facilitating these kinds of informal training opportunities is Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF). Often framed as a kind of volunteer tourism, WWOOF is an organization that links a network of organic host farms around the world with volunteers eager to give their labor in exchange for room and board, and an opportunity to experience/learn something about farming in a foreign context (Maycock, 2008). WWOOF is part of a growing trend of agri-tourism that supports small scale organic farmers by supplying them with ostensibly free labor<sup>8</sup>. Research on “WWOOFing” tends to focus on motivations of host farmers and volunteers in more developed countries like the U.S., Canada, and New Zealand (McIntosh &

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<sup>8</sup> Through my earlier research on beginning farmers, many of whom hosted WWOOFers, it was evident that there are also hidden costs that come with hosting inexperienced volunteers. These costs range from time spent training to time spent counseling disaffected youth that harbored romantic notions of bucolic farm life.

Bonnemann, 2006; McIntosh & Campbell, 2001; Ord & Amer, 2010; Yamamoto & Engelsted, 2014). Like many of the MESA stewards in this research, WWOOFers tend to emphasize the benefits of “intercultural learning” over the technical aspects of their farming experience (Ord & Amer, 2010; McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006). McIntosh and Bonnemann, who write on WWOOF New Zealand, articulate the potential for this kind of agricultural exchange/tourism:

Because of the philosophies of the WWOOF organization and its network of member farms, the WWOOF experience may have the ability to heighten understanding between people from different cultural, social or ideological backgrounds, ‘endear’ visitors to rural regions in support of wider economic development initiatives, engender or raise appreciation, care and concern for the natural environment, support for the organic movement or an alternative lifestyle, and encourage self-reflection and personal development among visitors (p. 97).

Despite the significant distinctions between MESA and WWOOF in regards to program support and structure, there are strong similarities in regards to the aims and potential benefits for both hosts and their volunteers. These benefits go beyond inexpensive labor (for hosts) or low budget travelling (for volunteers). Cross-cultural educational experiences on these farms are enriching in their own right, often outweighing any potential benefits derived from learning technical skills related to organic farming.

Scant research has been conducted on the few exchange programs that provide opportunities to study international agricultural apprentices working-studying in the U.S., especially those focused on sustainable and organic agriculture. One rare study that does examine the experience of participants from less developing countries coming to the U.S. reveals that technical knowledge was low on the list of valuable attributes ascribed to the experience (Jones & Dos Santos, 2008). Instead, participant surveys suggest that increased cultural understanding and personal growth were the most valuable aspects of the exchange, not unlike findings from study abroad participants from the U.S. who travel abroad (Dweyer & Peters, 2004), or the MESA steward in this research. Given the existing scholarship on both the internationalization of sustainable agriculture education and on-farm apprenticeships, important questions about the *utility* of international exchange remain unanswered. In the case of this research, these questions revolve around perceptions of transferability, and the compatibility of organic farming as practiced in the U.S. with developing country contexts.

## **Methods**

In order to investigate what elements of the exchange stewards found most transferable, or not, I conducted a total of 25 semi-structured interviews with a convenience sample of MESA host farmers and their respective stewards from the 2010 cohort. I interviewed host farmers to learn about the various characteristics of host farms, including their approaches to training and mentoring. Interviews were

conducted with 12 out of 28 (43%) hosts from seven states across the U.S. including California, New Mexico, Arkansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New York. Interview questions for hosts revolved around understanding their interest in participating in the MESA program and their approach to on-farm education which ranged from a pure “learn by doing” model, to one that incorporates on-farm educational workshops and research experiments. These particular farms were selected based on their diverse geographic locations and farm types, their responsiveness to an initial email inquiry outlining my research agenda, and for the presence of South American stewards that compose the second set of data.

Interviews with MESA stewards focused on how they might be able to apply or transfer what they were learning back in their home countries. Transferability in this context refers not only to practical agricultural knowledge and skills acquired during the exchange, but also to less tangible ideas about the benefits of organic agriculture for farmers and communities. I conducted formal interviews with 16 out of 34 (47%) South American stewards out of a total of 39 stewards who participated in the program in 2010.<sup>9</sup> I choose to focus on stewards from Peru and Ecuador because for a number of years the majority of MESA stewards came from these two countries. With the help of a U.S. sponsored loan program their governments were able to subsidize program costs like airfare and English language classes<sup>10</sup>. I also

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<sup>9</sup> The remaining 5 stewards were from Kenya, Ghana, and Thailand.

<sup>10</sup> Somewhat ironically, these subsidies were part of a PL480 (Food for Peace Act) loan package to Peru and Ecuador, a program most commonly associated with the promotion of conventional methods of production by the U.S. government and agribusiness (Patel, 2013). A lesser known part of PL480 (Title V) includes a provision to support farmer exchange programs like MESA.

planned on conducting subsequent research on program outcomes with stewards from these countries (because of the relatively large sample size), so focusing on stewards from Peru and Ecuador in the U.S. provided continuity, and in some cases, access to communities in Peru where I ultimately did conduct research with MESA alumni (Cody, 2014).

In addition to these semi-structured interviews, substantial data were generated through participant observations that took place on MESA hosts farms over the course of three months. Farm visits lasted anywhere from a few hours up to two days, during which time I would tour the farm, attend meals or other farm-related events with stewards and their hosts, and observe (or sometimes participate) with stewards and hosts at work on the farm. Through these experiences I was able to capture a sense of the frustration and joy, exuberance and exhaustion of stewards and their hosts as they attempted to navigate cultural differences, labor requirements, and learning expectations in the context of an organic farming apprenticeship.

Additional data for this research, in the form of field notes and steward surveys, are a result of the close working relationship I have had with the MESA organization beginning in 2010, which is when I started this research project and shortly thereafter took a position on MESA's board of directors. For three consecutive years (2010-2013), I attended MESA steward orientations and exit seminars in California, the two times per year where all the stewards are together in the same place. Frequent discussion with MESA staff revolved around things like

challenges host farmers face in providing meaningful learning experiences. These discussions contributed to a detailed understanding of how the program functions. I also analyzed open-ended responses from monthly steward self-evaluations and a mid-program survey conducted by MESA, both designed to assess steward satisfaction and progress towards meeting learning objectives. Open-ended responses to questions about daily activities, overall program satisfaction, and the perceived transferability of the experience, were used to flesh out interview data and participant observations.

### **Background on MESA Hosts and Participants**

MESA host farmers are more alike than they are different; they all see their farms contributing to a more sustainable food system by supporting local economies and growing food without the use of pesticides or herbicides. These twelve farms represent the producers in the growing alternative food movement in the U.S. predicated on closing the gap between producers and consumers. In terms of production, all of the farms in this study are growing organic produce and/or livestock. The majority of farms are growing mixed vegetables, fruits and berries, and/or cut flowers on between five and thirty acres, and are selling their produce through direct marketing channels like farmers markets or CSA's.

There are exceptions, however, in regards to what farms are producing and how they engage with the market. Two of the twelve farms do not grow vegetables; one is a dairy in upstate New York that sells grass-fed milk, the other is a mixed

livestock operation in Kentucky that raises pastured pigs, chickens, turkeys, and cattle. Two other host farms do not sell their produce at all. They are primarily involved in research and education—one in New Mexico conducted experiments and seed trials for an organic seed company<sup>11</sup>; the other in California offers classes, workshops, and internships teaching innovative methods of organic production.

All host farmers engage in some kind of mentoring and training with their MESA stewards, although their strategies vary depending on the “marketness”<sup>12</sup> of the host farm. Methods of training and mentoring range from a pure “learn-by-doing” model used mostly on farms that emphasize production, to experiential learning models on the research and education farms that incorporate hands-on training and instruction with field work. These distinctions are best illustrated by the hosts themselves. For example, on a student-run farm supported for a private liberal arts university, the host states explicitly, “We are an education farm doing events that don’t have a direct financial return.” This particular farm grows mixed vegetables and livestock, and gives students hands-on experience in growing, processing, and marketing produce at the local farmers market and through their CSA, alongside valuable formal educational experiences in the field. These sessions occur every

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<sup>11</sup> While I was conducting this research the seed company had recently been purchased and the new parent company decided the research and educational outreach on this particular farm were not worth funding. The farm operation was dismantled and the MESA steward forced to relocate to a new farm.

<sup>12</sup> Marketness provides a way of accounting for the depth of social embeddedness of the farming operation (Hinrichs 2000). When price reigns supreme, and when individuals are motivated primarily by economic opportunities, levels of marketness are high. When farmers engage in activities that don’t have an immediate economic return, such as spending time training apprentices or hosting events for the local community, they reveal a greater depth of social embeddedness and lower levels of marketness.

week, according to the host, “for forty-five minutes at the end of the day. We cover topics like soil fertility, ecology, compost, solar energy, that’s a part of our offering. All interns and stewards, whoever is here that day will participate, like a class.” Most host farms did not offer such formal training opportunities.

To illustrate the diversity of host farms, compare this university farm to the family owned and operated mixed livestock production farm where stewards engage in fairly routine tasks on their own or with other farms interns. According to this host, “Most of what [the stewards] learned, they’ve learned from observing, and doing, which isn’t a bad way to learn.” He also acknowledged, however, that providing the stewards with a diverse array of duties on the farm is not tantamount to a more formal educational approach: “I need some kind of manual, but also a mini seminar or something. The basics of fence building, livestock management...they need those mini-sessions in there to give more in-depth, structured learning.” Others echoed these sentiments reaffirming their priorities as a production farm suitable to training stewards with little or no organic farming experience. Certainly, differences among host farms influenced stewards’ perceptions of transferability, making any continuity among the stewards all the more remarkable.

Much like their host farms, the significance of stewards’ diversity, in their social background and rural or urban upbringing, is diminished in light of their similarities: they are from the same geographic region of the world that shares agricultural traditions, cultures, and crops; they all have some higher education or



have taken university courses on organic farming; they are all interested in working in an advisory capacity in their home country, and not necessarily in becoming farmers themselves; and they share certain nascent, if not mature, beliefs in the value of organic farming for bodies and the environment. And of course, they are all participating in the same exchange program whose mission is to “connect sustainable farming leaders around the world for participatory training and cross-cultural exchange to strengthen local, resilient food systems worldwide” (mesaprogram.org). As one steward said of his cohort, “Each steward has their own very different perspectives. We are different people, each with their own objectives. But the idea is to see how we can apply what we learn here in this experience, there [in Peru or Ecuador], in accordance with our reality.” This “idea” is what most unites the stewards beyond any of their individual backgrounds or motivations, and despite the differences among their host farms.

Another characteristic uniting this cohort of exchange participants, one that is somewhat surprising—they are not farmers, not really. While most stewards have had some first-hand farming experience either in a research setting or various kinds of family farms or both, none were dependent on agriculture as a livelihood strategy in their home communities. These are educated individuals who have chosen to study agronomy or organic agriculture as way of improving farmer livelihoods in their home countries. Notably, stewards tend to have more higher education experience than their hosts. Of the sixteen individuals in this data set, all but three of them attended a university or vocational school, most of them having earned a bachelor’s

degree in agricultural engineering. Everyone had some experience taking classes related to organic agriculture. Many of the Peruvian stewards, for example, learned about MESA through an organic farming program at The National Agrarian University—La Molina, located in Lima.

MESA stewards represent an interesting aspect of the demographic shift from the country to the city; they often have feet in both worlds, with on-farm and academic experience. A majority of stewards are from families that still have plots of land in the countryside where they grew up helping out on the farm. However, most have strayed from toiling on the land and instead have gravitated towards the university, and/or the NGO sector where they have taken advisory or management roles on organic farms, or farms in transition to organic. Prior to coming to the U.S., a few continued to work part time on their family's farm, but most appear to have secured some sort of agricultural work (at least part-time) off the family farm. In effect, these individuals see themselves as being more like extension agents than market farmers. Motivated by a desire to disseminate information and teach farmers about organic agriculture, few saw themselves farming for their livelihood when they returned.

On their host farms, MESA stewards may do different kinds of work but their amount of work and degree of social interaction off the farm are similar. When MESA stewards sign up for the program they effectively enter into a contract with their host (mediated through MESA) in which they agree to work 40 hours per week.

On the farm running a mixed livestock operation, work often consisted of moving chicken tractors and electric fencing in addition to feeding livestock. Other operations offered a greater diversity of experiences from cultivating and processing cut flowers, to running drip line irrigation and harvesting an array of vegetables that were both foreign and familiar to stewards. Many stewards would help process and package produce that was going into CSA boxes or trucked to the farmers' market.

Interactions with the public included occasional trips to the farmers' market or nearby towns, community events held on the farm, and occasional farming conferences or tours to neighboring farms. Stewards sometimes attended local church services, dinners with their host's families, or outings with fellow apprentices. Constrained by a lack of transportation and their hourly work requirements, stewards spent most of their time on their respective farms.

These distinctions belie a commonality in how stewards perceive the transferability of their experience. Although some were more, some less optimistic about being able to transfer specific farming skills or techniques, many of which I will discuss below, their experience provided them with something much more valuable albeit less tangible. That is, this cross-cultural exchange provided stewards with a frame of reference for thinking about how to improve agricultural livelihoods in their home countries.

### **Perceptions of Transferability: Opportunities and Obstacles**

Steward perceptions about how they could utilize or transfer elements of their experience on their host farms to their home countries ranged from excitedly optimistic to decidedly skeptical. I'll discuss this range of perceptions before elaborating on a theme common to all of the stewards—critical reflections on the self, and farming systems in the U.S and in their home countries. Elements of the exchange MESA stewards perceived as being most transferable can be grouped into two main categories: 1) technical and practical agricultural knowledge and skills, 2) marketing and potential economic benefits. Interestingly, similar categories emerge among those stewards skeptical of the transferability of their experience. Skeptics were less convinced that the U.S. market-driven version of organic agriculture could be adapted to the agrarian contexts in Peru and Ecuador where subsistence production is still common, and where the affluent clientele who could afford the organic price premium are rare. Stewards, however, were not neatly divided into groups that were either optimistic or pessimistic; they often expressed both sentiments. Because of this, the following data is organized not based on groupings of individuals but rather on the ideas and practices that were seen as more or less transferable and why, beginning with those that many stewards believed could be adapted to their home country environments.

When asked what they were learning on the farm that might be applicable in Peru or Ecuador, stewards mentioned a variety of skills and techniques ranging from organic seed production to biodynamic farming methods. Stewards reported learning diverse practical skills specific to their respective host farms. These included learning

how to grow and harvest cut flowers, how to raise pastured poultry, and how to manage a grass fed dairy operation. Crop rotations and the ordered design of row plantings were also seen as valuable elements of their experience. Greenhouses and drip irrigation, ubiquitous technologies on these farms, were the most commonly cited technologies stewards believed would prove valuable back home. The former would help extend the growing season and allow for greater diversity of crops, especially in the highland regions. The latter was seen as an important tool for conserving water, a scarce resource for many rural populations.

Certain stewards perceived transferability in the marketing arrangements they experienced on their farms, specifically the direct marketing channels on which these farmers depend. Market intermediaries perform a valuable service in Peru and Ecuador brokering the sale of produce and often playing a role in getting that produce to market, though at a significant cost to the producer. The prevalence of direct marketing schemes on the host farms—made possible, in part, by the first-world transportation infrastructure and farmers’ ability to purchase the means of transportation—inspired many stewards to consider how such marketing schemes could be adapted in their home communities. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) box schemes were one particular strategy many stewards believed had potential to be developed, especially among those from bigger cities like Lima and Quito where a growing number of consumers are taking an interest in organic agriculture.

In addition to these relatively novel marketing strategies, certain stewards with an eye towards improving farmers' economic livelihoods were impressed by the enormous diversity of produce on their host farms. They were on the lookout for specific crops that they believed might have a market in places like Lima. The diversity of one mid-size organic farm was a surprise to Santiago, a Peruvian steward who said: "In my zone, I've never seen a tomato plant like they have here, all the different colors. And the lettuce; we don't have red lettuce... Here there are plants I didn't know. They are growing colored potatoes here I have never seen in Peru! It is a very good experience." Others like Alberto, saw the biodiversity for its potential marketing opportunities; he was focused on things like the "cost of production, and which crops might work well" in the nascent domestic markets for organic produce in Lima. He also happens to be involved with a cooperative of organic producers south of Lima that is growing in step with the number of consumers in the city demanding certified organic produce.

Stewards who were less optimistic about being able to adapt and/or apply elements of their experience to their communities back home tended to emphasize the incompatibilities between organic farming systems in the U.S. and their home countries, and the related challenges they might face in promoting and implementing U.S.-based organic farming systems. The specific barriers cited include: differences in climate and geography, a lack of affluent consumers in Peru and Ecuador willing to pay the high costs of organic produce, differences regarding market-driven operations and corresponding agrarian ideologies, and/or inaccessible or unaffordable

technologies like drip irrigation or tractors, all common component of U.S. organic farming systems. Even small-scale organic farms in the U.S., like the host farm growing five acres of mixed vegetables and cut flowers, often rely on a tractor for cultivation, black plastic for weed control, and drip lines for irrigation, all of which are relatively inaccessible for all but the most heavily capitalized farmers in Peru and Ecuador. Growing markets for organic produce in the global North have spurred organic exports in the South, but domestic markets for organic produce in Peru and Ecuador remain small (Willer, Lernoud, & Schlatter, 2014).

Differences in climate and geography led some stewards to dismiss the potential value of their experience, even though others seemed to think these same differences were less consequential to their ultimate agricultural ambitions. Stewards from mountainous or tropical regions working on farms in the Southwest or Northeast were skeptical about being grow some of the crops on their host farm back in their home communities. Most, if not all, these stewards are from regions with very different climates and geographies from where they were working in the US, but the stewards who also expressed frustration with their training pointed to these differences as barriers to the transferability of their experience. When asked if there were products on their host farm that could be grown in Peru, one stewards stated unequivocally, “No, because the conditions are different. These are plants of the coast, and I’m from the mountains. Many things here you can’t apply there.”

Stewards also cited challenges in regards to the lack of markets and consumers to support the kind of farming endeavors they were experiencing in the US. In talking about organic markets in Lima, one steward said there is still a general level of distrust hampering the development of organic markets. That is, the development of domestic markets for organic produce in Peru is limited by more than just a lack of consumers able to pay the price premium. Others spoke about the need to educate the consumer saying things like: “I think the problem in Peru, more than markets, is consumer habit. If you promote consumer habits the demand will increase. First you must promote the education of the consumer.” Although, it’s not always about education or awareness, as one steward from Ecuador pointed out. “Here, the entire world has money,” he said, “and they still buy the cheapest product. Then it’s impossible in Ecuador where there is little money.” Even for organic farmers fortunate to grow near cities like Lima, transportation to the market is limited, often requiring multiple buses and taxis when personal transportation isn’t an option.

Another significant perceived barrier to transferability relates to the relatively high levels of marketness among organic farms in the U.S., something stewards saw would be difficult to re-create in their home countries. Two stewards on the same host farm doing a mixed livestock operation were struck by the intensity of the work routine and by the farms focus on profits. Juan said, “the focus of this farm here is to make money. In Peru it’s more survival, it’s not about money. It’s about living daily life, cultural life, people are happy selling one cow every once in a while to buy clothes. That’s the life.” His fellow steward echoed these sentiments saying, “It’s not



relaxed here. They are always stressed. I think they are only thinking of the money... The people of my country I think are happier in general.” Other stewards seemed equally struck by the intensity of the work and the emphasis on productivity and profits. This kind of farming lifestyle based on productivity and profits was as foreign to these stewards as it would be for primarily subsistence farmers in Peru and Ecuador.

In order to transfer U.S. based production techniques and marketing arrangements designed to provide economic income, stewards recognized they would also need to change how farmers in their home countries think about the commercialization of agriculture—a daunting enterprise. In many communities where stewards are from, subsistence production is the norm. According to one steward from a coffee growing region of Peru:

People in San Martin give you the lettuce, instead of selling it for three dollars. People don't value vegetables very much. There are no organic markets in my area. The most common agricultural products are coffee and cacao... In my zone organic can't work because we have everything we need on the farm.

In certain places around Peru and Ecuador where commercial agriculture is already commonplace, organic agriculture is seen as economically feasible, but mostly for export markets. Domestic markets for organic produce are generally seen as limited to the larger urban centers and/or cities popular among tourists, like Cusco and Lima.

Stewards foresaw a variety of challenges to transferring elements of their experience to the home communities like a lack of consumer awareness about the various beneficial aspects of organic agriculture, a lack of affluent consumers willing and able to pay an organic price premium, and difficulties in changing subsistence-oriented production mindsets among rural farmers. These perceived obstacles hint at the kind of critical reflection discussed more below. At the same time, certain technologies and marketing strategies stewards encountered on their farms, such as greenhouses and CSA box schemes, were perceived as transferable and applicable in their home countries. Such variability can be attributed to a variety of factors such as the host farm learning environment, steward motivations, and the differing agrarian contexts in their home communities. I will touch briefly on this notion of variability in the discussion. First, it is important to assess the value of this kind of agricultural exchange given the divergent and sometimes contradictory perceptions of transferability, the final question of this research agenda to which I now turn.

### **The value of international agricultural exchange**

More so than specific farming or marketing skills, this exchange provided stewards the opportunity to learn about themselves, and how best to improve the agricultural livelihoods of farmers in their home communities. The cultural landscape surrounding their respective farms often reinforced their prior commitments to organic farming and inspired new ways of thinking about rural living. While many stewards expressed some degree of ambivalence about the transferability of the

practical elements of the exchange, they spoke with conviction about their organic values and interests in serving as agricultural advisors. These less tangible elements of the exchange seemed most influential in shaping stewards' thinking about how they would apply this experience back home.

The technical and practical elements of the stewards' experience were at times overshadowed by the cultural and ideological facets of what Natalia referred to as an "organic lifestyle." She said, "This is not a very technical experience because I already studied these techniques in the university. For me, this is more for life, to help grow as a person." And for David: "There are many ways you can learn in this experience, because it's not just about organic agriculture; it's about society, culture, personality. Personally, I feel great here." David was also fortunate enough to be placed on the university farm where education was a top priority. His particular organic philosophy went well beyond learning about new and potentially marketable crops. "In the end," he said, "the point of organic agriculture for some is to make money. I think that to do organic agriculture you have to have conviction, to believe in organic agriculture, to eat organic, think in organic, live organic." These beliefs were derived, in part, from an upbringing where he was taught to respect and honor *Pachamama* (rough translation: mother earth), by his parents and grandparents.

In addition to reaffirming prior commitments to organic farming, the exchange experience also provided stewards a novel context from which to examine their own values and the role for certified organic produce in their own country.

There were those who gravitated towards the marketing opportunities, and those for whom the “organic lifestyle” resonated with and reaffirmed pre-existing beliefs about the social and ecological benefits of organic farming. Certain stewards were wary of promoting a certified organic produce sector in Peru, citing risks associated with disenfranchising a group of farmers who grow organically but don’t have a certification, or of turning their traditional way of farming into a business opportunity. This kind of critical reflection was made possible, in part, because she was able to experience first-hand a market-driven approach to organic agriculture on her host farm.

Stewards often reflected on their experience in the U.S. in order to understand how best to serve the communities they are from. According to their MESA applications, most stewards were motivated to participate in this program as a way to receive training that would help them improve farming livelihoods in their home communities. Unlike many of their American counterparts, few stewards imagined their apprenticeship as a stepping stone to farming as a vocation. The scant research that exists on farming apprentices in the U.S. suggests that many of these individuals do aspire to become farmers themselves (Niewolny, & Lillard, 2010). MESA stewards, on the other hand, imagined themselves mostly in advisory roles, helping farmers transition to organic agriculture, or teaching organic methods of production through some sort of demonstration farm. They spoke about their interests organizing farmer collectives and securing public or private funding for grant projects supporting small scale organic agriculture.

Due to the directionality of the exchange, MESA stewards may in fact be ideal candidates for this kind of extension/advisory work by inverting more common flows of knowledge exchange in development work. Instead of a foreigner or foreign NGO entering rural communities with notions about how to improve agricultural livelihoods, MESA stewards have some foreign training, but with a unique insider status in the communities where they may ultimately work. This gives them a unique perspective on working with rural communities of farmers. Some stewards have already had experience working with foreign NGOs and were aware of the potential pitfalls of a community becoming dependent on unreliable external support. For Alicia, the idea of being able to teach farmers in her community *how* to farm was unthinkable. She said:

I don't think I can teach them how to farm; they know how to farm. The thing I can do is to help with organization, look for government money. I have close relations with the community; I'm not going to teach them how to grow. I would be ashamed. I'm thinking I would make a project in the school; teach children who are going to be the next farmers in that place, help them realize the work they are doing is very important.

She went on to describe an experience that encapsulates one of the more promising elements of this kind of agricultural exchange.

One of the main problems is that people don't realize they know these things. I didn't realize that until I came here. For example, my father planted with the

new moon; for me it's natural. When I came here it's like a new science to say when to plant—biodynamic....One thing I have to do is give the value of that knowledge, of how the farmers see themselves.

The exchange then, is not necessarily about learning new agricultural skills, or about how to grow more marketable crops. It is about gaining a different perspective on the things you already know, and on the place you are coming from, by witnessing and experiencing how similar farming practices are applied in a completely different context. This kind of exchange has the potential to uncover hidden knowledge as much as it does produce new knowledge and skills.

#### **Discussion: Understanding transferability and variability**

Examining the comparability of organic farming as practiced in the U.S. with the dramatically different agrarian contexts of Peru and Ecuador is a worthwhile endeavor, especially as alternative food networks become more global in scope (Abrahams, 2007; Cody, 2014; Freidberg, & Goldstein, 2011) The MESA program is an ideal venue for conducting research into the transferability of organic farming practices and ideas among more and less developed countries. Stewards' perceptions of transferability described above point to potential opportunities to improve economic livelihoods of farmers in these developing countries by expanding their domestic markets for organic produce. Interviews also reflect the need for adaptations to these ideas, technologies, and marketing schemes. The cultural elements of the exchange, simply experiencing farming in a foreign country, may ultimately be the

most transferable elements as stewards gain new perspectives on farming in their home countries. Instead of further discussing the specific ideas and practices and how they may or may not be appropriate in developing county context, a line of inquiry that certainly deserves greater research, a different question that arises through this research is about how to explain the variability in stewards perceptions of transferability.

Stewards' perceptions of transferability at either end of the spectrum appear strongly influenced by the degree to which their hosts were able and willing to make education and mentorship a fundamental part of their apprenticeship offering. For example the steward on the college farm that included formal instruction was highly optimistic about being able to transfer and apply what he was learning back home, geographic and socio-economic differences aside. On the other end of the spectrum, stewards on production farm run by hosts relatively new to farming and to managing farm labor were not only disappointed in the educational value of their experience, this seemed to translate in a general pessimism about transferability.

Certain kinds of farms, it would seem, are better suited to educational training than others, the biggest distinction being their degree of marketness. While this finding may not be surprising, it is worth exploring further as the quality of experiential learning through farming apprenticeships has not been differentiated by farm type in the scant literature that exists on the topic. Over all, relatively little is known about *how* learning occurs through on-farm apprenticeships, what *kinds* of

farms are more or less conducive to mentoring and training apprentices, and therefore how farming apprenticeships may translate in other settings. Turning attention to these gaps would help farmer mentors and their apprentices achieve desired learning outcomes while also pointing out potential limitations of “learning-by-doing” on certain kinds of production farms.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, stewards seemed most optimistic about the transferability of the experience not in regards to specific farming or marketing skills, but rather in regards to “growing as a person,” and in how the experience enabled them to critically reflect on farming in their home countries. Stewards were able to experience first-hand a kind of market farming being promoted among affluent populations in cities like Lima, a disillusioning experience for some who saw “organic” boiled down to its economic essence. Others experienced an organic culture or lifestyle that reaffirmed preexisting beliefs and helped uncover hidden knowledge. By experiencing what it is to work and learn in a different country and culture they gained a renewed respect for the importance of being from the communities where they hope to work. In this sense, they are being trained as advisors outside the community only to then return with the knowledge/experience from their training abroad. This illustrates one of the potential benefits of a study abroad program that brings participants to the U.S.

In the end, this study reveals that international agricultural exchange participants are more likely to perceive their experience as transferable or applicable



to their home countries and communities when: they come to see organic agriculture (in the U.S.) as being a proxy for a way of living that supports rural communities and provides consumers access to healthy produce grown according to environmentally sound methods; and they feel the experience has helped them grow as individuals by providing a broader agri/cultural perspective on the world.

Future research in this area could go in a variety of fruitful directions. One such direction might focus on differential outcomes of agricultural apprenticeships by examining how farm type relates to educational offerings. In the context of international agricultural exchange, more work needs to be done to identify in advance specific needs in the exchange participants' home countries. Doing so will promote better alignment between host farm placements and participant motivations/expectations, useful feedback for organizations like MESA. Lastly, assessing the value of international agricultural exchange and the transferability of organic farming practices will ultimately require following up with MESA stewards in Peru and Ecuador to determine what, if anything, has come of their experience in the U.S., a question that will be addressed in the following chapters.

## CHAPTER 3:

### **“La misma realidad de cada lugar es diferente” (“The same reality of each place is different”): A case study of an organic farmers’ market in Lima, Peru**

#### **Abstract**

Studies of alternative food networks have proliferated in Europe and North America while relatively little attention has been paid to similar networks in the global South. An organic farmers’ market in Lima, Peru, serves as a case study to examine developments in the domestic market for organic produce in Peru. Drawing from interview data and participant observations with pioneering organic farmers and NGOs affiliated with the farmers’ market, this paper investigates how a developing country context reaffirms and/or challenges alternative food network (AFN) conceptualizations derived from Northern research sites. The aim of this research is to expand our understanding of alternative food networks in a global context. Findings suggest that while the farmers’ market in Peru replicates many challenges and opportunities ascribed to similar market-based initiatives in the global North, the developing country context encourages a different reading of these similarities. This exploratory examination of an AFN in Peru suggests that this organic farmers’ market has created novel economic opportunities for ecologically-minded entrepreneurs and organic farmers in rural communities far from the point of sale. Although constrained by a relatively small demographic of affluent, conscientious consumers, the organic market demonstrates the potential to improve rural livelihoods while raising consumer awareness about the benefits of organic agriculture.

The long row of vendors at the farmers’ market present an array of fruits and vegetables, hand-ground coffee, and vegan wraps. There are vendors selling artisan handicrafts and books on nutrition, and organizations promoting organic agriculture. Artisan cheeses and breads are complemented by fresh cut salad greens and colorful potatoes. In the center of the row a number of people on folding chairs listen attentively to a presentation on micronutrients and the health benefits of eating organic produce. Someone is passing out fliers for an upcoming weekend long course on permaculture. Customers at the market reflect the demographics of this

neighborhood—affluent locals and tourists from Europe and North America. This market is at once completely familiar, given it could just as well be somewhere in California, and yet totally foreign. After all, we are in Peru.

The organic farmers' market (FM) described above takes place in a relatively affluent district of Lima, Peru, and is the most economically successful and well-attended of its kind. Known as a *Bioferia*, it is unlike other open-air produce markets that are commonplace throughout the country. The most notable distinction is the organic certification claimed by the more than 50 stalls at the market composed mostly of individual entrepreneurs and farmers' associations. As with FMs in the US, farmers here can charge more for their products given the location and the increasing consumer demand for organic produce. At first glance the market appears to be a win-win scenario: consumers gain access to fresh organic produce; producers benefit from a price premium, supporting a small-farm sector increasingly marginalized by agro-industrialization (Flores, 2003). However, scholarship from the global North has both championed these kinds of markets for their social embeddedness and the economic opportunities they provide (Brown & Miller, 2008; Gillespie, Hilchey, Hinrichs & Feenstra, 2007), and problematized such market-based approaches to promoting agrarian change (Allen & Hinrichs, 2008; DeLind, 2002; Guthman, 2008; Hinrichs, 2000).

This research draws upon Northern-based scholarship on alternative food networks (AFN) to examine aspects of a similar empirical context in Peru: the

domestic market for organic produce. I focus on a popular organic FM (or *Bioferia*) modeled after a type of FM found in the global North that caters to affluent, health-motivated, environmentally-minded consumers. An emergent scholarship has provided initial insights into the potential for AFN in the North and South to support sustainable food systems that encompass diverse economic, racial, and cultural backgrounds (Abrahams, 2007; Friedberg & Goldstein, 2011). However, given the Northern geographic bias in the scholarship, there is relatively much to learn about how AFN are being developed in the global South and how these developments might contribute to “globally useful conceptualizations of AFN” (Abrahams, 2007, p. 95). Thus, this paper examines how a developing country context reaffirms and/or challenges AFN conceptualizations derived from Northern research sites, ultimately drawing attention to how expanding the scope of analysis to encompass the global South requires reconceptualizing the workings and implications of alternative food networks in a global context.

Based on critical and promotional scholarship on AFN, I consider how “place-based contingency shapes outcomes” (Guthman, 2008, p. 1172) in the development of Peru’s domestic market for organic produce. Unsurprisingly, the *Bioferia* reproduces some of the problematic tendencies also found in Northern markets: the *Bioferia* caters to a relatively small population of affluent Peruvians and foreigners, while “organic NGOs”<sup>13</sup> promote farmer livelihoods and market integration over food

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<sup>13</sup> I use this term to describe the loose assortment of NGOs promoting organic agriculture and the creation of new marketing opportunities for small-scale, ecologically-oriented farmers.

security for rural and urban populations. Moreover, organic NGOs' emphasis on consumer choice may impede collective action on issues related to social justice while reifying organics as the domain of privileged elite. As one of the pioneering organic farmers in this study remarked, "The same reality of each place is different," provoking a closer examination into not only the similarities between FMs in the North and this market in Lima, but also the context surrounding the *Bioferia* that makes it so distinct.

One reading of the *Bioferia* is to view it as an example of how market forces tend to subvert agrarian values and create subjects with a myopic focus on their own personal choices and well-being (Guthman, 2003; 2008). However, drawing from Gibson-Graham (2006) and the concept of "reading for difference rather than dominance," (p. xxxi) many of these critical analyses are complicated by the unique Peruvian context in which this market has emerged. I contend that expanding the geographic frame of reference of AFN opens up discussions of poverty, development, and the "historical forces" and "contemporary conditions" under which alternative food initiatives either "take root or wither" (Friedberg & Goldstein 2011, p. 24). This exploratory examination of an emblematic instance of AFN in Peru shows that the *Bioferia* has created novel economic opportunities for ecologically-minded entrepreneurs and organic farmers in rural communities far from the point of sale. Although constrained by a relatively small class of affluent and conscientious consumers, the domestic market for organics in Peru has the potential to improve rural livelihoods by ascribing economic value to already existing organic farming

practices, while at the same time inspiring critical reflection among organizers and advocates about the limitations of market-based agrarian change.

First, I review relevant literature about the challenges and opportunities associated with FMs and organic agriculture, introducing the concept of “reading for difference” as a strategy for revealing an alternative interpretation of AFN in the global South. After an overview of my research methods, I provide background on the development of an organic sector in Peru focusing on the *Bioferias* and organic NGOs<sup>14</sup>. In my findings section, I first highlight the challenges associated with the growth of the organic sector, including the questionable sustainability of institutions developed to support emerging organic markets, and then show how the *Bioferia* has opened up new opportunities for ecologically-oriented producers and their rural communities. I conclude by showing how this case study lends itself to an alternative reading of critical scholarship on FMs and organic agriculture, despite the similarities between this market in Peru and other up-scale organic markets in the global North.

### **Farmers’ markets and organic agriculture: Assessing market-based agrarian reforms**

Northern-based AFN are defined by processes that reorient social and spatial dimension of food systems, bring producers and consumers into closer contact, provide economic opportunities for small-scale farmers, and support visions of economic, social and environmental sustainability (Goodman & Goodman, 2009;

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<sup>14</sup> I focus principally on two different organic NGOs: The National Association of Ecological Producers or (ANPE), and Huayuna.

Jarosz, 2007; Renting, Marsden & Banks, 2003; Watts, Ilbery & Maye, 2005).

Farmers' markets have become a hallmark of AFN and are associated with wide ranging benefits, from economic gains for small-scale farmers unable to access larger wholesale markets (Brown & Miller, 2008; Gillespie et al., 2007; Griffin & Frongillo, 2003), to the cultivation of trust, reciprocity, and regard among producers and consumers (Lee, 2000; Sage, 2003).

Another market-based mechanism said to facilitate agrarian change, certified organic agriculture<sup>15</sup> has been heralded as a boon to small and medium size farmers who receive a price premium for their certified organic products (IFAD 2003; Pugliese, 2001) while also benefiting the environment through reductions in the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides (Allen & Kovach, 2000). Organic agriculture in the global South has evolved along a very different trajectory than the North where the vast majority of organic produce is consumed. In the global South, organic agriculture is primarily export oriented, destined for markets in North America and Europe (Willer & Lernourd, 2014), and promoted by NGOs as a way to improve rural livelihoods of small-scale farmers (Beban, 2014; Flores, 2014; IFAD, 2003; Parrott, Olesen, & Høgh-Jensen, 2006; Pugliese, 2001; Thavat, 2011; Vaarst, 2010). The results, however, have been mixed. Programs developed to support organic exports in the global South have proven problematic for their imposition of Northern-based market and regulatory requirements on rural communities undergoing their own

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<sup>15</sup> Throughout this research, "organic agriculture" refers specifically to that which has been certified in one form or another, as compared to a de-facto organic agriculture common among more traditional subsistence farmers.

unique processes of agrarian transition (Beban, 2014; Reynolds, 2004; Thavat, 2011). And while there is a well-established and occasionally critical literature examining the impacts of organics and fair trade in export commodities like coffee (Bacon, 2005; Beuchelt & Zeller, 2011; Jaffee, 2007; Reynolds, 2004), there has been very little work done to explore emerging domestic markets for organic produce and corresponding AFN in the global South (Abrahams 2007; Friedberg & Goldstein 2011). This research helps to fill this gap by asking how and to what extent these Southern markets reflect similar tendencies and challenges associated with market-based agrarian reforms found in the global North.

The alleged social, economic and environmental benefits of FMs and organic agriculture have been problematized by AFN scholars in the global North skeptical of the progressive nature of market-based socio-agrarian reforms (Alkon, 2008; Allen & Hinrichs, 2008; DeLind, 2002; Guthman, 2008; Guthman, Morris & Allen, 2006; Hinrichs, 2000). This critical scholarship on AFN points to how an emphasis on market-based solutions fails to address systematic social injustice and reinforces neoliberal emphases on individual choice and entrepreneurialism as sufficient drivers of social change (Alkon & Mares 2012; Allen & Hinrichs, 2008; Guthman, 2008). Farmers' markets in particular have been critiqued for being overly determined by market mechanisms as opposed to the social and ecological values they are said to represent (Delind, 2002; Hinrichs, 2000). According to Delind (2002) the FM is a market-based initiative where "the principal players (however friendly and personalized) are still producers and consumers; their basic identities are still framed



by the economic or commercial transaction” (p. 218). This is not to say that the social relations and ecological values embedded within the market are non-existent, but rather to acknowledge the tendency of the market to subsume these types of social values. With regard to the market for organic agriculture, Allen and Kovach (2000) caution that over the long run, ecological and social benefits are likely to be compromised by the incursion of large scale agrarian capitals. Indeed, this trend is evident in the conventionalization of organics across the globe (Buck, Getz & Guthman, 1997; Coombs & Campbell, 1998; Raynolds 2004).

Another critique of FMs is that they are ill-suited to address food justice<sup>16</sup> concerns because of the tendency to privilege producer livelihoods over those of low-income consumers (Guthman, Morris & Allen, 2006). Allen (2004) claims that such “farm-centrism” overinflates the importance of farmers in the alternative food movement to the exclusion of, for example, food-industry and farm workers (p. 120). That the vast majority of organic exports from the global South are consumed in the North further illustrates the strong relationship between affluence and organic consumption (Flores, 2014). As this case from Peru will demonstrate, the tendency for AFN organizers and advocates to privilege farmer livelihoods and to rely on affluent consumers to do so is evident in organic FMs in the North as well as the South.

### *“Reading for Difference”*

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<sup>16</sup> According to Alkon and Mares (2012), “the concept of food justice speaks to the multiple ways that racial and economic inequalities are embedded within the production, distribution, and consumption of food” (p. 348).

At first glance it appears that these US-based critiques apply handily to developments in Peru's organic sector. However, the application of these critiques to the up-scale FM in Peru depends upon how findings are interpreted, or "read." This paper adopts a "reading for difference" approach (Harris, 2008; Gibson-Graham, 1995, 2006) which seeks to avoid reinscribing neoliberal emphases on market-based reforms, individual consumption, and entrepreneurialism. According to Harris, activist/scholars have a role to play in cultivating alternatives to neoliberalism through our theoretical engagements. He argues that,

by adopting Gibson-Graham's practice of 'reading for difference rather than dominance' (2006, xxxi) we might learn to read the landscape of alternative food politics not as reproducing the dominance of hegemonic neoliberalism, but as populated by a variety of emergent institutions and practices (paraphrasing Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 54). In so doing, we might better acknowledge attempts to imagine and enact a food politics that achieves different socio-environmental justice outcomes to those of conventional food systems, and offer a more constructive academic critique (2008, p. 60).

Geographical and historical locations, then, are essential to determining difference in the case of alternative food initiatives like the FM, as demonstrated by case studies of emerging AFN in South Africa (Abrahams, 2007) and a CSA box scheme in Kenya (Friedberg & Goldstein, 2011). As the following "reading for difference" analysis demonstrates, the organic FM in Peru has—rather than merely replicating the

challenges pointed to in Northern AFMs—opened up a variety of unforeseen opportunities to further social and ecological commitments to the burgeoning organic movement.

### **Methodology and case selection**

Data collected for this research reveal aspects of Peru's domestic market for organics through interviews and participant observations with individuals and institutions associated with one of the country's most well-established *Bioferias*. My entry point into this research, and subsequent methodology, is a result of working closely with a group called the Multinational Exchange for Sustainable Agriculture (MESA)<sup>17</sup>. MESA alumni constituted a convenience sample of individuals working in organic agriculture in and around Lima. They also provided access to communities of farmers participating in the *Bioferia* and introduced me to the staff of two NGOs (ANPE and Huayuna) and members of two organic cooperatives. Numerous alumni are particularly active in an agricultural region near the district of Mala, approximately one hundred kilometers south of the city. Mala became an epicenter of this research, much like it has been for the organic movement in Peru since the late 1990s when Huayuna began offering trainings in organic methods and helping organize two different organic cooperatives.

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<sup>17</sup> In this program participants from around the world (though mostly Peru and Ecuador) come to live and work on a variety of US organic farms for approximately nine months. The intention is to provide opportunities to learn valuable skills and gain experiences that they will be able to apply once back in their home countries.

Over the course of two months in 2011 and during a previous research trip in 2009 I made frequent observations at the *Bioferia*. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with eight MESA alumni, three pioneering organic farmers, representatives from ANPE and Huayuna, and informal interviews with members of two different organic cooperatives as well as dairy farmers in a rural community supplying the milk for an artisan cheese making operation at the *Bioferia*. Informal conversations with customers and vendors provided data on the demographics of the market and the motivations of producers and consumers to attend the market. In-depth data was collected with four MESA alumni in particular with whom I conducted multiple interviews, in addition to observing their work on their respective farms and in the rural communities where they live. Each of these individuals is engaged in different productive endeavors associated with the *Bioferia*: one is an entrepreneur, another is a farmer/organizer, and two more work as laborers on an organic farm, in addition to selling produce at the market. All of these interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded in an effort to derive common themes which emerged in the form of both challenges and opportunities in the domestic market for organics in Peru.

### **Background: Organic markets and NGOs in Peru**

There are a number of distinctive features of an emerging AFN in Peru that have contributed to the formation of the *Bioferia* in Miraflores. Organic agriculture in Peru, like in many other developing countries around the world, is primarily export-

oriented, although there is evidence of a growing movement focused on organic production for domestic markets in the form of high-end supermarkets, natural food stores, and FM like the *Bioferia* (Flores, 2014; GAIN Report, 2008; “Organic Products and Market” [*Productos Ecológicos y Mercado*] 2012). While as little as 5% of organic products in Peru are sold in domestic markets (GAIN Report, 2008), the volume of sales fails to represent broader cultural and political trends within Peru’s emergent AFN.

In the cultural sphere, the domestic market for organic produce has been given a significant boost by the Peruvian Gastronomy Society and the rise of a movement celebrating Andean cuisine (Flores, 2014). One initiative of the Gastronomy Society is to create farmer-chef alliances that support the production of indigenous crops and ecological/organic methods of production. In an interview with the executive director of the National Association of Ecological Producers (ANPE), Peru, he said: “The Peruvian gastronomy boom is another phenomenon that is pushing the growth of the organic movement and organic production. It is an important engine. They are now looking for certified organic products, mostly for restaurants.” Famous Peruvian chefs like Gastón Acurio have been enormously influential in drawing international attention to Peruvian cuisines and inspiring the use of organic and indigenous products in high-end restaurants in Peru. An event started by Acurio and others called *La Mistura*, a gastronomy fair in Lima celebrating regional cuisine and agricultural products of Peru, has drawn as many as 500,000 attendees in recent years (“Mistura,

Past Issues” 2014). Events like *La Mistura* illustrate distinct aspects of an emerging AFN in Peru focused on the country’s diverse agricultural history and traditions.

In the political sphere, efforts are underway to promote organic and sustainable food production as a way to improve farmer livelihoods and ensure environmental and consumer safety. The Peruvian congress established a law promoting organic agriculture<sup>18</sup> and instituted a 10-year moratorium on all GMO foods (Murphy, 2013). Various organic certification agencies<sup>19</sup> are managed by SENASA (The National Agrarian Health Service), in coordination with private sector NGOs. In 2001, the public and private sectors together created the National Organic Products Commission designed to implement certification standards from the point of production to the point of sale. NGOs like ANPE have introduced bills on food sovereignty to the national legislature. Overall, the growing domestic market for organic produce in Peru provides an opportunity to expand analyses of AFN that encompass geographic areas in the global South. An especially intriguing development in Peru is the emergence of organic farmers’ markets.

*“Las Bioferias”*

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<sup>18</sup> The Law for the Promotion of Organic and Natural Production (Law No. 29196) is meant to promote organic and sustainable agriculture as an avenue for poverty reduction, food security, and environmental conservation (Peru: Promotion of the Organic or Ecological Production, 2014)

<sup>19</sup> There are currently five private certification agencies recognized by US and European regulators: Bio Latina, BCS OKO, Control Union-SKAL, IMO Control, and OCIA. Bio Latina works in Bolivia, Columbia, Peru and Nicaragua and is the primary certification agency for domestic organics in Peru; the others work mostly with large export markets.

The *Bioferias*, or organic farmers' markets, are one of the most visible and influential elements of Peru's domestic market for organic produce. Outdoor markets selling traditional and local produce are the norm throughout rural Peru. What makes the *Bioferias* distinct is their explicit focus on the *ecológico* or organic methods of production. All the produce at the *Bioferia* is alleged to be grown without pesticides or herbicides, thus providing a "healthier" product for the consumers who choose to pay a premium for their produce. These organic FMs are a main distribution outlet for organic produce and one of the most visible indicators of what could be considered an emerging AFN in Peru.

There are *Bioferias* in all parts of Peru<sup>20</sup>, but the most widely recognized, well-attended, and the most lucrative is the *Bioferia* in Miraflores. This particular market was established in 1999 with the ongoing support of an influential NGO called *Grupo Eco-lógico*. According to Aponte (2013)<sup>21</sup>, the organizers had to overcome the stigma associated with outdoor markets among the more affluent population who perceived these markets as "noisy" and "chaotic". Unofficial estimates are that the market takes in about 1 million soles a year (about \$335,000)<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> There are *Bioferias* in other less affluent districts of Lima, and in other regions of Peru, which have achieved limited success according to farmers at the market in Miraflores. An unpublished study of a *Bioferia* in Huancayo, a known tourist destination in the Andean highlands, found significant limitations to their organic market due to poor organization and marketing, coupled with a lack of supply of organic goods, and a lack of consumers willing and able to pay for organic produce (Loomis 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Data drawn from W.V. Castro Aponte (2013) will be featured prominently in the following sections on "*Las Bioferias*" and "*Organic NGOs in Peru*."

<sup>22</sup> According to a report by USDA's Global Agriculture Information Network (GAIN) on Peru's organic sector, domestic sales of certified organic products reached \$500,000 in 2003 (GAIN Report, 2008).

In 2009 there were 50 vendors in 48 stands at the market composed of associations and individual producers as well as agro-food processors. It is estimated that there are around 1,000 farmers represented at the market through the various associations. Farmers and farmer associations from all over Peru are drawn to this market where they charge prices up to 30% higher than in non-differentiated markets. This particular *Bioferia* is the only one of its kind where all the vendors are certified by a third party, such as BioLatina. Other *Bioferias* in more remote locations utilize the Participatory Guarantee Systems, certification systems based on “participation of stakeholders [that] are built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange” (Participatory Guarantee Systems, 2014). PGS are in some ways an institutionalized version of the social embeddedness associated with FMs in the US (Hinrichs 2000; Sage 2003).

Customers at the *Bioferia* reflect the demographics of this area—affluent Peruvians and tourists from Europe and North America for whom Miraflores is a popular destination in Lima. According to one vendor I spoke with, customers inquire about the origins and qualities of the produce, but never about the price. Customers appreciate the fact that there is a marketplace providing certified organic produce, a distinction rarely made in other produce markets. The notion that the organic produce is healthier than the conventionally grown counterparts, and that price was less relevant, were common themes that emerged in my conversations with vendors. The *Bioferia* in Miraflores and much of the domestic market for organic agriculture in



Peru has been made possible, in part, by an active NGO sector with ties to the international development community.

### **Organic NGOs in Peru**

The international development community has joined forces with Peruvian NGOs and small-farmer advocates to promote an organic sector designed to improve farmer livelihoods and create a domestic market for their products. Beginning in the middle 1980s a number of organic NGOs began to emerge in Peru. These NGOs operate in conjunction with other NGOs in the country and are affiliated with global and international organic and agroecological movements. Their missions are similar, to promote the production and consumption of organic produce, although they differ in the degree to which producers have leadership roles within the organization and the amount of direct farmer training they provide (Aponte 2013). What is most striking, however, is that they have all converged on one particular strategy, to varying degrees—encouraging farmers to adopt organic methods of production as a way to get better prices for their products.

The predominance of NGOs in the promotion of organic agriculture follows trends in the development sector more broadly in Peru which has seen a rise in civil society networks since the era of privatization beginning in the 1990s (Bebbington, 2004; Ortiz, 2006). During this time, NGO orientations began to shift from technical innovations “to entrepreneurial approaches prioritizing access to markets” (Ortiz, 2006, p. 484). This has certainly been the trend among the organic NGOs in Peru.

They have, according to Aponte (2013), played a key role in establishing organic markets by “providing funding for the *Bioferias*, organizing training on organic farming techniques and on certification schemes, coordinating with municipalities, and influencing policy makers for institutionalizing the *Bioferias*” (p. 86).

One NGO in particular, Huayuna, was instrumental in training and organizing organic farmers in the region where research was conducted. Nonetheless, according to an agronomist with the organization, “the principal focus [of Huayuna] is the market... We focus on the market because in the end the necessity of the producer is to earn money.” Price premiums for organic produce were seen as an ideal way to improve farmer livelihoods in this region less than two hours south of Lima. The farmers they work with were already embroiled in markets for commodities that were becoming increasingly less reliable, like cotton and apples, both of which are commonly grown using chemical fertilizers and pesticides that are associated with negative health and environmental impacts. The creation of an organic market was seen as a way to both reduce the negative impacts of conventionally grown produce, and as a way to support a vulnerable population of farmers whose pre-existing markets were being threatened by overseas competition (Finan, 2007).

Both the organic NGOs and the *Bioferias* are evidence of a growing organic movement in Peru. An organic discourse has found its way into mainstream culture through events like *La Mistura*, and into the political sphere through laws banning GMOs and promoting organic agriculture. These unique characteristics of what could

be considered an emergent AFN in Peru are in some ways comparable to developments in Northern-based AFN: emphasis on market-based agrarian change, privileging producer livelihoods over low-income consumers, and dependence on an affluent consumer base that can afford to pay organic price premiums. Just as these developments have been problematized in the U.S. (Alkon, 2008; Allen 2004; Guthman 2008; Guthman et al., 2006), the *Bioferia* in Miraflores presents similar challenges and limitations that are, however, conditioned by the distinct Peruvian context.

#### **Awareness does not equal access: Limitations of the organic market**

Farmers at the *Bioferia* and the NGOs promoting organics have come up against various constraints to the growth of the organic market, and the sustainability of institutional frameworks that support the organic sector. Challenges associated with the domestic organic market mentioned by representatives of various “organic NGOs” and pioneering organic farmers include a lack of awareness/knowledge by both consumers and producers; a lack of consumers due to the relatively small affluent population willing and able to pay organic premiums; and challenges around the institutional sustainability of NGOs and producer co-operatives. These challenges are linked to deeper structural challenges like systemic poverty, inequality, and the lack of state support for small-scale farmers, issues that are not necessarily being addressed by promoting organic farmers’ markets.

The greatest challenge to the growth of the organic market, according to interviews conducted with organic farmers, organizers, and NGO leaders, is a lack of awareness on the part of both producers and consumers. In an interview conducted with the executive director of ANPE, he said that many of the *campesinos* (peasants/farmers) they work with lack awareness about how to improve their economic situation, and how to add value to their products. Helping farmers find ways to “commercialize” their products is an important goal of each of the “organic NGOs”. Up until this point, the main commercial strategy has been to develop and promote the *Bioferias*, with additional efforts going towards the creation of producer cooperatives better able to supply wholesale markets.

An agronomist for Huayuna expressed a similar sentiment about a lack of awareness among producers, some of whom had to be convinced of the benefits of organic that went beyond the price point. In a simplistic account of farmer motivations she said:

I think that here in Peru there are two types of organic producers, one that enters with awareness, without much convincing, and the other that enters because they have expectations that the price will be better than conventional.

I think the majority enter for this reason.

If indeed the majority of organic farmers enter the organic market due to economic motivations, this does not bode well for the sustainability of organic agriculture in the region as prices will tend to come down as more producers enter the market.

It is not just a lack of awareness on the part of producers, or their short-sighted economic motivations that stifle the growth of the organic market. Consumers also have an important role to play. The agronomist for Huayuna said a major problem for the organic market is

a lack of awareness by consumers about the quality of the product. [Organic] is a better quality product. But this is a characteristic that is not concrete. You have to accept this in your head, that it is better quality. This is the work we have to do at the consumer level. This is what is missing, in my opinion.

There is a group of consumers, but very few.

How then to convince consumers that there are intangible benefits to eating organic produce, especially when they can buy conventional produce that appears the same for a fraction of the price down the street? Organic farmers and alternative food advocates face similar challenges in the US. Consumers need to trust that the organic product is somehow superior, *and* be able and willing to pay for the difference in quality. According to the same agronomist, who has been working in the field of organics since the late 1990s: “Only in the market in Miraflores can they afford to pay these prices. Nobody else can pay. Nobody else is going to pay.” Indeed, other *Bioferias* in Lima have proven less economically successful, and even greater challenges emerge in the case of a rural *Bioferia* in the Andes regarding insufficient supply and demand of organic produce (Loomis, 2010).

In addition to the NGO representatives, pioneering organic farmers and cooperative members expressed concerns about the long-term viability of domestic organic markets. One such farmer named Pablo described what he saw as some of the primary challenges facing organic producers in the region. One concern was the costly certification process, which for one cooperative was about \$900 per year for the group. Others have shown certification to be a high barrier for small-scale farmers wanting to enter the organic market, especially those interested in exporting their products (Barrett, Browne, Harris & Cadoret, 2002; Raynolds, 2004). Another farmer, Juan, acknowledged the tremendous growth of the organic market in Lima, but also recognized that the lack of knowledge among consumers, and the lack of differentiated markets spaces were limiting the growth of the organic sector. He said that many farmers grade their organic products with the highest quality going to the *Bioferia* and the rest going into a common market where the organic certification is essentially meaningless, at least in terms of a price premium. He still took satisfaction in knowing that he was growing and selling what he called a “healthier” product, regardless of the final destination.

Another concern expressed by Pablo, and an organizer of an organic cooperative, was the “sustainability of the institutions” built up to serve an organic market. This particular cooperative, for example, went from about 10 members in 1998 to only 5 members in 2013. Pablo was concerned that there would be no one to continue his legacy and that of the other organic pioneers. “What interests me most is the sustainability of organic agriculture,” which he was concerned would not persist

in the region given the incentives for using synthetic fertilizers and pesticides which produce more immediate short term gains via higher yields. According to interviews with cooperative members, organic apple producers (apples are the most common organic product in the region) have to compete with up to 40% lower yields than their conventional counterparts, in addition to having fewer marketing outlets for their produce. They say they are able to compete by selling a higher quality product at a better price.

A further indication of a lack institutional sustainability, during the course of this fieldwork news began to spread that the European NGOs funding Huayuna were defunding the organic training program and demonstration farm, choosing instead to focus their efforts in Africa. Employees of the NGO who worked on the demonstration farm and with the cooperatives were in jeopardy of losing their jobs, and the farm itself in jeopardy of being dismantled<sup>23</sup>. Because this particular NGO has been instrumental in training new farmers in organic methods of production, their absence in the region could further jeopardize the creation of new organic farmers and new marketing strategies to sell their produce<sup>24</sup>. While farmer field schools and farmer-to-farmer like exchange programs exist in Peru (Godtland, Sadoulet, Janvry, Murgai, & Ortiz, 2004), which may safeguard against this type of NGO withdrawal

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<sup>23</sup> The demonstration farm is located a few hundred feet above the valley floor and it irrigated by a rather costly pump that pumps water to a tank located high above the farm to then use gravity to irrigate the crops. Without the NGO to pay the electricity bills, it seemed unlikely that the water would continue to flow.

<sup>24</sup> Since this research was conducted it remains unclear the extent to which Huayuna maintains an active presence in the region.

by empowering farmers to generate and share knowledge among one another, these types of organizations appear to be more active in the Andean highlands with a greater emphasis on improving subsistence production over market integration. Farmers in this coastal region of Peru, however, have historically been linked into markets for commodities like cotton, and more recently to various fresh fruits and vegetables, especially asparagus (Escobal, Agreda & Reardon 2000; Finan 2007), making them more attractive to NGOs interested in helping farmers establish new marketing opportunities. While the emphasis on market integration by various organic NGOs can be problematic for certain demographics of farmers and consumers, this particular *Bioferia* also presents numerous opportunities for those interested in promoting AFN in Peru.

### **Emergent opportunities: Organic entrepreneurs and rural development**

Despite the challenges posed by the creation of an organic market that caters to an affluent clientele, the *Bioferia* also presents a number of opportunities for individual entrepreneurs and farmers in rural communities far from the point of sale. Organic NGOs have been instrumental in creating and supporting the organic market, but the knowledge and dedication of organic producers is what makes this market possible. Examples of an organic cooperative of farmers and a value-added dairy operation show how the *Bioferia* provides a space for the expression of social and ecological values previously subsumed by more conventional marketing outlets.



In the district of Mala south of Lima, already existing “organic” farmers were able to benefit from the commercialization of organic agriculture by establishing multiple organic cooperatives. Pablo is one of the “organic pioneers” who began working with the NGO Huayuna in the late 1990s to help develop an organic sector which for him, is still predicated on ecological values passed down from previous generations and not purely on economic incentives. He was one of the first farmers to become involved with Huayuna, one of the first to be certified organic by Bio Latina, and is a founding member of the organic growers’ cooperative. He describes his initial interaction with a Huayuna representative at a meeting of agronomists this way:

They always talked to us in the classes because we always farmed in a traditional manner. Ancestrally, our parents, they made us do work in line with lunar rotations, the sun cycle, a series of factors that we took into account. But we never knew why we did these things, scientifically... We only saw that it gave us results. So, [the representative] invited us [to the meeting]. To me it seemed interesting because all the knowledge I received from my grandfather, there are practices that I did, and I realized why I did these things.

For him, the organic methods of production replaced the traditional methods, as he put it, whereas for other farmers, traditional practices were replaced with conventional ones. He continued to work with Huayuna, demonstrating what was

possible with these traditional methods, which further inspired the trainings and workshops on organic agriculture on topics like integrated pest management and crop rotations.

For Pablo and the other founding members of the cooperative *Biofrut*, the economic incentive was not their primary motivation for growing organic fruits and vegetables. He said that for the group, “the organic [*ecologica*] for us is a living philosophy.” He takes a holistic approach to farming, one governed by a deeper understanding of ecology including how livestock, orchards, and vegetable production work together. The cooperative was formed to make a case for this holistic type of farming as much as for the economic benefits of organic agriculture.

According to Pablo:

We began in *Biofrut* with a difficult challenge. We didn't start to go into business. We organized to show how you could do organic agriculture, not for business. We showed Huayuna it was possible to grow these things. Before this, Huayuna was not interested in organic agriculture, not at all. We demonstrated it was possible. This was our reason to be, our philosophy, knowledge of country, climate, pests, soil. They saw we know all these things and said we should enter the market.

This may have been the case in the early days of the cooperative, with a consensus among members about a deeper set of ecological/organic values they brought to the table. According to an interview with one of the main organizers of the cooperative,

many members ultimately left *Biofrut* due to the costly certification process, relatively low yields, and/or insufficient economic incentives.

Despite *Biofrut*'s decline in membership, a different organic cooperative has seen tremendous growth in their volume of sales, mostly as a result of establishing wholesale accounts in Lima. Antonio, who has worked with Huayuna since their first trainings, projected that total sales from the cooperative could be up to four times as much as they were the previous year. The cooperative maintains an active presence at the *Bioferia*, selling mixed fruits and vegetables in relatively small volumes, but has also recently expanded their business by selling things like apples and purple corn to larger, relatively new, wholesale markets for organic produce.

In addition to fostering cooperative marketing arrangements, the *Bioferia* has also created opportunities for a new kind of socially embedded entrepreneurialism. Scholars apply Polanyi's concept of embeddedness to farmers' markets in the US (Hinrichs 2000), and to the fair trade movement (Raynolds 2012) to illustrate how markets can be reshaped with social and ecological concerns in mind. Gloria is one such example of an organic entrepreneur who is helping re-embed markets by linking her products and production to social and ecological, as well as economic values. She and her family are running a small business making cheese and yogurt with milk purchased from a rural community of dairy farmers outside of Lima. They bring to the business a deep commitment to the rural community that supplies their milk, and are optimistic about the potential of the market to promote more sustainable food

systems. Their business has been so successful that they recently opened a “*biobodega*,” a brick and mortar storefront where they sell their dairy products, in addition to local honey, olives, meats, and vegetables, creating a more permanent and visible presence within the organic food movement Lima.

Gloria’s family business offers one of the clearest examples of how the creation of organic markets can improve rural livelihoods far from the point of sale. They have formed strong social ties with members of the community, especially those inclined towards ecological agriculture. They offer farmers a good price for their milk, better than what they were getting at nearby markets. But to her, the relationship was more than just one based on an economic exchange. She said, “In reality, we share with the people of the community we live with and learn from each other, economically as well, and it is actually profitable to do so.” She spoke of wanting to find other ways to support the community through things like agri-tourism, and wanting to make more connections between people of the community with the consumers in Lima. In speaking with dairy farmers that supply the milk for this artisan cheese and yogurt, it was clear they appreciated the opportunity to sell their milk at a good price to a reliable buyer at the point of production. Previously, they would have to transport the milk themselves to markets up to two hours away. This case is a small but prime example of socially embedded entrepreneurialism that speaks to the potential of organic markets to promote rural development.

### **An organic farmers’ market in Peru: Challenges and opportunities**

Challenges associated with the domestic market for organic produce in Peru, evident in the workings of this particular *Bioferia* in Miraflores, reveal some of the same challenges associated with similar markets in the U.S. The relatively high cost of organic produce at the *Bioferia* still puts the organic movement squarely in the domain of an affluent and health-conscious consumer base. Many key figures in the movement point to a lack of awareness by both consumers and producers, but no amount of awareness can compensate for a lack of access due to financial constraints. The *Bioferia* could have the effect of reifying organic agriculture as the domain of privileged elite, while drawing attention away from things like costly third-party certification for producers, or the inability of low-income consumers to access certified organic produce. Market-based initiatives like the *Bioferia* are often ill-suited to address these kinds of structural limitations. Farmers' market managers in the US make similar claims about a lack of awareness among consumers as a limiting factor, drawing attention away from other more practical reasons why people might not choose to shop at these kinds of markets (Guthman et al., 2006).

A unique feature of the organic landscape in Peru, compared to that of the U.S., is the predominance of organic NGOs that have on one hand, been invaluable in helping establish organic markets and farmer cooperatives, in addition to training new organic farmers. On the other hand, a myopic focus on the market combined with unstable funding sources may leave farmers who have come to depend on their support in jeopardy. Such organizations and farmer associations have been shown to be important to the promotion of markets for organic agriculture in developing

countries (IFAD, 2003). However, reliance on the NGO sector may prove detrimental in the long run as funding sources dry up or shift priorities. A better strategy might be for local NGOs to facilitate the kinds of decentralized farmer-to-farmer exchanges that have proved successful in generating and sharing knowledge (Holt-Giménez, 2006; Rosset, Machin Sosa, Roque Jaime, & Ávila Lozano, 2011). This could include knowledge about how to access and benefit from newly emerging organic markets.

In many ways, the opportunities created by the development of an organic market outweigh the limitations and negative implications associated with such high-end markets. The *Bioferia* expands marketing opportunities and economic incomes, conferring economic value on already existing social and ecological commitments of farmers and entrepreneurs. The market, in a broad sense, may be insufficient in instilling these non-economic values, but it does create a positive reinforcement for those who may already be interested in promoting rural development, improving farmer livelihoods, and supporting the environment. For Gloria and her family, participation in the *Bioferia* provided the context to incubate and grow their artisan cheese and yogurt business. The organic cooperative has benefited from the networking opportunities at the market which have opened up access to wholesale accounts. Both these findings reaffirm important benefits ascribed to FMs in US scholarship that go beyond the price premium (Feenstra et al., 2003; Gillespie et al., 2007).

Another potential opportunity associated with this market, one not easily reflected in the data, pertains to the critical reflection displayed by interview subjects. According to the NGO representatives and farmers I spoke with, a lack of consumer awareness is one of the main challenges to the growth of the organic market in Peru. And yet, these same individuals also recognized that Miraflores was one of the only places in the country where this kind of organic FM could be a success. They were aware that the *Bioferia* was not a panacea to improve livelihoods of farmers throughout the country, or a way to address the persistent poverty and inequality throughout the country. However, they persisted in their efforts because there were improvements being made in the lives of those farmers fortunate enough to have access to this market and to organic certifications. Their awareness is similar to the “reflexive localism” championed by DuPuis and Goodman (2005) that encourages an examination of inequalities and social justice within and among various conceptualizations of the “local”. These actors, each in their own way, demonstrate critical, reflexive awareness, towards the possibilities, and limitations, for the organic market. This is the first step to addressing some of the deeper structural problems facing Peruvian campesinos and urban dwellers unable to afford/access organic produce, their willingness/awareness aside.

### **“Reading for difference” in Peru’s organic farmers’ market**

Despite its parallels with AFN in the global North, Peru’s burgeoning organic sector must be studied in its geographical/social (and developing country) context,

which encourages “reading for difference rather than dominance” (Gibson-Graham, 1996) in AFN. NGOs promoting rural livelihoods in Peru are less susceptible to the criticism of AFN in the North for being overly focused on farmers at the expense of underserved populations (Allen 2004). This is because these NGOs *are* serving one of the most vulnerable populations in Peru—small-scale farmers. Organic NGOs like Huayuna promoting market integration have focused on farmers who are already dependent on the market, as opposed to mostly subsistence farmers. While the farmers in the coastal region of Peru may not be the most impoverished in the country, their reliance on shifting domestic and international markets has made them more vulnerable to global processes of agro-industrialization (Escobal et al., 2000; Finan 2006; Reardon & Berdegue, 2002).

Markets like the *Bioferia* may be ill-suited to addressing broader structural reforms that promote rural development or food system reform, but NGOs in Peru are pursuing other paths to address these concerns. For example, ANPE has long been working to petition the government for better food security laws, and has proposed a law that codifies the right of food sovereignty, a concept largely developed for and by peasant producers in the global South. Peru is also the first country in the Americas to ban GMOs, putting a 10-year moratorium on their use, and barring the entry of GMO seeds and products into the country (Murphy 2013).

As for consumer awareness, the gastronomy event mentioned earlier, *La Mistura*, is a testament to the widespread interest in celebrating distinctly Peruvian



products grown by a traditional agricultural sector. The culinary renaissance in Peru has a tremendous amount of support among a cross-section of the population, evident in the huge numbers of attendees at this annual event. The national celebration of an incredibly diverse Peruvian cuisine evades the kind of entrenched localism found in parts of the US alternative food movement, while also drawing attention to the challenges and opportunities in utilizing organic agriculture as a tool for promoting rural development.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has argued that the *Bioferia* in Miraflores creates socially embedded economic opportunities for ecologically-minded farmers and entrepreneurs, while also promoting rural development and contributing to the growth of an organic movement in Peru. Importantly, this research expands on conceptualizations of AFN relevant in both the North and South, in addition to highlighting distinctive features of AFN in a developing country context. Interviews and participant observations with NGO representatives, organic farmers, and cooperative organizers affiliated with this particular *Bioferia* showed that the growth of the domestic organic sector in Peru is compromised by the emphasis on market-based agrarian change and consumer/producer awareness as opposed to access. Avoiding the temptation to view the *Bioferia* as yet another example of neoliberalism in AFN (Harris 2008), this reading instead shifts the focus to the emergent

possibilities for an organic market in a country where a traditional farming sector is being ascribed new economic, social, and ecological value.

As the exploratory research presented here is intended to open up perspectives on AFN in a global context, it also points to several fruitful avenues of future research. Such research would do well to consider the potential ramifications of increased competition in the domestic market for organic produce in Peru, especially given the tendency towards conventionalization in Northern markets (Buck et al., 1997; Coombs & Campbell, 1998), and the already existing export-oriented organic sector in the global South that shares some of these tendencies (Finan, 2007; Raynolds, 2004). Survey data of organic consumers in Peru might also be compared with survey data among organic consumers in the global North to determine if there are unique concerns or motivations among consumers in more and less developed countries. Lastly, more research is necessary to assess the extent to which organic farming for domestic markets in Peru is a viable strategy for improving rural livelihoods. These potential research endeavors would increase dialog and interaction between the related, but too often separated, fields of sociology of development and sociology of agriculture, thus contributing to an increasingly globalized discourse about the importance of building sustainable food systems.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Community gardens and the making of organic subjects: A case study from the Peruvian Andes**

#### **Abstract**

Community gardens are a well-established component of Northern alternative food networks. Most of the scholarship on these gardens describes the myriad benefits for participants and their communities, as well as the individuals' motivations for growing their own food. Relatively little research has explored how different kinds of gardens and their organizers produce subjects. What does exist is confined geographically to the global North. Drawing from scholarship on community gardens and subject formation, I examine the emergence of what I call an "organic subjectivity" among garden participants in a small rural town in Northern Peru. I argue that the making of organic subjects in the CG in Peru is the result of three primary influences: 1) the changing agrarian context in the community marked by the recent rise of conventional farming practices, 2) the influence of the garden organizer as the agent of an organic ideology, and 3) the material practices associated with CG participation which include attending educational workshops and the workings of a voluntary association. The CG in Peru reinforces the idea that CGs produce subjects, and that such subjects could well be oriented towards an agenda of agrarian change that promotes environmental awareness and ecological farming practices, key elements of emerging alternative food networks in the global North and South.

While working alongside the women from the Club de Madres, they spoke about their dedication to organic agriculture and their motivations for participating in the community garden: "The vegetables without fertilizer, which are pure, without chemicals, are the only kind we are interested in producing...For me, it is important to know how this plant is grown, if this plant has chemicals or not." Another woman says that before the community garden, "everything was from the market because no one had any experience; we had no organization. But now, we have our garden organization so we have food for the school cafeteria and for our own home."

This vignette from Lamud, a small rural town in Northern Peru, illustrates how participants in this community garden (CG) think about organic agriculture. The practice of organic farming in the CG corresponds to, and is embedded within, an ideology about the benefits of growing your own food without the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, and providing healthy food for one's family. What makes these sentiments remarkable is that the concept of "organic" or "*ecológico*" agriculture is relatively new in the community, although the practices themselves are not. In recent years, this rural community has seen a tremendous growth in the number of farmers growing potatoes with synthetic fertilizers and pesticides for the market. Traditionally dominated by subsistence production using only the inputs available in the local environment, these changes in the countryside have spurred the creation of a community garden dedicated to organic methods of production.

This research examines how individuals from this rural community have come to think the way they do about organic agriculture, and how these beliefs relate to their participation in a community garden. In this paper I draw on existing theories of subject formation to consider how the intersection of ideology and practice within a particular socio-historical context produces an organic subjectivity. I argue that the making of organic subjects in the CG in Peru is the result of three primary influences: 1) the changing agrarian context in the community marked by the recent rise of conventional farming practices, 2) the influence of the garden organizer as the agent of an organic ideology, and 3) the material practices associated with CG participation

which include attending educational workshops and the workings of a voluntary association.

Community gardens have become a popular area of study with the rise of alternative food movements and are associated with a host of benefits from increased food security (Baker, 2004; Ferris, Norman, & Sempik, 2001) to greater civic engagement (Krasny & Tidball, 2009) and environmental awareness (Turner, 2011; Walter, 2013). While much of this literature is concerned with benefits or outcomes of CG participation, a smaller thread of research examines *how* CGs work to produce subjects—individuals who are both agents of, and subordinate to, a system of beliefs and values that corresponds with a set of material practices within a specific social context (Agrawal, 2005). Therefore, a subsequent element of this research considers how theories of subject formation can add to an understanding of how these CG participants have come to care about organic agriculture, or how they have become “organic subjects”.

After discussing this literature in more detail, I describe my research methodologies and then provide background information on the garden organizer. The presentations of data for this paper follows the three primary factors listed above that have influenced the production of organic subjects. Through the synthesis of these three points I show how CG participants are hailed by a garden organizers organic ideology made all the more salient within the changing agrarian context, which is then reinforced and crystallized through practices associated with participation in the

garden. I conclude with thoughts about the production of alternative food subjectivities in the CG setting and beyond to suggest that subject formation is a critical component of understanding agrarian change more broadly.

### **Community gardens and subject formation**

In recent years, community gardens have proliferated across countries in the global North and Australia, as has the scholarship studying their wide-ranging benefits and purposes. Similar to, but not necessarily synonymous with urban agriculture, the term CG refers to “open spaces which are managed and operated by members of the local community in which food or flowers are cultivated” (Guitart, Pickering & Byrne, 2012, p. 364). Much of the scholarship on CGs has focused on urban contexts in the global North (Guitart et al., 2012), and has emphasized how CG participation builds bonds within the community (Armstrong, 2000; Kingsley & Townsend 2006), increases civic engagement (Baker, 2004; Glover, Shinew & Parry 2005), improves food security (Ferris, Norman, & Sempik 2001), and promotes environmental and nutrition-based education (Corkery, 2004; McCormack, Laska, Larson & Story 2010). How these benefits are achieved depends in part on how the CG is organized, by whom, and for what purposes. CGs are most often run by non-profit organizations (Guitar et al., 2012), and have more recently tended to have institutional affiliations with schools, hospitals, and prisons (Pudup, 2008). Types of CG projects are wide-ranging and include everything from leisure gardens, to school

gardens, to entrepreneurial gardens, each designed with a specific purpose in mind (Ferris et al., 2001).

Scholars have shown that CG participation promotes civic engagement (Baker, 2004; Glover, et al., 2005) and environmental education (Corkery, 2004; Krasny & Tidball 2009; McCormack et al., 2010; Walter 2012); both are notable features of the CG in Peru. CGs promote civic engagement by creating a space for leadership development. In a study of Latino community gardens in New York City, the gardens served as sites of community activism around issues of land tenure and access to resources like water, and “in some cases, organizing and leadership experiences gained through participation in community gardens led to engagement in the political process, such as voter drives and rallies” (Saldivar, 2004, p. 410). Civic engagement overall is also said to be greater when the CG involves the work of a voluntary association. According to Glover et al. (2005):

Participation [in voluntary associations] has the potential to foster political efficacy (the feeling that one could influence collective actions if one wished to do so), a variety of political skills (e.g., public speaking, ability to compromise), civic virtues (e.g., concerns for justice, attentiveness to the common good), and other core competencies fundamental to democratic activity (p. 77).

In this way, participation in the CG has the potential to spill over into forms of civic engagement beyond the garden gates, especially when the CG involves the work of voluntary associations, as is the case in Peru.

A second potential outcome of CG participation pertinent to this research is a heightened level of environmental awareness that comes as a result of working in the garden. A relatively underexplored theme in CG literature situates these gardens as sites for place-based learning, ideally suited to expanding knowledge and awareness of environmental issues and alternative food movements (Krasny & Tidball 2009; Turner 2011; Walter 2012). CGs provide a context for learning that promotes scientific literacy, and environmental stewardship (Krasny & Tidball 2009), with potentially transformative effects on the individual who comes to see themselves and their lived experiences as implicated in broader socio-environmental contexts. Walter (2012) draws from the Freirian tradition of engaged pedagogy to argue the CGs are ideal sites to engage with socio-environmental movements related to food and agriculture. Freire's concept of *concientización* is particularly useful in this context because:

*Concientización*, as the basis of educational work, is about recognizing, respecting and nurturing people's (sometimes hidden) ecological knowledge(s) and their experiences through a lens of economic and political structures and forces that contribute to environmental problems and the undermining of an 'active' citizenship (Clover 2002, 318).



The CG as a site for environmental education has the potential to uncover participants “hidden” ecological knowledge and open them up to new ways of understanding and interacting with the natural world.

A common refrain in the CG scholarship is that these gardens produce more than just food. For example, they may promote increased ecological awareness and civic engagement as well as improve food security. Most research on CGs tends to focus on participants’ motivations and potential outcomes or benefits associated with participation (Ferris et al., 2001; Guitart et al., 2012; McCormack et al., 2010). A rising undercurrent in the scholarship is bringing a new analytical perspective on CGs by suggesting that these are sites designed to produce specific kinds of subjects determined by the In the majority of CG scholarship, this point is left implicit in favor of an emphasis on outcomes or effects. I aim to show the processes or mechanisms by which they are produced by focusing on theories related to subject formation, the topic of the next section.

### **Subject formation in the community garden and beyond**

The primary way in which contemporary agro-food system scholars have understood subject formation in the CG settings is through the concept of governmentality (Drake, 2014; Hobson & Hill, 2011; Pudup, 2008; Rosol, 2012). To reiterate the notion of subjects laid out in the introduction, subjects here are individuals who are both subject to social forces that exact pressures and influence ones interests and ideologies, and are at the same time exerting their influence as

actors with specific interests and beliefs. According to its progenitor, Foucault, governmentality can be “broadly understood as techniques and procedures for directing human behavior,” or simply, “the art of government” (1997, p. 82 [in Rose, O’Malley, & Valverde, 2006, p. 83-84]). More specific to the contemporary era and to its application in CG scholarship, a neoliberal governmentality refers to self-help technologies, often couched in discourse surrounding the benefits of “community,” that produce subjects responsible for governing themselves (Drake, 2014; O’Malley, 2009; Pudup 2008). Because contemporary CG settings include social and material practices that promote individual responsibility (in place of a welfare state) scholars have begun considering just *how* such practices produce neoliberalized gardening subjects (Drake, 2014; Hobson & Hill, 2011; Pudup, 2008; Rosol, 2012).

The notion that CGs produce subjects has, however, been applied to historical as well as contemporary gardening contexts. Historical research on CGs in the US demonstrates how garden projects were intended to create specific kinds of subjects defined in large part by contemporary social crises having to do with capitalist restructuring (Lawson 2005; Pudup 2008). For example, in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, early waves of urbanization, the Great Depression, and the two World Wars made growing your own food both patriotic and pragmatic (Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2003). CGs in this era were about more than subsistence and were viewed as a way to instill moral character (Pudup 2008), just as today’s CGs, in all their variations, have goals in mind beyond just providing fresh, healthy food to low-income neighborhoods.

Neoliberal governmentality pervades much of the scholarly work on contemporary garden projects interested in subject formation. According to those writing in this vein, CGs and alternative food movements in general, produce neoliberal subjects in the sense that these NGO-inspired, community-based projects promote individual choice, self improvement, and in some cases, market mechanisms as a means for achieving social change (Guthman, 2008; Pudup, 2008). If CGs produce subjects, in part, defined by “prevailing and/or emergent social categories or definitions of the era” (Pudup, 2005, p. 1230), neoliberal governmentality is currently the most dominant force. This scholarship is generally critical of outcomes in neoliberalized gardening projects for imposing an “alternative food consuming subjectivity” (Pudup, 2008, p. 1238) that is narrowly defined, and has the potential to erase critical features of race, class, and the political responsibility of the state.

However, other studies have adopted a governmentality approach in studying CGs that acknowledges greater variation in the kinds of subjects being produced. According to Drake (2014), it is too easy to simply look towards garden organizers as the sole conduit through which gardeners become transformed into neoliberal subjects. And “although garden organizers’ agendas can set the conditions for neoliberal subjectivities, in practice there are other factors that come into play that can result in outcomes contrary to organizers’ intentions” (2014, p. 180). Such is the case in a governmentality-based study of two different gardens, one in the Philippines and another in Australia, where the authors found a high degree of agency among participants who often shape their experience to fit their own needs and desires,

despite efforts among organizers to enroll them in goals of their own making (Hobson & Hill, 2011). These participants became more than the governmentalized subjects the gardens organizers intended to create “through embodied acts of working up ethical subjectivities with others” (p. 228). By looking at both top-down CGs run by NGOs from outside the community, alongside bottom-up initiatives that involve more direct community participation in their design and implementation, Drake (2014) suggests that sustainability of such projects, and their success in enrolling subjects is dependent on the social location of garden organizers and how they “perform” notions of community.

Subject formation in contemporary community garden settings may indeed, in some cases, produce a neoliberal governmentality among gardeners who come to view their participation as empowerment, when in fact it is another self-help technology that has “put them in charge of their own adjustment(s) to economic restructuring and social dislocation” (Pudup, 2005, p. 1228). In other cases, where gardeners have taken on a greater role in organizing and decision making, their participation can result in unintended outcomes, or different kinds of subjectivities. The meaning of “community” and “garden” can vary tremendously across CG sites (Kurtz, 2001). Social practice then, becomes a powerful force for explaining variation in subject formation and, depending on the context, how we think about the environment.

I will now step outside of the community garden for a moment to examine the role of social practice in two different environmental contexts. Each one show how subjectivities and ideologies may stem more from what we do, than from how we define ourselves, or how we are defined by our society. Robbins (2006) and Agrawal (2005), each in their own way, expand notions of subject formation by looking at how social-environmental practices can inform one's identity and ideology, inverting common sociological interpretations of subject interests based on identity markers like class or gender. Robbins draws from Althusser (2006 [1971]) and the concept of interpellation<sup>25</sup> to explain how people succumb to the demands of their lawn, creating what he calls "lawn people". Robbins states that "personal identity, the way people imagine themselves as members of their families and communities, might be as much a product as a driver of lawn care" (2007, p. 15). In this sense what people think, their ideology, is a product of their behavior, the social-ecological practice of lawn care. As Robbins puts it, the lawn itself calls out, and the lawn person responds, not just to the needs of the lawn, but to an "ideology of community and international economy of turf maintenance" (2007, p. 16). "Lawn people" are subjects beholden to communities of practice and maintaining property values while actively supporting the lawn care industry built to supply, and create the demand for, the turf grass and its requisite chemicals.

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<sup>25</sup> Althusser's concept of interpellation (2006 [1971]) provides a way of understanding how one is "hailed" by a specific ideology. In this formulation, subjects must recognize themselves in an already existing set of ideas *and* material practices and then take it upon themselves to reproduce this ideology to become subjects.

Agrawal relies more heavily on a governmentality approach, although one he claims is grounded in the “texture of social practice” (2005, p. 180) that seeks to explain variation in subject formation. In his study of Indian villagers who have come to embrace an ethic of environmental stewardship, practice is a crucial factor explaining how short term interests are transformed into new ways of thinking about the environment. Agrawal has, in his own words,

tried to show what differentiates various kinds of subjects by viewing practice as the crucial link between power and imagination, between structure and subjectivity. It is close attention to practice that permits the joint examination of seemingly different abstract constructs such as politics, institutions, and subjectivities” (2005: 180).

Agrawal, like Robbins, inverts common sociological understandings that an individual’s actions are based on their social locations, including identity markers like class or gender. Instead, they posit one’s personal identity, and their belief system, may emerge out of the practices such as lawn care (Robbins 2007) or participation in regulatory councils (Agrawal 2005). Much like work on forest councils, the “embodied practice” of community gardening, including the physical work of planting, weeding, and harvesting, can itself inspire new forms environmental and ecological citizenship (Turner 2011). The following data from the CG in Peru pull together three influential factors that explain the production of organic subjects based on the literature above—the changing agrarian context, an influential garden

organizer, and the social and material practices in which the women of the Club de Madres are engaged.

### **Research methodologies**

This research was conducted over the course of two different rounds of fieldwork. During the first exploratory round of data collection I spent two weeks meeting members of the Club de Madres in Lamud, Peru, attending workshops, and travelling to the fields above town where subsistence crops are grown, work I would continue in the second round. Two years later, I returned to Lamud for one month to conduct formal interviews with members of the club, in addition to local civic leaders and farmers. In all there were eight semi-structured interviews with CG participants, out of a core group of around fourteen, informal interviews with twelve local farmers, and formal interviews with the sitting mayor and a local civic leader. In addition to these interviews, these data consist of extensive participant observations with members of the club while working in the CG, attending educational workshops, and travelling to neighboring towns and to a national agricultural exposition where they presented on their work in the CG. Participant observations also took place in the fields outside of town, where a nearly three hour walk (roundtrip) and long days of harvesting corn and beans included informal conversations about changing agricultural dynamics with local farmers, especially the increasingly common use of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers.

Interview data was translated, transcribed, and coded in an effort to distinguish key themes that helped explain how the CG participants became such staunch advocates of organic agriculture, and the garden itself. Farmers' use of pesticides was one such theme, food security another, and of course Maria—the individual who almost single-handedly got this garden project off the ground.

Maria is the key informant in this research; she provided access to the members of the Club de Madres, to local farmers, and to the community in general, as I lived with her family during my fieldwork in Lamud. I made initial contact with Maria while searching a database of agricultural exchange participants who had been to the US<sup>26</sup>, and were actively working in some form of organic agriculture in Peru. Through Maria, and her family, I was able to meet local farmers and participate in agricultural related activities in the community. Maria also provided documents that detailed the demographics and development challenges of the region, prepared by local government offices, and the original proposal for the CG she used to acquire the land and the start-ups funds for the project.

**Background: Maria and the *huerto ecológico* (organic garden)**

To provide background information on the formation of this CG is also to provide background on Maria—the influential garden organizer who, upon returning for an agricultural exchange program in the U.S., decided to create the garden as way

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<sup>26</sup> This database was provided by the Multinational Exchange for Sustainable Agriculture (MESA), a US-based NGO that sponsors individuals from developing countries around the world who come live and work on US organic host farms for nine months to one year.



to teach organic methods of production to members of the local *Club de Madres*. During her exchange program in the U.S. Maria lived and worked on multiple organic farms, one of which was a training center for a farming method known as “biointensive” designed to improve yields of mixed vegetables and grains on relatively small parcels of land. Maria was inspired by the biointensive method and took this knowledge back to her community in Peru.

Maria’s own organic subjectivity can be traced back even earlier to her work with an NGO based in Lima. While attending college in Lima, Maria became involved with the National Association of Ecological Producers (ANPE), Peru. ANPE is a NGO that promotes ecological and sustainable methods of production to improve household food security, while also helping farmers commercialize valued-added, ecologically grown produce. During our initial conversations she spoke about how this work has helped shape her thinking about organics and on farmers’ increasing reliance on fertilizers and pesticides, something she saw first-hand during her frequent trips back home. Maria is now a regional director for ANPE in the northern region of Peru where she’s from, and she continues to promote organic agriculture by recruiting local farmers to participate in agricultural expositions and training sessions, including members of the *Club de Madres*.

Upon her return from the U.S., Maria set to work on a proposal to create a community garden in Lamud where she could demonstrate the techniques she learned on the farm in California. In the project proposal, she outlines the purpose of the

community demonstration garden, the potential beneficiaries, and the specific needs this type of garden would address. The overall objective was to demonstrate the feasibility of organic methods of production designed to improve soil fertility and productivity while reducing poverty. According to the proposal, Maria would teach classes on “bed preparation, soil preparation, making different types of compost, planting, transplanting, irrigation and marketing.” These classes and the garden would ideally spread awareness about organic agriculture and resource conservation, as well as provide alternatives to farmers growing monoculture potatoes. During the course of this research, Maria lived in Lima working with ANPE, but returned home once a month to visit her family, teach workshops, and coordinate events with other organic producers in the region.

Early on in the development of the CG, Maria talked with a number of women from the Club de Madres, some of whom she has known since childhood, and they were generally supportive and interested in participating in the project. The Club de Madres is a traditional voluntary association of women in the community who were actively engaged in a variety of civic activities. For example, the women rotate shifts cooking for the school cafeteria, and they attend regular meetings or presentations from other civic organizations on topics ranging from childhood nutrition to domestic violence. As a result of the pre-existing social cohesion among the group, Maria was able to generate a large degree of interest in the garden project that has since been sustained by a core group of community gardeners.

The CG in Lamud, officially known as the *Huerto Ecológico la Caldera de Club de Madres*, is similar in form and function to many community gardens described in literature from the global North. The garden began in 2007; it is located on approximately one half acre of publicly owned land near the center of town. All of the participants are affiliated with the *Club de Madres*<sup>27</sup>. The garden is divided into both individual and communal plots. Numbers of participants have varied over the years going from a high of approximately 40 members, down to a core group of about 14. The women meet once or twice a week to garden together, often assisting one another with weeding or planting, while also tending to their own individual plots of mixed vegetables and herbs. Tools, seeds, and irrigation equipment (there was one hoe, one hose, and a few seed packets) were provided with funds secured by the garden organizer. In addition to the weekly or bi weekly gardening sessions, participants also attend monthly workshops, conducted by the same organizer, in which they learn about building soil, cultivating different types of vegetables, and basic accounting.

The vast majority of food produced is for household consumption. It is not uncommon for women to share harvests from their individual plots with one another, in addition to dividing up produce grown on the communal plots. What is not consumed in their respective households is donated to the school cafeteria that also

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<sup>27</sup> The fact that all of these garden participants are women presents an opportunity for a gendered analysis in the making of organic subjects. Their traditional gender roles are complicated by their participation in the garden through which they bring in additional food and occasionally income to the household, traditionally men's roles in this community. Because this data focuses solely on the women in the garden, the gendered dynamics of their participation in relation to their households remains as sub-text in the making of organic subjects.

functions as a community dining hall. An even smaller portion of the harvested produce is sold at the local produce market, providing funds that are then reinvested in the Club. Food grown on communal plots is distributed based on the number of hours participants put into the garden each week. This background information is provided as way to introduce key players and developments in the creation of the garden. The following section provides a different kind of background, one that focuses on the changing socio-agrarian dynamics in the community that play an important role in shaping the kind of subjects produced by the CG.

### **Changing socio-agrarian dynamics in Lamud, Peru**

The changing socio-agrarian/historical context of Lamud is the first of three factors explaining the emergence of organic subjects. Here I argue that the introduction of conventional farming practices in the countryside has made an organic ideology more resonant with CG participants. Historical and contemporary research on CGs in the U.S. demonstrates that the kind of subjects these gardens produce, from patriotic to neoliberal, is in large part inspired and shaped by changing social contexts (Lawson, 2005; Pudup, 2008). In Lamud, farmers' adoption of modern methods of production has inspired a shift from subsistence to market-based livelihoods. These changes also mark the development of "organic" [*ecológico*], a term that was unnecessary until the introduction of chemical fertilizers and pesticides before which all agriculture was more or less grown according to traditional methods.

Driven by economic instrumentalism and a lack of market opportunities for their traditionally grown produce, farmers in Lamud have turned to growing a singular variety of potato which requires the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides to be economically viable. The use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides in this community where 99% of the population are farmers, according to my interview with the mayor, is a relatively recent change in the region. This particular variety of potato is one preferred by middlemen for the large, uniform size, and marketability in more densely populated urban areas along the coast of Peru.

Farmers' dependence on this crop and the requisite inputs has changed the composition of crops among purely subsistence producers as well. Not long after the introduction of this potato variety, a potato blight (*la rancha*) appeared and spread making it nearly impossible to grow potatoes without some use of pesticides. As one farmer recounted, "Unfortunately, now if you sow potatoes and don't apply the fertilizer you will harvest nothing." Potatoes were once on the list of staple crops all farmers would grow, but now it takes a significant amount of capital to purchase the necessary inputs to have a successful potato crop. According to one of the members of the Club de Madres, "We buy [potatoes] in the market. We grow squash, corn; the potatoes are grown by people with money because they have to buy fertilizer. And it takes a lot of people to plant and harvest and all this." The CG and the participant's dedication to growing organic produce is, in part, a response to what they see happening in the countryside and how this has affected their own households.

As the person most responsible for disseminating an organic ideology, Maria herself was clearly affected by the rise of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in the community. Through her work with ANPE, and through her experiences in the U.S., Maria saw the changes taking place as a corruption on traditional methods of farming, now being re-branded as “organic”. According to Maria, organic agriculture is nothing new, “it comes from our ancestors,” she tells me. “Everyone was producing organically”. It wasn’t until the introduction of this particular variety of potato that pesticides and fertilizers became more commonplace; something Maria felt threatened the health of individuals and the environment. Beginning with our earliest conversations walking through town, visiting local producers who she hoped to recruit for an upcoming agricultural expo, Maria expressed concern for the farmers who have become dependent on these chemicals, especially since more and more were starting to adopt these practices. The economic benefits for the early adapters was beginning to taper off as more and more farmers transitioned to conventional production methods. It is out this context of agrarian change that she decided to implement a community garden where she would teach and demonstrate organic methods of production to women from the Club de Madres.

These farmers are operating within a framework of economic necessity where potato farming has become their sole source of income to complement their subsistence-based agricultural livelihoods. Having stepped onto the classic treadmill of production (Cochrane, 1958; Carolan, 2012), declines in yields and increases in cost of inputs and adopters of these new chemicals technologies have forced early

adopters to expand land under potato cultivation. This raises questions about the long-term impact on household food security as land under production of subsistence crops declines. Increasing market pressures have shaped social dynamics in the countryside as farmers compete with one another, and farmers with large land holdings hire workers to help with their harvest, as opposed to relying on labor from friends and family. Much like CGs in the US have emerged during periods of social change (Lawson 2005; Pudup 2008), so to with the CG in Lamud. Such changes contributed to the production of organic subjects in the garden by demonstrating the effects of a non-organic other. What an organic ideology stands for, as opposed to against, was something introduced directly by Maria.

### **An influential organizers organic ideology**

The second factor that has influenced the production of organic subjects is the direct influence of Maria, the garden organizer and champion of an organic ideology that is based on the value of pesticide-free produce for bodies and the environment. Maria has a heightened status within the community due to her social and familial bonds, combined with her experiences working with ANPE and travelling abroad. This status seems to have influenced the garden participant's high degree of receptivity to the organic ideology promoted by Maria through workshops and in the garden.

The women from the club all spoke very highly of Maria and were grateful for her contributions to the community. She was well-respected among the women of the

club and by local leaders and farmers who shared her views on organic agriculture.

According to one of the gardeners, Marguerite:

[Maria] has many good intentions to get us ahead, and brings us many beautiful teachings. She teaches us how to prepare the land, how to sow seeds and the right distance between the plants. She is teaching us very well. She has experience. She is able to teach us mothers to be able to get ahead. In the past, we have sown plants too close together and they did not produce very well. She is teaching us how to plant and prepare the land and we are coming out a little further ahead, and we have more produce...I admire her for having this career.

Other CG participants expressed similar sentiments during our interviews, praising Maria for her knowledge of organic agriculture and commitment to helping improve the livelihoods of community members.

The organic ideology expressed by garden participants includes the beliefs that this type of agriculture is a healthier alternative to conventionally grown produce, for both bodies and the environment, and that it is therefore important to know where your food come from. On the first point, women like Lucia said, “the vegetables without fertilizer, which are pure, without chemicals, are the only kind we are interested in producing.” Improved health was a major factor for growing the garden, and growing it without chemicals. Another woman, Marguerite, said “sometimes our children are malnourished because of a lack of vitamins. Carrots or cabbage has more



vitamins.” It wasn’t just about added food security, although this was an important factor in their motivation to participate in the garden. It was about the quality of the food being produced, that which was grown without chemicals. Personal and familial health seemed to be more important than environmental health, although the latter was also a concern for the women who saw this garden as an opportunity to produce food in a manner concomitant with their burgeoning organic values.

This ideology includes the belief that organic agriculture from a known source is healthier for families and the environment than the conventional alternative. There was a consensus that food grown without chemicals, and from a known source, was more valuable and healthier than food grown with chemicals from an unknown source. Lucia said: “For me, it is important to know how this plant is grown, if this plant has chemicals or not. What we grow doesn’t have chemicals. The most important thing is that not a single thing is grown with chemicals harmful to organisms.” Every woman I spoke with expressed concern about conventionally grown produce, saying that it was harmful to both bodies and the environment. While much of the produce at local markets tends to be farmed organically by default, growing it themselves was the only way they could be assured of its quality in this regard. There is no organic certification in this region, and it would likely be too costly regardless.

The desire to provide what they perceived to be healthier food for their families shows how the garden participants were hailed by an ideology that resonated

with their preexisting roles as caretakers of the household. Women are not traditionally associated with food production as much as they are with food preparation in this community. Their desire to provide healthy food for their families is coupled with new opportunities to produce that food, and in the process reduce the cost of food for the household. In effect, they are subjects *of* organic by way of participation and promotion, as well as subject *to* organic as a result of social pressures and the effects of agrarian change in the community. Still, the manifestations of this organic ideology say little about how it came about, which leads to a discussion about the material practices associated with this CG project.

### **The community garden in practice**

It is not only the reaction to the increase in conventional agriculture and Maria's influence as an agent of an organic ideology that help shape these organic subjects. Following from Agrawal (2005) and Robbins (2007), it was also through CG participants' engagements with a set of material practices that they came to believe what they do about organic agriculture. Specifically, three different practices associated with the CG seemed to enroll these women as organic subjects. These were the semi-formal educational workshops on organic agriculture, the work of the voluntary association, and the physical and social work of community gardening. These practices intersect with an emerging organic ideology in ways that further enroll participants in the goals the CG project.

Educational workshops taught by Maria were a cornerstone of early phases of this garden project, designed to teach and promote organic methods of production. Nearly once a month, for the first three years of the project, the women of the Club de Madres would gather in a classroom next to the school cafeteria, the same cafeteria where they prepare food from the garden. Effectively, Maria was teaching night classes on organic farming. Typically, Maria would stand in front of the classroom equipped with poster paper, markers, and a textbook on biointensive organic gardening. The women would be seated in desks listening attentively, asking occasional questions, and discussing things like the club's finances.

While some members of the club were familiar with basic organic farming techniques, others had less experience with vegetable gardening because the houses where they live in town lack space for a garden. One of these participants, Marta, describes how these workshops expanded the group's agricultural expertise. She said, "Before the workshops we only grew corn and beans. After the workshops, we learned how to grow more things, and different ways to grow them." Many of the vegetables they grow are not common features in most kitchens in the community where rice, potatoes, corn, and beans make up the vast majority of caloric intake. Lucia was one of the members who did not regularly attend these workshops as she lived almost an hour walk from town. In our interview, she explained how her father always had a vegetable garden and used natural fertilizers made from compost and manure, but she was still interesting in learning more. Geography and timing made it difficult for her to attend these classes, but when asked if she was interested she said,

“Of course, I’m interested in learning more, especially so I can teach others what I’m learning.” Teaching others would become a core mission the Club de Madres as they travelled to neighboring towns to describe their work and to promote organic methods of production. In the end, these workshops built a foundation for their knowledge of organic agriculture, one that could be practiced in the garden and disseminated to neighboring communities. These classes were conducted in a semi-formal learning environment that contains a set of rituals that confer legitimacy on the material being taught.

This research also reaffirms findings from U.S. scholarship that suggests CGs are sites of learning ideally suited to teaching about environmental issues through engaged pedagogy based on the idea of *concientización* (Clover 2002; Walter 2012). Women from the club were able to put their own knowledge and experience into conversation with new ideas and practices associated with organic agriculture and the CG. In this way, many of these teaching resonated with participants preexisting beliefs and “hidden knowledge” (Clover 2002) that validated already existing traditional farming practices/beliefs, and further stigmatized the use of synthetic inputs.

In addition to attending workshops on organic agriculture, participation in the CG is inherently tied to the work of the Club de Madres voluntary association. Prior to their involvement with the CG, the club was involved in various civic engagements, such as attending presentations from local NGOs on topics like the

importance of early childhood nutrition. The Club de Madres was also responsible for preparing school lunches which, after the implementation of the CG, included produce they grow themselves. The structure of the association includes a rotating presidency which, now that the club is responsible for the CG, includes additional leadership responsibilities such as negotiating with the mayor over access to additional land and the clubs contract to provide food for the school cafeteria. The latter was a major point of contention while I was conducting fieldwork. A new mayor wanted to separate the CG from the cafeteria and the new president of the club was indifferent to this decision, while others were adamantly opposed, creating a contentious division among some members. The CG as a space for political negotiations further reinforce participants ideological commitments associated with the practice of gardening.

Beyond the increased political participation and bonding social capital derived from increased frequency of interaction among club members, the women were also able to reach out to neighboring communities and at agricultural expos, often finding their own voice in the process. Maria spoke about one woman in particular, Marina, who always struck me as a particularly vocal member of the group. I was surprised to learn that up until taking an active role in the CG, Marina was in fact quite shy and rarely spoke-up in public. After two years of active participation in the CG, Marina has become the most outspoken advocate for organic agriculture, taking a lead role in the meetings held in neighboring towns to talk about the CG practices. Women from the club have traveled as far as Lima (a 24-hour bus ride) to represent their activities

at a national agro-food exposition. These kinds of experiences not only validate their own knowledge, but reinforce the beliefs and values they are promoting on a national platform.

Lastly, participation in the CG also includes the physical work of gardening, which in this case includes a social element as the participants work in the garden at the same scheduled times every week. The women were happy to be working alongside one another in the garden. In speaking about this working dynamic, Marguerite said, “we work together, as a group, and we participate in an exchange of products. One of the mothers will sew one product, others another product, and after the harvest we share with one another.” The physical work of gardening also provides real material benefits in the form of organic produce the women use to feed their families, a value not to be diminished. Prior to working in the garden, most of the participants purchased their produce at the local market, if at all. Some of the women, those with access to small plots of land near their home have taken to growing their own vegetables, apart from the CG. Marina described the benefits of the CG in much the same way as the other women: “The benefit is having food to feed yourself, and to be able to feed our kids.” The knowledge and skills the women acquired in the workshops was translated into improved diets and access to food for their families.

The material benefits of the CG are not to be understated, and yet there is something more than food being produced, to echo the refrain from the CG literature. CG participation has strengthened bonds within the voluntary association and

increased bridging forms of social capital through contact with a national NGO and neighboring towns. The women of the Club de Madres have developed leadership skills and are more civically engaged as a result of their participation in the CG. Having a structured learning environment that promotes dialog and critical reflection on life circumstances, the women are encouraged to consider the long-term impacts of conventional agriculture and possible alternatives. In all of these ways, participation in the CG has spurred the creation of organic subjects: individuals who are hailed by an ideology about food grown without pesticides being healthier for families and the environment. Through their participation in the CG this ideology is manifest in material form, in both civic engagements that promote their newly acquired knowledge and experience, and in additional produce for the household.

## **Conclusion**

Multiple influences explain how women from the Club de Madres have come to believe what they do about organic agriculture and how they have been enrolled in the goals of this particular CG project in Peru. These include: 1) the socio-historical context in which the increasing use of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers in the community has generated increased environmental awareness/concern to which organic agriculture has been portrayed as viable alternative, 2) the organic discourse championed by an influential community member that also appealed to participants' concerns about providing healthy food for their families, and 3) the material,

embodied practices associated with participation in the CG in form of educational workshops, work of the voluntary association, and the physical act of gardening.

By including theories highlighting the importance of social and material practices on subject formation with studies of governmentality in CG settings we may better understand the interplay between individuals' ideologies and the material practices that constitute these ideologies. In the context of the CG in Lamud, participants were hailed by an organic ideology due in part to their social location and an influential garden organizer, but also because of how the material practices with which they were engaged reinforced these emergent beliefs and values. Both Agrawal (2005) and Robbins (2007) have inverted common sociological assumption about actions following beliefs, suggesting instead that actions based on short-term interests may coalesce into a belief system to then defend "short-term oriented actions" (Agrawal 2005, p. 163).

This research contributes to emergent theories on subject formation by showing how CG participants came to embrace an organic ideology as a result of both material practices associated with a specific CG project and the changing agrarian dynamics in the countryside. These then resonated with already existing beliefs about the importance of providing healthy food for their families in an environmentally sound manner. Voluntary associations like the Club de Madres have the potential to inspire additional forms of civic engagements and "other core competencies fundamental to democratic activity" (Glover et al., 2005, p. 77). Indeed, the CG has



opened up additional opportunities for the women of the Club de Madres to become advocates of organic agriculture. The CG in Peru reinforces the idea that CGs produce subjects, and that such subjects could well be oriented towards an agenda of agrarian change that promotes environmental awareness and ecological farming practices, key elements of emerging alternative food networks in the global North and South.

What are the stakes involved in understanding processes of agrarian change, and more specifically the proliferations and expansion of alternative food networks? The era of diffusion-adoption research prevalent in the mid part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century sought to explain why and how certain ideas and practices were spread from early to late adopters (Buttel et al., 1990). In addition to taking an often uncritical promotional posture towards technological innovations in agriculture, “the diffusion-adoption paradigm had focused primarily on commercial innovations and had largely ignored conservation of environmental innovations” (Buttel et al 1990: 61). Since the era of psychological-behaviorist models, rural sociologists have used structural changes in the agro-food system to explain agrarian change more broadly.

Theories of subject formation allow for a more nuanced understanding of agrarian change that take into account both the individual agency of farmers, and the socio-agrarian structures in which they operate. As alternative food networks gain prominence in more and less developed countries, it becomes even more important to understand how individual actors become subjects of progressive agrarian change.

One important insight from this study is that beliefs and ideologies require a set of material practices in which to be made visible. Creating spaces like the CG in which individuals can enact short term interests in things like improving food security, has the potential to create subjects more deeply committed to the underlying goals of the CG project—in this case, organic agriculture.

In addition to considering the broader implications for understanding agrarian change, this case study has the potential to be expanded upon in future research in at least two ways. The first is to consider greater similarities and differences among CGs in the global North and South. This case of an organic CG in Peru demonstrates comparable findings with CG scholarship in the global North, especially in regards to CGs as sites that promote civic engagement and environmental education. Further research might extend comparative research of CGs across diverse geographies to explore additional commonalities among rural and urban settings in the global North and South. Understanding these similarities and differences contributes to a better global understanding of CG outcomes and participant motivations, something currently lacking in the literature.

The second way in which this research might be expanded is to consider theories of subject formation in other arenas associated with alternative food movements. For individuals to think differently they might first have to act differently. Formats like food policy councils, farmers' markets, or even neighborhood farms, all present opportunities for engaging in material practices

associated with the food system. Agrarian change requires more than an intellectual understanding of the need for a more sustainable food system. It requires real physical spaces for active engagement and participation, through which new subjectivities are formed.

## CHAPTER 5

### **Conclusion: The globalization of alternative food networks**

This dissertation has expanded the geographic frame of reference of alternative food networks by examining how specific ideas and practices associated with Northern AFN are being implemented in the global South. The primary agents of change in these three different case studies are international agricultural exchange participants who are either experiencing Northern AFN in the U.S., or are actively integrating their experiences back into their home communities in Peru. In the first of these case studies (chapter 2), I examined participant's perceptions of organic agriculture during their apprenticeship in the U.S. and how they imagined being able to adapt what they were learning to their home country. Despite the varied perceptions about the utility of specific farming methods, participants often saw the exchange as being most valuable in providing opportunities to reflect on cultural and place appropriate ideas and practices related to organic farming. The experiential learning component of the exchange promoted critical reflection among participants who are now in a better position to serve as advisors in their home countries.

Chapter 3 presented the case of an organic farmer's market (FM) in Lima, Peru that, on the surface, closely resembles certain kinds of markets in the U.S. that have become emblematic of Northern AFN. This kind of market catering to affluent clientele has also served as a point of departure for critical food studies that interrogate the progressive potential of market-based agrarian change. The FM in

Peru is characterized by the consumers who are willing to pay a price premium for certified organic produce, and the NGO sector that has promoted this venue as way for farmers to make higher profits selling organic produce directly to consumers. While Northern-based critiques apply to an extent—the reification of organic as the domain of a privileged and conscientious elite class that marks those unable to afford organics as simply unaware of the ecological and health benefits—the fact that this market is in Lima forces us to consider the broader agrarian and development contexts. Rural producers far from the point of sale benefit from this farmer’s market, and NGO leaders are well aware that this is simply one among many development strategies that may not be appropriate in more rural, less affluent contexts. As tempting as it might be to export Northern critiques of AFN like has happened with direct marketing initiatives (Friedberg, & Goldstein, 2011), both scholarly critiques and farming and marketing practices need to be grounded in local realities.

The final case study examined another quintessential feature of Northern AFN, the community garden, in the context of a rural community in Northern Peru. This case demonstrated how individuals can become agents of progressive agrarian change through the act of gardening, set within the context of broader agrarian and environmental concern, and with the support of an influential garden organizer. Numerous studies have documented reasons why individuals, mostly from the North, choose to participate in CGs by describing what motivates their decisions. Much less attention has been paid to how the garden and the surrounding contexts influence these decisions and produce a desired effect, usually based upon the intentions or

garden organizers (Drake, 2014; Pudup, 2008). In this case the effect had to do with the production of organic subjects, individuals who act upon and are motivated by their concern for the environment and the desire to provide healthy food for their families. Theorizing subject formation in this particular context offers a way to expand upon theories of agrarian change that haven't fully evolved from diffusion and adoption models that were deterministic and involved mostly conventional farming practices (Buttel, 2001). These cases combined demonstrate how AFN ideas and practices can be conceptualized from a more global perspective that integrates a diverse array of actors in varied settings promoting progressive forms of agrarian change.

### **Implications of reciprocating theory and practice**

Theorizing AFN in the South presents opportunities to “theorize back” (Hughes, 2005) to the North and to consider the historical contexts from which AFNs have emerged; how so-called “developing world issues” of poverty and inequality can be transformed into globally relevant issues; and how AFNs North and South can address issues like food insecurity and food justice. The global North is often the locus on scholarship and practices regarding alternative food networks. I have argued that this ought not to be the case, that integrating Southern experiences in a global conceptualization of AFN can improve farmer livelihoods and food system sustainability in the North and South.

AFN in the North as a field of study emerged from the sociology of agriculture where research into the agrarian political economy of family farmers merged with the study of organics and ultimately “turned” towards consumption and consumers (Buttel, 2001; Goodman, & DuPuis, 2002; Goodman, DuPuis, & Goodman, 2012). Global commodity chains and critical work on agro-industrialization were embraced by those concerned with political economy and small scale farmers to round out the global dimensions of AFN. While alternatives in the form of organic agriculture, farmer’s markets, and community gardens are clearly articulated to changes in global agro-food system, where local becomes the site of resistance to global agro-food restructuring (DuPuis, & Goodman, 2005), AFNs in the North continue to focus inward on local and regional developments. In neither theory nor practice have scholars or practitioners taken the next step, which is to look out across the globe to understand how less developed countries have responded in their own right to changes in the global food system, or taken up ideas and practices more common in Northern AFNs, and then to integrate theory and practice across such diverse geographies.

Instead, a completely separate field of study, more closely aligned with development studies has turned their attention to what could be considered a distinctly Southern AFN. These networks are predicated on the agrarian realities more common in developing countries where farmers continue to rely on subsistence agriculture for their livelihoods. Due in part to the historic separation of academic disciplines, AFN scholars in North have not fully considered the relevancy of

Southern-based movements, even as things like community gardens and farmers markets, based on models from the North, have found their way into rural communities from the Philippines to Peru (Hobson, & Hill, 2010). While agroecology and food sovereignty, concepts pioneered and developed in the South, have made their way into academic and activist circles working on Northern AFN, their integration is more evident in discourse than practice (Alkon, & Mares, 2012; Fairbairn, 2012; Fernandez, Goodall, Olson, & Méndez, 2013).

Food insecurity, income inequality, issues of access and affordability to healthy food, these are fundamental challenges of food system sustainability across the globe. Furthermore, as scholars and practitioners attempt to understand why people choose to adopt new agricultural technologies/methodologies as in chapter, or choose to participate in their local farmers market or community garden, it is essential to examine what motivates individuals to take an active role in creating more sustainable food systems. Developing such theories of agrarian change are just as relevant in Peru as they are the U.S.

So what can U.S. or Northern-based AFN “learn from the South” (Stringer et al., 2008)? Based on conclusions drawn from these cases there are number of lessons for Northern AFN practitioners and scholars: The community garden in Peru highlights how food insecurity is not just urban issue, that rural communities of agricultural producers can also be food insecure; both the cases from Peru show how development strategies are most effective when community members instigate new



initiatives. Such insights, while more commonplace among development studies in the South, have yet to be fully integrated into Northern contexts where the missionary impulse to “[bring] good food to others” (Guthman, 2008a) has received insufficient critical attention. As food justice becomes the new rallying point for AFN advocates critical developments studies merit further attention. NGOs working on issues of food sovereignty in Peru also highlight how such organizations, and civil society in general, can form an important bridge to state-based governments that are in a better position to enact political and structural change in the food system. However, it is not just about “theorizing back” to the North with these cases. It is about testing out AFN theory and practice in a global context to determine what, if anything, can be promoted as an effective strategy for building more sustainable food systems. Testing the versatility of these theories and practices reveals just how important it is to understand local contexts, histories, and cultures.

In addition to expanding our conceptual understanding of AFN, this research has practical implications for farmers and AFN advocates. First, for the MESA organization this research can be used to better understand under what conditions the agricultural exchange is most effective, measured by what stewards are able and willing to accomplish back home. This includes selecting participants based on their ties to rural communities, commitment to serve those communities, and level of experience farming. Certainly, MESA does screen for many of these factors, but ensuring the right match between participant and host can improve the exchange experience to make it more meaningful for all those involved. This research also

reinforces the notion that agricultural exchange programs like MESA are well-suited to disseminating ideas and practices related to AFN. The kinds of cross-cultural learning experiences provided by MESA reveal common challenges among farmers around the world and possible common solutions as well.

Second, organic agriculture, farmer's markets, and community gardens are all characteristics of AFN that can be applied in more and less developed countries to improve farmer livelihoods and food security. The extent to which certified organic agriculture may prove beneficial for rural producers in the South intent on selling in domestic markets remains unclear. But as consumer demand grows, and agro-industrialization becomes increasingly untenable due to threats to human and ecological well-being, organic markets globally are on the rise (Flores, 2014). Farmer's markets, while though they may be the norm in many rural communities in the global South, eliminate costs associated with intermediaries, so long as farmers can access these markets. Many rural producers far from the point of sale at the market in Lima did benefit economically from ties to the market. However, more research on this potential is needed.

Lastly, CGs can promote food security even in communities where agricultural livelihoods predominate, whether this is in rural Peru or rural Colorado where crops being produced may more often be for the market than for household consumption. Improved access to fresh vegetables from a known origin was a key factor motivating women from the Club de Madres to participate in their community

garden. While this was not the main focus on this chapter, it does portend practical applications for this research that cut across North-South divides.

### **Future research**

This research could be expanded to include a larger number of MESA stewards in a variety of countries around the world. Systematic program evaluation has been attempted through alumni surveys but the poor response rate did not yield sufficient data to make claims about the effectiveness of the exchange. A qualitative case study approach, like the one taken in this research, may be more effective in offering a broader cross-cultural perspective on transferability and adaptability of AFN ideas and practices. Comparing cases of stewards in Peru with others in Ecuador, Ghana, Sri Lanka, and Thailand would serve to further expand the geographic frame of reference of AFNs and highlight common challenges facing small-scale farmers around the globe.

In the past two years MESA has expanded their program offerings leading to new research potential. One new element of the organization is an outbound program for U.S. participants. Piloted over two different 10 week courses, approximately twelve exchange participants from the U.S. travelled to Peru and, as it turns out, worked alongside MESA alumni in exactly the same sites where this research was conducted. In effect, this cohort of Americans going abroad represents an opportunity to ask similar questions to those I asked in chapter two regarding perceptions of transferability, but in reverse. MESA has also developed an online learning certificate

program in agroecology for both MESA stewards and farming apprentices in the U.S. This learning platform is an attempt to address some of the shortcomings of the “learn by doing” model that lead to steward frustration while also providing a valuable service for American interns and apprentices. The certificate program is being piloted this year with curriculum I helped develop. Evaluating these new elements of the program has the potential to expand on the field of experiential learning in organic and sustainable agriculture, and to further demonstrate the value of international agricultural exchange.

Finally, research on AFN in the South brings to light issues of global importance in building more sustainable food systems: urban poverty; culturally diverse and place-appropriate food systems; historical legacies of development and underdevelopment; and food security, access, and affordability. As food justice becomes part of the mainstream discourse in the global North, such issues will become even more important to activists and academics working in agrofood studies in more developed countries. A quote by Abrahams (2009) is worth repeating here. She writes, “alternative food networks articulated in the south do not simply offer a developing world perspective on AFN, but should challenge a hitherto northern and exclusionary conception of AFN and propose a globally useful conception of alternative geographies of food” (p. 9). This research is not meant to articulate and reinforce a distinctly Southern AFN that exists apart from developments in the North. On the contrary, I have shown how similar tendencies exist in how alternative food practices shape individuals’ subjectivities and valorize small-scale farmers.

International agriculture exchange programs like MESA provide a valuable mechanism for farmers and AFN advocates to share ideas and experiences and reflect on culturally appropriate agrarian development strategies. In the end, the reciprocation of AFN theories and practices between North and South is more than an academic exercise in testing the geographic limits of AFNs. By expanding the geographic boundaries of these networks advocates and academics, farmers and food system practitioners across the globe may find common ground from which to strengthen farmer livelihoods and promote more resilient, sustainable food systems.

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