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THE LOCAL EXPERIENCE:
A STUDY OF TWO PENNSYLVANIA FARM-TO-RESTAURANT NETWORKS

A Thesis in
Rural Sociology
by
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As local food movements claim to provide improved environmental sustainability, community revitalization, and agricultural livelihoods, evaluation of the local food networks that they foster becomes all the more necessary. These networks have led not only to the increased direct marketing of locally grown foods, but also the establishment of more relationships between producers and regional institutions. To better explore this aspect of local food networks, this study examined how two farm-to-restaurant networks in central Pennsylvania (1) operate and distribute responsibilities and tasks among their participants, (2) are based on particular definitions for local in regard to food (3) produce benefits and drawbacks, as experienced or perceived by the participants. Using a case study approach, data was collected through semi-structured interviews with proprietors, selected kitchen and floor staff, and selected local food producers of two local-food restaurants in the central Pennsylvania community, one in a smaller, rural community, the other from a larger, more urban community. Other data collection methods included participant observation at each establishment and content analysis of restaurant materials and images, such as their menus and websites. Using frameworks borrowed from scholarship on agrifood systems and sustainability transitions, this study explored how the term local is applied and understood at multiple points across the farm-to-restaurant network, as well as the ways in which perceived benefits and drawbacks provide insight on the goals and motivations of the network participants in regard to food system change. Local was understood in geographical terms by most of the study participants, but values associated with local also played a large role in the way participants described the concept. It was also found that across both farm-to-restaurant networks, participants’ perceptions of benefits and drawbacks implied a more “simple” innovation niche orientation among the networks in regard to sustainability transitions, indicating that their intent was to create change at the local or community level, and
not so much at the full system or regime level. The study results provided a greater understanding of the ramifications of local foods within farm-to-restaurant networks, as well as the orientation and motivations of these networks in regard to broader food system change and the applicability of sustainability transitions literature within alternative agrifood studies.
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CHAPTER 1
Introduction

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, society saw a great change in its relationship to food and farming. Before then, much of the food that was consumed was sourced regionally and adhered to local seasonality and food preservation practices. Diets centered on foods that could be raised at home or bought directly from the producers, and much of the food sold through markets spent less than a day in transition from farm to consumer (Giovannucci, Barham, and Pirog 2010). Following World War II, the rise of neoliberal and post-Fordist economic models and vast development of communication and transportation technologies contributed to the emergence of a new worldwide food regime (Bonanno 1998). The advancement of agriculture and food-related technologies and the growth of global markets have resulted in greater dependency on foods produced far from their point of consumption (Kloppenburg, Hendrickson, and Stevenson 1996). Despite the benefits it may offer, this more extended global food system has contributed to environmental degradation, vast energy consumption, food insecurity, and the decline of family farms and rural communities (Allen 2004).

In light of these problems, a counter trend of food system relocalization has emerged. Sociologist Thomas Lyson has called this movement ‘civic agriculture,’ an idea he defined as: “the emergence of community-based agriculture and food production activities that not only meet consumer demands for fresh, safe, and locally produced foods but create jobs, encourage entrepreneurship, and strengthen community identity (2004:2).” Lyson advocated a strong community structural base comprised of localized initiatives, like community supported agriculture (CSA), farmers’ markets, and community gardens. This movement toward more local food systems is not limited to direct engagement between producers and consumers; it also
includes the intermediary parties, such as distributors, retailers, and food service establishments who engage in farm-to-table efforts (Dunne et al. 2010).

Yet, the term *local* in respect to food remains ambiguous, in part due to the different definitions used and values implied by various supply chain stakeholders. If local food systems are to continue to proliferate and be successful in meeting the civic agriculture goals outlined above, then further study on the perceptions and goals of local food networks is necessary. As an exploratory study of how intermediary establishments are involved in these local food issues, this thesis examines the operation and experience of actors in farm to restaurant networks. Specifically, (1) how is local-food sourcing performed by the supply chain actors, and how are the responsibilities distributed among them? (2) How is *local* defined by different stakeholders within the context of the local-foods supply chains under study, and how are these definitions shared? (3) What are the benefits gained and barriers faced by different stakeholders when participating in the farm-to-restaurant network? Before presenting the review of relevant literature, a description of the research methods, and the study’s empirical data, I provide an overview of the local food concept that is central to this study, and a quick look at the conceptual framework to be used in the analysis of this study.

**The Local Food Concept**

Interest in local foods has been growing in the United States for a number of reasons, including consumers’ concerns about environmental sustainability, food security, dominance by large corporations, rural livelihoods, and origin of food products (Martinez et al. 2010). In this regard, local food systems have been associated with a number of topics and studies, including alternative agrifood initiatives and networks, community food security, civic and democratic agriculture, shortened food chains, and post-productivism (Feagan 2007). The multifacetedness
of local food systems is also reflected in a description shared by Feenstra (1997:28), in which local food systems “are rooted in particular places, aim to be economically viable for farmers and consumers, use ecologically sound production and distribution practices, and enhance social equity and democracy for all members of the community.” Mount (2012) drew upon academic research and popular media portrayals in order to suggest three fundamental principles of local food systems: reconnection of producer and consumer, direct market exchanges of food, and a foundation of shared goals and values. In this way, local food networks are often portrayed as an alternative to the dis-connecting relationships that are associated with more conventional or global food systems. Using direct exchange mechanisms, these parties are assumed to be acting upon shared environmental, social, and/or economic values.

The term *local* itself is used informally both to describe products’ quality and origin as well as an actor’s food-sourcing policies and values. But what does *local* mean? Unlike other popular food certifications, like organic, there is no legal or universally accepted definition of local food – in fact, it can mean many different things depending on the actor and locality in question (Hand and Martinez 2010). A common geographic definition is food that is produced within a 100-mile radius of where it is consumed (Hand and Martinez 2010), but others may instead consider ‘local’ to be anything sourced from within a one to a 3,000-mile radius (Ostrom 2006). Further, some parties believe local goods to be those that are sourced within a particular socio-political boundary, such as the county, state, or region in which they reside. The United States Department of Agriculture itself defines local goods as being sourced within a 400-mile radius and/or within state lines for the purposes of some rural development loan programs (Clancy and Ruhf 2010). In addition, ‘local’ often carries meaning other than specific geographical delineations, such as agricultural production practices, food characteristics and
quality, and/or the relationships formed among producers and consumers (Roininen, Arvola, and Lähteenmäki 2006).

The ambiguity of local is important for multiple reasons. Academics have begun to challenge many of the assumptions that are at the foundation of local food systems. By pitting local against global, we fall into an unnecessary and misconstrued biclassification, called the “local trap” by authors Born and Purcell (2006). It is impossible to fully separate local food systems from the global – resulting in many hybrid food systems instead – but the two are still often perceived as a false dichotomy (Feagan 2007). Born and Purcell (2006) warned against the assignment of value to any food system scale, as scale does not have a necessary relationship with any particular outcome. Thus, scale should not be a goal in of itself, but instead serve as the means for achieving clearly stated goals. Therefore, local (just like global) may advance or impede sustainability and social justice.

Some authors have observed negative effects associated with local food systems, reinforcing the ambiguous status of local. Coley, Howard, and Winter (2009) showed how the combined travel of customers to a locally-oriented farm shop actually resulted in greater energy use and greenhouse gas emissions than the conventional mass-transport delivery of vegetables by a large-scale organic company. Mariola (2008) also criticized the assumed ecological sustainability of local food systems by pointing out that local food systems rely on the same fossil-fuel dependent technologies and infrastructures for transportation that the conventional food system does. Just because food is produced or consumed locally, it cannot be assumed that it was produced using any more ecologically sustainable methods or fair employment practices than food that comes from outside the arbitrary boundary (Born and Purcell 2006). As for other socially-oriented drawbacks, Hinrichs noted (2003) that defensive localization can occur when
rigid spatial and ideological boundaries are imposed as local. The concept of defensive localization captures communities perceived to reserve resources for their own purposes and reduce the impact of outside communities on their affairs. And yet when localization becomes more receptive to diversity, it potentially muddles traditional visions of local place and values.

Allen (2004) claimed that the process of food system restructuring away from the more globalized system and toward a focus on buying local food can reinforce power inequalities and social justice problems. When making assumptions about a community within specific spatial boundaries, the perspectives of those with higher socio-economic status tend to overshadow those who were already marginalized in other ways. As explained by Hinrichs and Allen (2008:329), Buy Local Food campaigns, (as specific efforts situated around the promotion of localized consumption) have “emphasized social justice needs and concerns for designated groups in ways that have been potentially exclusionary of other disadvantaged groups and thus undermining of social justice more broadly.” Many of these issues are at least partially due to the ambiguity and oversimplification of the term. Because many understandings of local are dependent on the context in which they are employed, there is no consistency or generalizability – and yet it is often invoked as a commonly understood descriptor.

Finally, as seen in related values-based food descriptors, unclear definition, disorganized applications, and powerful interests can lead to misappropriation via institutionalization (Feagan 2007). Both organic and fair-trade have undergone vast transformations in meaning on the road towards their institutionalization. Originally, the organic agrifood movement was founded upon “a system of small-scale local suppliers whose direct marketing, minimal processing, and alternative forms of ownership explicitly challenged the established food system” (Guthman 2004:7). But Guthman (2004) argued that perhaps the integration of scientific principles into the
organic movement undermined the movement’s original intent and opened up *organic* to be used in the marketing practices of large, industrial agribusinesses – an application far removed from the initial goals of organic agriculture. The fair-trade label is also facing a similar dilution of value as it is being high-jacked by multinational industries for their own marketing interests – again, an outcome far from the original conception of fair-trade practices (Barrientos and Dolan 2006).

As part of local food systems, restaurants are obviously not immune to the ambiguity and misapplication of *local*. But they, like other intermediary entities, provide a unique research opportunity for the further examination of local food systems, which goes beyond the studies of typical direct-marketing activities, like farmers’ markets and Community-Supported Agriculture farms. These intermediary entities have the potential to move large amounts of food products as they reach numerous consumers, more so than any given single household. Their inclusion in local food system research broadens efforts toward initiation and evaluation, as well as demonstrates the potential reach of these systems (Dunne et al. 2010). Restaurants not only serve a large and widely varied audience, but they may also act as a point of contact between locally-produced food and consumers who do not or cannot participate in other direct-marketing schemes (Barham et al. 2005). In this respect, restaurants and chefs can be important sources of local foods education and points of information diffusion (Inwood et al. 2009). Therefore, this study will explore not only the ambiguous concept of *local*, but it will also try to understand its use and application in the case of restaurants that engage in local food networks.

**Conceptual Framework: Grassroots Sustainability Innovations**

The issues that are associated with a more globalized, conventional food system, such as environmental degradation, food and economic insecurity, and the decline of rural livelihoods,
may all in one way or another be considered issues of sustainability, as they negatively impact ecological, economic, and/or social wellbeing. The drive for food systems change may therefore be understood as a turn towards more sustainable methods of food production and consumption, or as described by Spaargaren, Oosterveer, and Loeber (2012): sustainability transitions. These transitions happen through changes in socio-technical systems and social practices that are geared toward improved sustainability. In the case of food systems, this means changes to the globalized, conventional system in order to improve the standards and practices that may contribute to the issues mentioned above. One particular mechanism for instigating and supporting sustainability transitions is grassroots innovations, or creative solutions to sustainability problems that emerge at the community level. This framework will be elaborated in Chapter 2, and then used to help analyze the findings discovered through this study so that the potential of local food systems, particularly farm-to.restaurant networks, to create and/or support greater food systems change, may be better understood.

**Research Questions**

In this thesis, I draw on relevant scientific literature, theoretical concepts, and empirical data to explore how a particular local food system operates and how different actors experience their roles. More specifically, if local food networks are to be understood as a mechanism for transitions toward greater sustainability, then it is necessary to examine the methods of operation, vocabulary used, and the values embedded into these networks by those who are participating in them. Without properly understanding these networks through the words of those who create and uphold them, our evaluation of the networks as grassroots sustainability innovations is limited.
To address my research problem, I pose three research questions. First, how is local-food sourcing performed by the network actors, and how are the responsibilities distributed among them? This question will help lay context for the food service intermediaries and networks under evaluation as well as provide insight regarding the foundation and operation of these networks, and which actors within the network are playing dominant roles. Second, how is local defined by different stakeholders within the context of the local-foods supply chains under study, and how are these definitions shared? This question probes the ambiguous nature of local and examines how it may remain similar or change, depending on the network or one’s position in it. Third, what are the motivations for and barriers faced by different stakeholders when participating in the farm-to-restaurant network? This question examines the types of values that are embedded within the local food network as well as their orientation towards innovative change.

Thesis Overview

The thesis is organized as follows: Chapter 2 provides a review of relevant literature – focusing on how different local food network actors have defined local in their given contexts. I also elaborate on my conceptual model about sustainability transitions and grassroots innovations to provide a deeper look at how the values, benefits, and drawbacks identified by food system actors may be related to food systems change. Chapter 3 describes the case study research design, the use of mixed qualitative methods to collect and analyze the empirical data, and the context of the study area. Chapters 4 and 5 present the findings of farm-to-restaurant Network A and Network B, respectively, and they are organized according to the research questions identified in Chapter 1. These findings include the perspectives of restaurant proprietors, chefs, floor staff, and their local food producers, as well as other data collected through content analysis of various restaurant materials and observations done at the research
sites. Chapter 5 provides an integrated analysis, comparing issues and insights regarding both farm-to-restaurant networks. Chapter 6 discusses the overall conclusions drawn from the study, limitations of the research, implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for further study.
CHAPTER 2
Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

In this chapter, I first present literature on the nature of the food service industry in the United States, and what the general role of restaurants may be in local food systems. This area of literature will provide some foundational support for understanding the results of my first research question about the operation of farm-to-restaurant networks. Next, I explore the way scholars have explored how different food system actors define local, applying a framework provided by Eriksen (2013) about the three proximities of local. This same framework will be used to analyze the findings generated by my second research question, about how the network participants define local. Then I more thoroughly introduce grassroots sustainability innovations as my conceptual framework, turning specifically to the concepts of simple and strategic innovation niches. By exploring other studies in which scholars have analyzed actors’ motivations for and benefits/drawbacks experienced by participating in local food networks, we can begin to understand patterns in the simple or strategic nature of local food networks as grassroots innovations. This portion of scholarship will aid in my application of this conceptual framework to the data collected to answer my third research question, about the benefits and drawbacks experienced by the farm-to-restaurant network participants.

The Role of Restaurants in Local Food Systems

The food service industry is currently the fastest growing American industry, and in 2010, it provided jobs for 10.09 million people, of which 9,376,900 were workers in full-service food and drinking places (Jayaraman 2013). Therefore, as an industry, restaurants represent the largest private employer sector in the economy (Carroll and Torfason 2011). Of the 425,000 food service firms that exist in the U.S., about 80 percent are small businesses that employ fewer than
Projected restaurant industry sales for 2013 are $660.5 billion and they will account for four percent of the total U.S. gross domestic product (NRA 2013).

And yet, the food service industry faces challenges. The high competition within the industry makes it very hard to start independent food service establishments. According to a study performed in Columbus, Ohio, 26 percent of restaurants fail in their first year of business, 19 percent in their second, and 14 percent in their third (Parsa, Self, Njite, and King 2005). The food service industry also has the highest percentage of minimum-wage workers when compared to all other industries, with the median annual salary of a restaurant worker being a mere $18,130 in 2010 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013). Working conditions are sometimes very poor, exemplified by discriminatory labor practices, exploitation, and unsanitary kitchens (Jayaraman 2013). By reducing the number of local jobs and removing money from the local economy, national chains, as many restaurants are, have also been found to be detrimental to community development efforts primarily by running independently owned businesses into the ground (Neumark, Zhang, and Ciccarella 2008).

In light of such issues with restaurants, interest in establishing and supporting locally oriented, independent restaurant businesses is growing. A study conducted by Patel and Martin for the Maine Center for Economic Policy (2011), found that in general every $100 spent at a locally owned business generates an additional $58 in local impact, compared to only $33 in local impact generated by spending $100 at a representative national chain store. Another study conducted by Civic Economics (2012) in Salt Lake City, Utah, found that national chain restaurants locally recirculated only 30.4% of their revenue, while independent restaurants recirculated 78.6% of their revenue locally, which was distributed among profit, labor, procurement, and charitable giving.
It has been shown that independent businesses also make better use of local resources and aim for higher environmental sustainability (ILSR 2013). In regard to restaurants, a specific example of achieving these aims would be the integration of locally grown and produced foods into their menu offerings. As restaurateurs, chefs, and customers across the country are becoming more interested in the consumption of local foods, food service establishments are proving to be an important distribution point for these goods. In 2006, 87 percent of fine-dining establishments claimed to serve local food, as did 75 percent of family dining and casual dining restaurants (Martinez, et al. 2010). By procuring food locally, restaurants support the establishment of local supply chains, which can have many benefits for community development (Shuman 1998). Not only are these localized supply chains becoming more cost-effective, they also support the viability of small- and medium-sized agriculture (Feenstra 1997). By engaging in local food supply chains, restaurants can send more of their food expenditures directly back to the farm, and consumers become educated about local food options through restaurants’ advertisements of their local products (Feenstra 1997; Inwood, et al. 2008). And by focusing on the seasonal products and types of cuisine that are particular to a community’s region, unique food traits may be both promoted and protected (Barham 2007).

Following that idea, a specific way that restaurants can use local foods to promote development within their communities is by engaging with the rural tourism industry. In response to the many hardships that rural communities face, rural tourism has been adopted as a modern way to diversify economic development strategies (USDA 2014). With increased urbanization, tourists have become more interested in seeking out authentic, traditional rural experiences, making this industry ripe for growth. According to a local foods tourism study by Sims (2009) that was done in a rural part of the UK, the promotion of iconic food and drink
products can help to create an image for a particular place, which designs the unique niche necessary for healthy place-based competitiveness. This image can be used to attract new visitors and keep the region’s tourism industry sustainable in the long term.

**Defining Local: A Matter of Proximity**

While *local* in the context of food systems may appear to be a coherent concept at first glance, the meaning of the term is rarely transparent or consistent, and stakeholders are hard-pressed to provide clear explanation of its use (Hinrichs 2003). Eriksen (2013) created a taxonomy of how local foods were being defined within academic research, including three different domains concerned with *proximity*: geographical proximity, relational proximity, and values of proximity. Geographical proximity refers to the specific physical territory or radial distance in which the food is produced, distributed, and consumed. Relational proximity refers to the relationship and often face-to-face interaction between different food network actors, such as producers, consumers, and distributors. Finally, values of proximity can be understood as the different values that actors may attribute to local food, like environmental sustainability, social justice, chemical-free production, seasonal eating, support of rural economy, and more. While the orientation of this taxonomy does not imply that any domain should take precedence over the other, Eriksen (2013) conceded that *local* is typically defined using just one or two of the proximity domains – with geographical proximity often being cited first. Though these three types of proximity may clash with one another, it is through the combination of elements from all three domains that a more comprehensive understanding of what *local* means may be achieved (Eriksen 2013).

By examining research seeking to understand how *local* is defined by participants within different contexts, we can begin to identify the ways in which geographical, relational, and
values proximity may be described. These analyses may also provide insight on how these
different forms of proximity interact to form a coherent local concept for the given actors and
situation at hand. The following sections convey how scholars have explored the ways in which
local is defined, by examining the perceptions and actions of different local food network
stakeholders – including individual consumers, food producers, and food service intermediaries.

**Individual Consumers**

Using the results of a national consumer survey that targeted the primary grocery shopper
within the given household, Onozaka, Nurse, and McFadden (2010) identified some of the most
common ways in which consumers conceptualize local, all of which used terms of geographical
proximity. Over 70% of the respondents considered a 50 mile radius to be local, while only
about 25% considered a 100 mile radius to be local, and only about 5% felt the same way about a
300 or 500 mile radius. Moving away from mileage, consumers were also prompted to reflect on
the differentiation between sociopolitical boundaries. Over 40% of the respondents thought food
produced within their own county to be local, while only about 17% and 5% considered state and
country boundaries, respectively, to be local. None of the respondents deemed food produced in
Canada or Mexico to fall within their definition of local. This study’s local results are nearly
synonymous with those uncovered by Pearson et al.’s study on local food consumers in the UK,
who also reported that they believed local to entail food produced primarily within their home
village/town/city, county, or surrounding counties.

Using a slightly different research approach, Wilkins, Bowdish, and Sobal (2002) also
found that individual consumers describe local using terms of geographical proximity – but these
results went beyond miles and regions. These authors examined the way in which New York
grocery store and food cooperative shoppers conceptualize local and seasonal foods. A one-page
questionnaire was administered to a total of 120 adults, and it asked the participants about awareness, meanings, and naming of foods that were and were not either local and/or seasonal. The authors found that the participants most often defined local foods using distance, physical accessibility, and specialty or uniqueness criteria. Distance-related descriptions of local included largely geographic criteria, such as foods grown or produced within an unspecified surrounding area; food grown within a specific radius, region, county, state, or local community; food produced close to home; or food grown within the area that it is sold. Physical accessibility was another way of looking at geographical proximity, as it referred to the marketing of local food within a specific area or foods that are limited to sales within a specific region. Finally, references to specialty or uniqueness of local products revealed the types of values, in addition to geographical concepts, that these consumers applied to local. These references described local as foods that represent specific regions, including those that were branded with place-name associations (eg. New England clam chowder).

While exploring the shopping practices and consumption networks of grocery shoppers in the UK, Blake, Mellor, and Crane (2010) discovered a similar finding through a different research method: their sample population also used both geographical and values proximity to describe local. The authors specifically interviewed thirty-six women who to shop at three different grocery stores within their town, and they found that the consumers conceptualize local differently, depending on the market outlet. Those participants who chose to shop at the grocery store that was part of a large national chain, which prided itself on low prices, defined local by the geography and value of convenience – both in terms of physical access to the store (eg. close to home) and product availability. Those participants that shopped at a smaller, regional chain grocery store, which promoted their selection of high quality products and professional...
employees, *local* was geographically defined by the four county region from which this chain sourced its “local” products. *Local* was also defined at this second store by products that were marketed with the values of special traditional and heritage designation. Finally, for those who shopped at the last store, a small green grocer food cooperative, *local* was also defined by convenience (because the store delivered to anyone within a five-mile radius), but also by the value of community outreach. This third store provided fruit for a local high school sports team, and therefore customers associated their *local* commitment and reach not only to their food products, but also their community generosity.

As for relational proximity, both Selfa and Qazi (2005) and Ostrom (2006) found elements of *local* that fell into this domain, in addition to geography and values. Their common study surveyed both Washington state consumers (N=950) and producers (N=3,718), and found that both parties largely relied on notions of mileage (50-150) and municipal boundaries to describe *local*. The types of values that consumers attributed to *local* included the support of the local community and economy, as well as specific product attributes, like freshness, taste, and quality. Different from the other studies above, these research participants included social relations as an element that they considered important to their idea of *local*, specifically those that they formed with the producers from whom they bought their food.

**Food Producers**

Studies examining how food producers conceptualize *local* are less prominent than those that examine the ideas of individual consumers. The Washington state study cited above by Selfa and Qazi (2005) and Ostrom (2006) also examined the perceptions of producers, and compared them to their consumer sample. When asked to identify their local market, many producers used geographical terms, like mileage (50-150) and municipal boundaries. Ostrom (2006) described
the producers’ geographical descriptions of local as being less fluid than those provided by consumers. Unlike the consumer sample, the producers made no or few references to social relationships or the values of local community/economy resiliency or product quality as being a part of their local definition. Ostrom (2006) specifically noted that while nearly all consumers answered the questions about describing local, farmers were more likely to skip these questions on their survey. While these differences between the two research samples may be related to how questions were worded on the respective producer and consumer surveys, the results indeed pointed to how producers and consumers may perceive local in both similar and contrasting ways – and ultimately to the need for introducing multiple stakeholder perspectives into an integrated definition of local. The lack of studies on food producers’ definitions of local alone indicates that this may be an area that needs further study.

Intermediaries

Moving beyond individual consumers and producers, those who represent food service-related intermediaries like grocery stores and restaurants have also been included in studies that aimed to understand local perceptions and definitions. It is important to incorporate these food retailers into our understanding of local because they make up a large portion of producers’ sales as well as consumers’ food purchases (Dunne et al. 2010). In an Oregon study about grocery stores’ perspectives on sourcing and marketing local foods, Dunne et al. (2010) conducted semi-structured interviews with 27 different stores. The authors found that the stores used widely varied definitions that were not tightly regulated. Most of the stores gave definitions of local in terms of geopolitical proximity, usually including Oregon and surrounding states. Several identified radii of 100 and 200 miles as being local boundaries, while others made references to specific regions, like the Pacific Northwest. A few even described local food in terms of personal
relationships with producers. Further, Abatekassa and Peterson (2008) also examined the experiences of retailers and wholesalers in sourcing and selling local goods in a different setting, Southeast Michigan. Through semi-structured interviews conducted with owners, managers, and representatives of ten retailers and four wholesalers, it was found that while definitions of local were largely geographical, they also varied according to business size, with the smaller retailers recognizing a much smaller sourcing radius than the larger wholesalers.

Exploring the perceptions of those who are part of another food service intermediary, Barham, Lind, and Jett (2005) conducted interviews with chefs at 46 restaurants in St. Louis Missouri to investigate why these restaurants sourced locally, how much more they’d be willing to pay for local goods, and what their preferred distribution strategies were for receiving local products. Most of the chefs interviewed purchased the majority of the foods they described as local from counties that fell within Missouri state lines – using geographical proximity to describe local. But when pressed to explain further, the chefs did not appear to be strongly attached to the state as the defining boundary or feature of local. Instead, local was repeatedly described using values, such as descriptions of handmade or craft products that were native to particular places. The chefs first looked for the high quality, artisanal products that they wished to incorporate into their menus, which may or may not fall into a particular geographical boundary. The concept of local, within this particular context, therefore rests more heavily on the quality or type of product being sourced (values), not necessarily the area from where it’s being sourced (geography).

Summary

As stated by Eriksen (2013), geographical proximity is extremely prevalent in the ways local is conceptualized and measured, and is often cited first before other domains of proximity.
Various stakeholders in the studies discussed above invoked ideas about specific radii, miles traveled, and sociopolitical boundaries that could be used to demarcate what local is meant to be with one’s own particular context. But scattered among these geographical notions were also those that cited personal relationships and particular attributes or values – pulling in Eriksen’s other two domains of proximity. In contrast to Eriksen’s (2013) finding that relational propinquity was the next most cited domain of local, examination of the studies shared above showed that values of proximity were far more prominent, at least in these particular cases. The level of interaction between these three domains of local differed both by research context and methods of data collection, but it became apparent through this review of literature that local has been found to be a very intricate concept, incorporating many different characteristics and ideals. This review also encourages one to keep his or her scope broad and flexible when examining others’ perceptions of local, because many different elements may come into play at varying levels of importance.

**Conceptual Framework: Grassroots Sustainability Innovations**

This next section describes the conceptual framework that will be used to evaluate the motivations, benefits, and drawbacks perceived and experienced by this study’s participants in order to understand their relationship to food system change. Seyfang and Smith (2007:585) described grassroots innovations as “networks of activists and organizations generating novel bottom-up solutions for sustainable development; solutions that respond to the local situation and the interests and values of the communities involved.” Intermediaries, particularly restaurants, are the focus of this evaluation of local food networks not only because they (and their employees) are an underappreciated part of alternative agrifood systems research (Inwood, et al. 2009), but also because intermediaries are similarly underplayed in grassroots innovations.
Seyfang and Smith (2007) deemed the local level as a neglected arena for inquiry around sustainability innovation, despite the potential of community-level activities to offer diverse ideas and protective spaces. Grassroots innovations also help to emphasize the social portion of socio-technical innovations, since sustainability innovation traditionally focused on niches within the market economy, driven by profit. In contrast, grassroots innovations also take into account the social economy of community activities and social enterprise, and are driven by social need and ideologies (Seyfang and Smith 2007). These community-based initiatives may also be more open and inclusive in nature than top-down technological innovations, and they can generate and integrate a diverse range of knowledges (Smith and Seyfang 2013).

As defined by Markard, Raven, and Truffer (2012:956): “Sustainability transitions are long-term, multi-dimensional, and fundamental transformation processes through which established socio-technical systems shift to more sustainable modes of production and consumption.” Socio-technical systems supply societies with specific services, like the supply of water, food, energy, housing, and transportation (Geels 2010; Markard et al. 2012). Sustainability transitions consist of ten to fifty year time periods in which the process challenges and affects dominant methods of consumption and production by changing the behaviors and opinions of the actors involved (Spaargaren, Oosterveer, and Loeber 2012). Not only do these actors change their views and tactics within the system undergoing the shift, new power relations are also established and consumption and production practices are (re)embedded in different cultural frames than they were in the previous system.

While there are a number of different frameworks and pathways that have been introduced into the sustainability transition literature (Geels and Schot 2007; Markard et al.
2012), one is particularly relevant for this research study and its integration with grassroots sustainability innovations: the multi-level perspective (MLP). The MLP framework describes the multi-dimensional aspects of changes within socio-technical systems (Geels 2010). This framework identifies three key analytical levels: innovation niches, socio-technical regimes, and a socio-technical landscape. The niche provides either a formal or informal locus for radical innovations in which actors can create, trial, and adapt new sustainability concepts, practices, and technologies (Geels 2010; Hinrichs 2014). Grassroots initiatives are included in sustainability transitions when understood as innovations that contribute to niche development (Ornetzeder and Rohracher 2013). Socio-technical regimes are the structured complexes of established practices and standards that enforce existing socio-technical systems (Geels 2010). Lastly, the socio-technical landscape is the exogenous conditions that provide the environmental and social context in which the niches and regimes exist. Within the MLP, socio-technical transitions are defined as shifts in the operation of the regime, and they happen through dynamic processes that promote interaction within and between the three analytical levels identified above (Geels 2010).

The scholarship of sustainability transitions provides many new opportunities for future research application, particularly in the realm of agrifood systems (Hinrichs 2014). The sustainability issues facing society – and agrifood systems specifically – are growing in both complexity and urgency, prompting the need for broadened study and understanding. Because sustainability transitions research does not constrain itself to a strict systems theory or approach, it would allow agrifood systems scholars to broaden their focus to include the vertical and horizontal interconnections between agrifood practices and change with those of other, related systems (energy, transportation, water, health care, et cetera). Sustainability transitions also
encourages agrifood systems research to incorporate a more explicit futures orientation, looking beyond what has been or what currently exists, and concentrating on what could be, as well. Because of the strong alignment between the two fields, agrifood system scholars can also make significant contributions to the sustainability transitions field, particularly by drawing attention to the power, politics, governance, and ethical issues that have been a necessary part of their own work (Hinrichs 2014).

Not only do there exist clear ties between sustainability transitions and agrifood systems research, but there is also an explicit link between the study and practice of agrifood systems and grassroots innovations, in particular. There is a growing dissatisfaction with the dominant, neoliberal agrifood regime, prompting many local-level initiatives that are seeking greater environmental, social, and economic sustainability (Feenstra 2002; Spaargaren et al. 2012). These alternative agrifood networks, including farm-to-restaurant networks, may be considered grassroots innovations due to their ability to create niches for bottom-up approaches to sustainability-geared change in both the dominant agrifood regimes, including technologies, standards, and practices (Kirwan et al. 2013; Seyfang and Longhurst 2013). Alternative agrifood networks develop grassroots innovation niches in both the market and social economies by, one, attempting to satisfy the needs of people and communities that are disadvantaged by or excluded from the mainstream market economy and, two, contributing to an ideological commitment to develop alternatives to the hegemonic regime (Seyfang and Smith 2007; Kirwan et al. 2013).

**Simple and Strategic Innovation Niches**

Seyfang and Smith (2007) suggest that grassroots innovations provide two different types of benefits: intrinsic and diffusion, which may occur concurrently. Intrinsic benefits are benefits that are realized at the level of action, or within the community. This can include things like the
generation of jobs, development of skills, building of confidence – but without any specific goals of directly challenging the dominant regime (or regimes). Niches in which intrinsic benefits are seen to prevail are deemed simple niches, as they are not actively promoting change wider than what’s occurring in the given locality. They are more focused on improvements to meet local needs that develop through the application of local skills and visions (Kirwan et al. 2013). Diffusion benefits are more ideological in scope, and result in raised levels of awareness and community empowerment and capacity building. These benefits are intent on changing the dominant regime with which the actors were dissatisfied. Niches where diffusion benefits are dominant are referred to as strategic niches as the actors within them are seeking wider transformational change (Seyfang and Smith 2007).

The success of grassroots initiatives can be measured based upon their initial intent – to be either a more simple or strategic niche – but it is the diffusion benefits that are purposively geared to enacting a more expansive transition towards sustainability (Ornetzeder and Rohracher 2013). Knowing what type of niche an alternative agrifood network is will help both scholars and practitioners evaluate these systems. This is particularly important because a regime-level shift in production and consumption systems and/or practices is not necessarily the goal of every grassroots innovation (Ornetzeder and Rohracher 2013). Instead, alternative food networks and their elements should be evaluated based upon their original goals and motivations for existence, be it for the sake of intrinsic, diffusion, or both kinds of benefits.

The following section is reviews of studies that have examined the motivations of particular actors in specific local food networks by asking questions about why these actors choose to participate in the network and what benefits they realize from doing so. These results will provide the clues needed to determine whether or not these particular grassroots innovations
are more inwardly or outwardly focused – determining their simple or strategic niche nature (Seyfang and Smith 2007). This selection of articles also draws on studies that vary by focusing on the motivations of different actors, including individual consumers, food-service intermediaries, and food producers that participate in local food networks. A look at the drawbacks and barriers to participating in local food networks, as identified in some of these studies, may also provide insight on the priorities of these participants, as well.

**Individual Consumers**

In a study of CSA members from southeastern Pennsylvania, Schnell (2013) examined the motivations these members had for purchasing local food through a community-supported agriculture outlet. The thirty study participants provided an extensive list of motivations, with the most popular reason being the ability to get freshly picked, nutritious, good-tasting food. The quality of the local product made available through the CSA share was often the most important motivator behind the membership commitment. Another reason was the ability to eat more seasonally, as it was perceived to provide higher nutritional and product quality, as well as reembedded the consumer in their place and time of consumption. The final realm of motivations involved wanting to know where their food came from – both who produced it and what production methods were used to do so. This involves having a personal connection with the CSA farmer, as well as the community who is supporting the CSA farm. It also includes knowledge about the environmental impacts of the farming methods being employed, requiring greater transparency and responsibility on the part of the farmer.

The motivations identified by Schnell (2013) lead to a mix of intrinsic and diffusion benefits. While the CSA members may themselves be primarily participating in the CSA because of the more intrinsic benefits of obtaining high quality, nutritious, seasonal food, the third realm
of motivations uncovered an orientation towards benefits that could be considered both intrinsic and diffuse because they concern not only the consumer, but also his or her community and broader environment. Onozaka et al. (2010) uncovered similar results through their national survey of household grocery shoppers, in which the most important motivator for shopping locally was the intrinsic health benefits, as local food was perceived to be more fresh, safe, and of better eating quality. But the other common reasons provided after health benefits were more altruistic and diffuse, such as supporting the local economy, supporting local farmers with fair economic returns, and maintaining local farmland. Yet, the prevalence of intrinsic over diffusion benefits in these two cases may identify these particular local food networks as more simple than strategic innovation niches.

A mix of intrinsic and diffusion benefits were also found in a study performed by Brown, Dury, and Holdsworth (2009), who examined consumer motivations for buying local, organic produce through vegetable box schemes in both England and France. Similar to Schnell (2013) and Onozaka et al. (2010), these authors uncovered both motivations that could be considered altruistic, such as benefiting the environment and local community as well as those the authors termed hedonistic, like quality, convenience, and budget. Of the two study populations, the English consumers were more highly motivated to buy local produce through this vegetable box scheme than the French consumers reported. The primary motive for the French consumers who used the box scheme was a concern for food quality, in a very hedonistic sense (taste, freshness, healthiness), while the English consumers were more concerned with the more altruistic motive of buying local produce to reduce food miles. This discrepancy was explained by cultural differences around food choice, where the French place higher value on the pleasurable aspects of eating than the British do. However, both French and English respondents ranked ecological
commitment and access to organic produce as the next most important motives for participating in the box scheme, both of which the authors deemed altruistic reasons. The authors compared these results to a more widely perceived movement that consumers are attempting to become more engaged in sustainable food choices by transitioning from personal benefit to being more broadly based on social justice and ecological health. When considering the findings of these studies, consumers’ interests appear to be more “strategic” in nature than “simple,” as they had a greater focus on wider change and gains, past those they experienced personally.

Intermediaries

Regarding restaurants’ participation in local food networks, researchers have overwhelmingly found chef and buyer motivations that emphasized product attributes. Barham, Lind, and Jett (2005) found that out of 46 surveyed Midwestern chefs, 45 identified ‘freshness’ as the most important reason for buying local food products. Another study performed by Inwood et al. (2009) also found that for their 100 Ohio restaurant participants product ‘taste’ ranked highest among chefs’ motivations to source locally. This emphasis on product attributes plays directly into the restaurant and chef’s ability to deliver good quality and unique dishes to their customer base – and therefore remain competitive and viable as a business. As these motivations underscore the particular needs of the actor, they correspond more to intrinsic benefits, and such a restaurant network is more of a simple niche, as described by the grassroots innovation literature (Seyfang and Smith 2007).

But product attributes were not the only reasons given by restaurants and chefs for participating in their respective local food networks. Barham et al. (2005) also found that chefs considered ‘food safety’ to be the second most important factor when making local purchasing decisions, implying that they trusted their local farmers to provide a safer product for their
customers than what could be sourced through more conventional distributors. The third and fifth factors identified by the chefs, respectively, were to keep farms around their city of operation and contribute positively to their local economy. These three factors, (‘food safety,’ ‘farms around city,’ and ‘local economy’) were also related more to the personal interests of the restaurant business and their immediate community, and therefore could be deemed intrinsic benefits. According to the authors, the only motivation commonly cited by their participating chefs that could be considered to serve both personal (intrinsic) and larger (diffusion) interests was their fourth most important reason for buying local: ‘certified organic,’ as it indicated a broader responsibility to our shared environment. Inwood et al.’s (2009) results revealed an emphasis on intrinsic benefits, as their participant chefs cited convenience of sourcing and price of products to be motivators for purchasing local foods, because they affected the soft and hard costs of the restaurant businesses. In fact, Barham et al. admitted surprise at how little concern there was among their participants for larger issues – those of a more strategic nature – related to benefits of local purchasing, like production practices, food miles, and social justice.

Compared to the two restaurant studies above (Barham et al. 2005 and Inwood et al. 2009), this next study indicates that their participants were realizing a more varied mix of intrinsic and diffusion benefits from participating in a local food network. In the 2010 study conducted by Dunne, et al. on 27 Oregon grocery stores’ perspectives on the purchasing and marketing of local foods, the authors discovered that their sample was largely motivated to buy local foods in order to support their local economy, more a diffusion than intrinsic benefit as it reached beyond their own economic gain. Other common responses, in order of decreasing occurrence, included environmental concerns, increased product quality, and meeting increasing customer demand for local foods. While increasing product quality and meeting customer
demand were much more focused on the viability of the actual grocery business, environmental concerns indicate a more outwardly focused orientation. Their biggest motivation for buying local, to support their local economy, could be considered both an intrinsic and diffusion benefit, as the participants had diverse ideas about what *local* meant (from the community- to state-level.)

Understanding schools as another example of food system intermediaries, Izumi, Alaimo, and Hamm (2010) performed a study that identified school food service professionals’ motivations for participating in local food networks by interviewing participants from seven different school districts located in the Upper Midwest and Northeast regions of the U.S. These authors identified three major themes among the motivations cited by their participants: one, student demand and benefit; two, competitive pricing; and three, providing support for local farmers. The first of these motivations was identified by all seven school food service professionals as very important, as local foods were a means of providing healthy food options, educating children about healthy eating, and meeting federal nutrition requirements – representing a mix of both intrinsic and diffusion benefits as they benefitted the school itself, but also the enrichment of the next generation. All seven participants also cited benefits within the second theme of motivations, stating that the locally grown foods were priced more competitively than those they could buy through more conventional channels, providing the school with the intrinsic benefit of stretching funds further. And finally, all but one school food service professional included the third motivational theme, which included benefits that reached beyond the schools’ walls and extended to their local farmers and the viability of their businesses.
Food Producers

The individual consumers and intermediaries are not the only actors in the local food networks – the perceptions of the producers that they source from are also an important component of niche evaluation. In the case of this next study, the producers’ participation in the local food network is motivated by the intrinsic benefit of improved business competitiveness and viability. In a study on Kentucky farmers’ markets, Futamura (2007) found that many farmers market their products as local – mostly by using specific geographical terms – in order to meet customer demand for greater transparency and accountability. They are also aware that by selling their goods through a local market outlet, they are creating the attachment to place and providing a higher quality product, again playing to the needs and wants specified by their customers. Finally, by marketing their products as local, using whatever terms they deem appropriate, the producers become eligible for participation in their regional farmers’ markets, therefore expanding their customer base.

Studies have also examined the motivations of and benefits received by producers who engage in local food network relationships with food service intermediaries. According to a survey of 195 Iowa producers by Gregoire, Arendt, and Strohbehn (2005), the most important benefits realized through sales to local restaurants or institutional foodservice operations were: supporting local farmers, providing fresher food to the customer, and short transportation distances. These benefits could be termed both intrinsic and diffusion, as the benefits serve both them and others. Similarly, Izumi, Wright, and Hamm (2010) found through interviews with seven producers who sold to local schools that motivations could be grouped into two themes: market diversification and social benefits. Market diversification emphasized the importance of distributing their risk across multiple market outlets, a benefit that could be considered more
intrinsic because it supports the producers’ own businesses directly. The social benefits that encouraged them to keep up these relationships were very community-oriented, including the education of kids about healthy foods and eating – benefits that are more diffusion-related, as they support those actors and initiatives that exist above and beyond the producers’ own businesses.

Another study by Conner et al. (2012) was also able to group the results from their 133 Vermont farmers into two motivational categories: social versus market. Social motivations included making donations to schools, having students visit the farm on field trips, and benefitting the school and wider community. Market motivations included farm benefits, capital investment, and positive effects on business profitability. The authors’ analysis found that more farms were overall more socially (or diffusion) motivated (n=25) than market (or intrinsic) motivated (n=14), but that the market-motivated farms were more willing to make adjustments for their school customers. The main lesson to be taken from these three studies is that food producers may be mixed in their simple and strategic nature, identifying both intrinsic and diffusion benefits for participating in local food networks.

*Drawbacks and Barriers*

An examination of the drawbacks and barriers that local food network participants experience may also help identify their priorities and motivations for being a part of these networks, also contributing to the strategic or simple nature of a local food network. While literature on this topic – the drawback to buying local food products – is relatively light when compared to the number of studies that assessed motivations and benefits for network participation, a few authors have explored this question. Three separate studies asked food institutions or producers about the obstacles or drawbacks they had experienced or perceived
from participating in a local food network. For example, Gregoire and Strohbehn (2002) discovered in their examination of Iowa food service operations that primary obstacles to buying locally were identified as: lack of availability of products year-round, inconsistency in obtaining a large enough volume of food, and unreliable food quantity. In a similar study, Gregoire et al. (2005) found that their sample of Iowa producers that marketed to restaurants and other food service institutions indicated that limited availability of products, lack of a dependable market, fixed wholesale prices, communications with buyers, and the amount of product demanded by the buyers were the major obstacles they had experienced.

In the third study, Sharma, Strohbehn, Radhakrishna, and Ortiz (2012) examined perceived benefits and drawbacks through study of ten Illinois producers that supplied nearby restaurants. These authors found that drawbacks were most closely associated with higher transaction costs (such as communication and product differentiation); higher transportation costs; and more frequent deliveries due to demand uncertainty. Taking these three studies into consideration, most of the concerns of these local food network participants are concerned with their own businesses, or the business of their local food partner. They do not address any drawbacks that may be associated with larger communities or regimes. Therefore, even within language around drawbacks and barriers, the focus tends to be more “simple” than “strategic.” On the other hand, in Ostrom’s 2006 study on Washington state producers, the author did find that the producer-identified barriers included lack of food processing facilities and regulation restrictions on value-added products, indicating that local food network participants can identify drawbacks that are related to standards or practices that exist outside of their own niche.
Summary

Overall, the exploration of the studies has highlighted how the motivations, benefits, and drawbacks experienced by local food network actors are aligned with both intrinsic and diffusion benefits – with an intrinsic benefit emphasis slightly more common. By extension, these particular grassroots innovations may be deemed simple rather than strategic niches, in that their actions to provoke change are much more directed towards the individual or business level, rather than at the overall agrifood regime(s) with which they may be dissatisfied. Further examination of other actors’ motivations for participating in local food networks can help to uncover the applicability of this evaluative model and lead us towards a more complete understanding of local food networks as methods of both local and greater social change.

Summary of Literature Review

In this chapter, I have reviewed different academic literatures relevant to the areas of inquiry to be pursued in this research study. First, I examined the ways in which scholars have striven to identify different local food network actors’ perceptions and definitions of local. The results of these studies largely followed the orientation of Eriksen’s (2013) local taxonomy, in which these studies’ participants often defined local using ideas of geographical proximity, such as food miles, radii, and sociopolitical boundaries (county, state, etc.). Yet, the results also indicated that Eriksen’s (2013) other two domains of proximity – relational and values – were also important to these actors’ perceptions of local, with values out-numbering relationships.

Next, I discussed the conceptual framework of grassroots innovations, and the notion of simple and strategic niches. By considering local food networks to be grassroots innovations, one could assess the values and motivations of network actors to understand whether or not their aim is to produce more personal, intrinsic or altruistic, diffusion benefits, and therefore initiate
change at a more personal or local level or at the broader regime level. This indicates whether or not local food networks could be considered either simple niches (with a greater emphasis on intrinsic benefits) or strategic niches (with a greater emphasis on diffusion benefits). By reviewing studies in which the researchers examined the motivations of particular local food network actors, I categorized the networks under study as either simple or strategic – with the results being fairly mixed, but ultimately indicating local food networks to be more simple than strategic.

This literature review provides a foundation for the examination of my three research questions, as identified in Chapter 1. My first research question – how do farm-to-restaurant networks operate – will provide both the context for the following two questions and understanding of how the network was founded and who still drives its operation today. This literature will draw upon the knowledge gained through examining the role of restaurants in local food systems. The second research question – how is local defined within the farm-to-restaurant network – will collect the perceptions of the network actors, which can then be compared to Eriksen’s (2013) taxonomy as well as the results from the similar studies outlined above. The third research question – what are the benefits of and barriers to participating in these networks – will help me how these perceptions can be incorporated into the simple vs. strategic niche model provided through the grassroots innovation literature. This will aid in my understanding the role of change (local- and regime-level) within the motivations of these network actors as well in the comparison of the following research findings to the similar studies also laid out above. Before using these findings and frameworks to organize and analyze my data in Chapters 4 and 5, I will further explain my research methods in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER 3
Research Design and Methods

This chapter first describes the qualitative research design, which involves two case studies. I then discuss the geographical context of my research and sample selection, both for the two farm-to-restaurant network cases and for individual participants within each network. Next, I explain the data collection methods, as well as the process of protocol development for the in-depth interviews. I also include description and justification for additional data collection methods used to develop the two network cases. Then, I cover my qualitative research approach and issues of data analysis, generalizability, and validity. Finally, I discuss issues of researcher reflexivity, as a scholar native to my geographical area of study, as well as how I addressed ethical considerations.

Due to the lack of in-depth studies on the role of restaurants in local food networks and the meanings and experiences of participants in such networks in regard to the idea of local, this study uses qualitative methods to explore these alternative food networks. Creswell (2013) attributed a number of characteristics to qualitative research, including: collection of data in the setting where participants experience the issue under study; the researcher as the key data collection instrument; employment of multiple methods; both inductive and deductive analysis; an emergent research process; and clear researcher reflexivity. In addition, Creswell (2013) also noted that qualitative researchers seek to learn the meanings participants assign to the research problem, as well as to generate a holistic, complex picture of the issue at hand. My research questions around local foods and the experience of participating in a farm-to-restaurant network are also informed by these goals.
Research Design

This study uses two comparative case studies to explore the perceptions, employment and implications of *local* in two distinct farm-to-restaurant networks (See Figure 1). Creswell (2013:97) defined a case study methodological approach as when “an investigator explores a real-life contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information… and reports a case description and case themes.” Qualitative methods are useful for this study because food supply chains are of a highly complex nature, as they involve multiple stakeholders who perform many different duties and whose perceptions and experiences are driven by their place along the supply chain (Stevenson and Pirog 2008). As a specific approach within qualitative inquiry, case study research can examine the contemporary, bounded systems of food supply networks that allows for the input of multiple stakeholders through a variety of data collection outlets. As an exploratory study, my research questions have a ‘how’ and ‘why’ focus, which fits a case study approach (Yin 2014).
The bounded systems explored in this study include two farm-to-restaurant networks. I define a network as including food producers, restaurateur(s), and restaurant staff, such as chefs and servers, centered on a particular restaurant. While these networks may also include food processors, distributors, and additional restaurant staff members – like an official food purchaser – these participants were excluded from this study because they may not have been present or prevalent within both of my case study networks, affecting the comparability of the network.
cases. Their roles were identified through interviews with the network participants who did participate (e.g., a livestock farmer may acknowledge the role of his or her meat processor), but interviews with such parties were outside the scope of this research. For each case study network, the following participants were identified: restaurant proprietors, executive and sous chefs, restaurant servers, and local food producers selling into the restaurant.

Study Region

The geographical area of inquiry for this research study is the Central Valleys of Pennsylvania, as delineated in the Pennsylvania Agricultural History Project (PAHS), a study performed by a collaboration team of researchers from the Pennsylvania State University, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, and the Pennsylvania and United States’ Departments of Transportation (2014).

The Central Valleys region, as identified in the PAHS, includes most of Bedford, Blair, Centre, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata, and Mifflin counties, as well as parts of Clinton, Snyder, and Union counties (see Figure 2). The growing season ranges from 140-170 days, with an annual precipitation average of 35 to 45 inches. Its geophysical setting is characterized by high-quality limestone alfisol soils, which occur in long valleys between narrow sandstone ridges. Gaps in the ridges were created by multiple waterways. Settlement patterns were largely driven by the ridge-and-valley landscape, and a strong cultural influence was exerted by populations of Pennsylvania Germans. Most of the original farms in this region were characterized by a high level of mechanization, a high rate of farm tenancy, high livestock numbers, and a large ratio of cropland to grassland. Over time, production of the region became more highly diversified, mostly in response to market pressures and land capabilities (PHMC 2014). In regard to interest around local foods, this study region also overlaps with two of the independent regions
recognized by the state’s Buy Fresh Buy Local campaign: The Valleys of the Susquehanna and the Southern Mountains (PASA 2008). Combined, these regions host a number of local food outlets and partners, including: 40 farmers’ markets, 134 farm members, 40 restaurants/caterers, and 12 retail stores.

Figure 2. Map of Historical Pennsylvania Agriculture Regions (PHMC 2014).

Sample Selection

Ultimately, two farm-to-restaurant networks were selected for analysis based on their current operation in the Central Valleys of Pennsylvania. Purposeful sampling is a strategy in which the researcher intentionally chooses cases and/or participants that can best inform the identified research question(s) (Creswell 2013). The two networks study cases were identified primarily by way of the restaurants, using criteria discussed below. In order to incorporate the potential for variation between the network cases, I ultimately included one restaurant business
that was determined to be large and within close proximity to an urban population center, and another that was smaller and located some distance away from the nearest urban population center.

The first step in a case study approach – after one has determined their research questions and hypotheses – is to define the case, or unit of analysis for the study (Yin 2014). The definition of the case is largely dependent on the research questions and hypotheses that are set forth by the researcher. Taking this guidance into account, I allowed my research questions to guide the defining and binding of my cases. Because I posed three different research questions, I utilized a combination sampling approach, which included convenience, critical, and maximum variation sampling to identify my case studies. Convenience case sampling is used when the cases are site or individuals that the researcher can simply access and from which information can be easily collected. Secondly, critical case sampling seeks out cases that provide specific information about the chosen research question or problem. Finally, maximum variation sampling involves determining in advance criteria that differentiate the cases, and then selecting cases that are quite different from one another based on those criteria (Creswell 2013).

I employed convenience sampling to define my two farm-to-restaurant network cases as those that were currently operating within my selected area of study, the Central Valleys region of Pennsylvania (PHMC 2014), due to limitations on time and travel. These networks would then include restaurant owners and staff members as well as food producers who are currently operating within and selling products to restaurants within the Central Valleys region. Next, I began my identification of the networks by establishing criteria to delineate critical cases that could potentially supply the information needed to address my particular research questions. I began by looking at restaurants first, and I isolated restaurants that participated in the region’s
Buy Fresh Buy Local campaign (PASA 2008) and who also publicly advertised their use of local foods through their websites, newsletters, and in-house displays, like special boards or menus. They specifically had to make use of the word local when describing their food sources and offerings because this is the point of focus in my second research question, which investigates how local is defined by the network participants.

Because my first research question examines how these networks actually operate, I focused on restaurants that had been in business for at least five years, which took into account the volatility of the food service industry in the United States and aided me in identifying restaurants that had established themselves as successful businesses – at least during the course of this individual study. I also focused on restaurants that advertised their business relationships with at least ten local food partners, (either on their website or through in-house materials, like special boards or menus), in order to find networks that included a wider variety of participants. By focusing on networks that included a larger number of producer participants, I would have a greater variety and depth of knowledge from which to collect data; and therefore ample opportunity to pursue my third research question, which aims to understand the specific experiences of the network participants, particularly the benefits and drawbacks that the participants have encountered during their experiences.

Finally, to incorporate the objectives of maximum variation sampling and create points of comparison between my cases, two criteria were chosen in order to vary the selection of cases: size of restaurant business (based upon maximum customer capacity and number of employees) and distance to an urban center (population of 50,000 residents or more) (US Census Bureau 2013). These criteria were chosen because they may affect the number and diversity of restaurant
clientele, the amount of food the restaurant requires in meeting its customer demand, and the logistics of food delivery, like distance traveled and method of delivery.

Each case study ultimately included a total of twelve interview participants, for a total of twenty-four participants overall. The participants were characterized as follows:

1. Proprietor of the restaurant business (one per case)
2. Executive and/or sous chefs (two per case)
3. Front-of-house restaurant floor staff (three per case)
4. Food producers that represented a wide variety of products (six per case)

In order to gain access to these restaurant research sites, initial contact was made with the proprietor of each restaurant via email communication. To build trust and rapport, all research documents (including interview protocols and informed consent forms) were shared with the restaurant proprietors for consideration. After permission was granted, a snowball sampling method was used wherein the proprietor identified other restaurant staff members invited to participate in the study. Snowball, or chain, sampling allows the researcher to identify cases of interest from people or other research participants who know what cases contain rich and relevant information (Creswell 2013). Their identification and selection was purposefully based on their current employment status and experience with food preparation, sourcing, and service. These participants included the executive and/or sous chef of the restaurant, as well as front of house staff members, like food servers.

A snowball sampling method was also used to help identify the local food producer participants, wherein the chefs provided the names and contact information for the producers with whom they worked most closely. Food producer participants were also identified through
restaurant advertisements, such as those on the restaurants’ websites or in-house features, like special boards and menus. Producers were chosen primarily because of their current participation in the network. They had to grow or raise their own product (excluding value-added producers and processors), and they must have sold their product to their restaurant partner within the past year. To capture potential diversity among local food producers, the products grown or raised by the producers were also taken into consideration during the purposeful selection process. The aim was to avoid only interviewing vegetable or meat producers, and to instead meet with producers supplying different local food products in order to ensure diverse producer perspectives within each network (Creswell 2013).

Lastly, during the course of interviews with the local food partners of one of the farm-to-restaurant networks, it became apparent that their restaurant partner had recently undergone a transition in executive chef. Because this former executive chef had been a key player in the formation of the farm-to-restaurant network under study and had left the restaurant less than a year prior, the sample was expanded to include this participant as Restaurant B’s second chef participant in order to better understand the network under examination and the information shared by the local food producers.

Data Collection

Defined by Baxter and Jack (2008:544): “The qualitative case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources… [that] ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood.” As such, case study research designs require the use of multiple data collection methods for
assurance of reliability (Yin 2014). Therefore, I incorporated a variety into my research design: semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documents and images.

**Interviews**

According to Weiss (1994), research aims should determine one’s research methods, and some research aims that align well with qualitative interviews include: seeking detailed description, integrating multiple perspectives, describing processes, and learning how events are interpreted. All of these aims align well with my own research agenda, in that I am seeking a detailed description of how and why farm-to-restaurant networks operate by integrating multiple perspectives of various participants by learning how certain processes and events occur and are interpreted. Therefore, my main method of data collection was semi-structured, open-ended interviews with my research participants, which were audiotaped at the time of the interview and then later transcribed. I used guidelines from Creswell (2013) to design my interview protocols. Due to the variety of participants included in my research sample (restaurant proprietors, chefs, floor staff, and food producers), I generated three different interview protocols that were geared towards the roles of the participants in the network (see Appendix A).

In general, the interview questions aimed to capture the experiences, motivations, and perceptions of those who played a role in the farm-to-restaurant network and were driven by the three main research questions identified in Chapter 1. The questions developed for these interviews started with inquiries about the foundation of the restaurant or producer business under examination in order to collect information for the development of each case study’s context. If the participant was not a business owner (such as the kitchen and floor staff participants), they were asked questions about their position in the restaurant and any relevant background in food service experience. The participants were asked about:
- The responsibilities and duties they performed within the farm-to-restaurant network
- Motivations for initially engaging with the network
- Formation of the partnerships and/or formal contracts
- Communications between producer, restaurant, staff, and customers about the local products
- Delivery of and billing for the local goods provided

Floor staff members in particular were asked about interactions with customers to better understand the strategies and outcomes of staff and customer education about the local foods.

Another subset of interview questions inquired about the participant’s definition of local. This line of inquiry sought to understand what the participants were defining as local and how it was being used in the respective businesses and networks. They were asked to explain:

- What local meant to them personally
- What it meant within the context of their business, if they were the business owner
- How their definition of local had changed over time
- How their network participation had affected their definition of local

Thirdly, the last subset of questions sought to determine the motivations the participants had for being part of the network. These questions aimed to uncover the motivations and goals the participants had for founding and maintaining the network, as identified by the benefits they perceived from their participation, but also what they interpreted as drawbacks and where they saw the network falling short. They were asked about:

- Benefits of participating in the farm-to-restaurant network
- Drawbacks of and challenges to participating in the farm-to-restaurant network
- How participation in the network affected the profitability of their business
- How participation in the network may or may not be related to the restaurants’
  community outreach activities

Finally, a short post-interview questionnaire was administered to the restaurant
proprietors, chefs (if suggested to do so by the restaurant proprietors), and farmers in order to
gather some standardized information about characteristics of their businesses for better
understanding of the case study networks (see Appendix B). For the restaurants, data collected
included operation details and descriptions, particularly around the use and selection of local
food products. For the producers, information was collected about their operations, market
outlets, and farm sales.

I aimed to conduct in-person interviews with every participant, at the setting of their
choice in order to make observations about the way in which the individual reacted to and
answered interview questions, but in a place where they felt most at ease (Weiss 1994). The
majority of restaurant participants opted to perform their interviews at their respective restaurant
site, and about half of the producers chose to meet at their properties, as well. Otherwise,
interviews were conducted at a third party location, like a coffee shop or café. Two of the
interviews were conducted by phone due to schedule conflicts and the participant’s personal
preferences, respectively. While this situation limited my ability to make in-person observations,
phone interviews are considered the second next best method for conducting semi-structured
interviews (Creswell 2013).

The interviews varied in length from 15 minutes to 1 hour and 45 minutes, with an
average of about 50 minutes. Each participant was interviewed only once, although most gave
permission to revisit them if information was found to be missing. (Only two participants were contacted at a later date in order to answer additional questions, as more questions had been added to their respective protocols.) One interview was performed with a husband and wife who jointly operated their farm business; another was done with both the farm owner and farm manager; and a third was conducted with solely the farm manager, not the owner. These were the people who interacted with the restaurants most closely, even if those duties were shared. While the presence of more than one person and the nature of the relationship between those two people may have affected the data collected, it was by the choice of the participants to do so.

*Participant Observation*

To further my case study development and gather context for data collected via the semi-structured interviews, I conducted observations at both of the restaurant sites as a participant observer – particularly as a customer going to the restaurant for a meal (Creswell 2013). The observations were driven by my research questions, particularly the operation of the network and the use of *local* and local food products at the restaurant site. During the interviews with the restaurant proprietors and chefs, they were asked to identify a time during which an observation of the local-foods use would be prime. The observations were conducted at the times recommended by these participants, and examinations were made about the advertisement and use of the local food products, both through in-house materials, like special boards and menus, but also through conversations with the wait staff assigned to my table. The wait staff member was asked questions about *local* items on the menu, other local-food related customer inquiries, and the nature of the observation time compared to other dining periods. This interaction was conducted in order to observe how the details collected through the semi-structured interviews
actually played out during meal service at the restaurant. Finally, notes were taken about the environment and layout of the restaurant in order to aid the thick description of each restaurant.

*Documents and Images*

During the semi-structured interviews and/or observation periods, I collected copies or pictures of restaurants’ menus and other documents left on the table for customers to read. I also took pictures of any *local* food promotion items that may have been present in the restaurant at the time of my observation, such as special or informational boards. Finally, I examined the restaurants’ website page and collected PDF versions of any particular page that contained food or *local* references. I gathered these documents and audiovisual materials to examine how the restaurant was communicating their local food use and food-related missions to their customers (and staff) at the time of their dining experience, as well as before or after the visit via their website. I analyzed the content of these various texts and images to provide a contextual counterpoint to the definitions and operational insights shared by the restaurant participants, as well as how the food producers had reflected on the use or promotion of their own products within the restaurant setting.

*Data Analysis*

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and were coded thematically according to my areas of research inquiry, as identified through my research questions and the literature presented in Chapter 2. Yet, while the use of my conceptual framework and my research questions aided in the structure of my data analysis and reporting, my analysis also allowed for the emergence of unexpected themes and patterns that perhaps did not perfectly fit into my preconceived expectations. All materials, including interview transcriptions, observation field notes, and restaurant documents and materials were coded according to similar themes.
Analysis of the semi-structured interviews was performed using the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo, Version 10.0. Initial codes that were generated through the first phase of data analysis were revisited to improve clarity and reduce unnecessary outliers and redundant categories. In regard to three research questions posed at the beginning of this study, all codes were grouped into categories that aimed to specifically answer these questions. For research question one, (operation of the farm-to-restaurant networks), the participants’ answers were loosely organized around the main steps identified to be part of these operations. To answer research question two, how local is defined, all definitions offered were organized by the three domains offered by Eriksen (2013), and were inspected for the frequency in which the three types of definitions were mentioned, but also the order in which they were identified by the participant. Finally, for research question three, the benefits and drawbacks were organized into similar categories (and subcategories) across all research participants, and were evaluated for frequency both among participants and within the interview transcriptions.

**Generalizability and Validity**

In regard to generalizability, criticisms of purposeful sampling and small sample sizes, including their inability to contribute to generalized conclusions, may lead to a misunderstanding of the rigor of case studies as a research strategy and what they may add to the advancement of scientific knowledge. Flyvberg (2011) pointed out that formal generalization may be considered overrated as the main source of scientific progress, and that it is but one way of many that people accumulate knowledge that sports its own limitations. According to Stake (2000), the main focus of case studies is not necessarily generalization anyway, but may instead be the understanding of the case within the context in which it occurs. Due to the small sample size and limited context of this study, the ability to generalize any results to a larger population will be limited, as will the
comparability of the case studies across their selection criteria since there are only two cases. However, by allowing the context of my research questions to guide the sampling strategies, I hope to make contributions to the theories and literature that laid the foundation for those research questions as well as to identify areas within this field of study that may be ripe for further investigation.

As for validity, Creswell (2013) identified several methods of promoting the validity of a qualitative study, including: prolonged engagement; triangulation; peer review; negative case analysis; clarifying researcher bias; member checking; thick description, and external audits. These validity checks may be understood as “transactional validity,” which aims to achieve a “relatively higher level of accuracy and consensus by means of revisiting facts, feelings, experiences, and values or beliefs collected and interpreted” (Cho and Trent 2006:321). It is recommended that researchers utilize at least two of these strategies in any given study. One particular strategy for ensuring the accuracy of these identified themes and patterns was performed through data triangulation. According to Creswell (2013:251): “Typically, this process involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective. When qualitative researchers locate evidence to document a code or theme in different sources of data, they are triangulating information and providing validity to their findings.” I strove to follow this validation process by not only including multiple data collection strategies (interviews, questionnaires, observations, and document and audiovisual materials) and coding them according to similar themes, but also by incorporating multiple perspectives from the farm-to-restaurant network into my interview research sample. My second strategy for building the validity of a qualitative study was through creating rich, thick description (Creswell 2013) about my fieldwork encounters. By making field notes about every interview and my
observations from the restaurant sites, I generated richer contextual accounts of facets of the farm-to-restaurant networks.

A third validation strategy noted by Creswell (2013) was to clarify any researcher bias that may affect the interpretation and approach to the study. Qualitative researchers are pushed to identify any biases, values, or experiences that he or she may be bringing into the conduct, analysis, and reporting of their research study. This notion of researcher reflexivity has two components: one, the disclosing of past experiences with the phenomenon being examined, and two, how these experiences may have shaped the creation of the study, the execution of the data collection, the interpretations made of the findings, and the ultimate conclusions which are then drawn. I address this validation strategy in the following section.

**Researcher Position and Reflexivity**

In the interest of full disclosure, it is important to note that I was born and raised in my study area. As similarly described by Heley (2011) in concerning his own role as a local, rural ethnographer, I consider myself both an “insider” and an “outsider” within the study region and research area, as I’ve spent many years of my life at least lightly engaged in local food and farming activities, but never fully employed or embedded in the region’s farm-to-restaurant networks. I spent several months during high school working at one of the restaurants I studied, and I have been a frequenter of regional farmers’ markets, community-supported agriculture farms, and several local-food oriented events and programs. I have also conducted other less formal research projects in the past few years that have drawn on a similar research sample to the one used for this study. I therefore still maintain both some personal and business relationships with a few members of my sample. Additionally, I have also been active in supporting a number of projects that have visibly promoted sustainable agriculture and local food movements,
including the foundation of a student-led farm at my nearby undergraduate institution, campaigns
to promote farm-to-dining hall practices, and the creation of a local food cooperative in my home
area. These connections and experiences prompted my interest in the thesis research. They also
benefited this study, as they aided my access and rapport with some of my case study
participants, as similarly found by Heley (2011). However, they may also have affected how I
designed and performed the study and how my participants chose to respond to my interview
questions, as my own ideas about the mean of local or my expectations about the farm-to-
restaurant networks’ operation could have unconsciously biased my data collection and analysis
methods (Cherry, Ellis, & DeSoucey 2011).

To address these concerns, I tried to limit my own spoken contributions during the
interview process and redirected the interview back to the research subject at hand when personal
anecdotes or comments would drive it off-topic. While many of these interviews could be called
“acquaintance interviews,” as described by Garton and Copland (2010), the informed consent
form provided to my participants guaranteed confidentiality and signaled an important difference
in our research-focused encounters. I have also made a concerted effort to limit any
conversations I’ve had with regional family, friends, and colleagues about my thesis research
efforts so as not to reveal any identifying details to those who may know my participants.
Finally, my personal enthusiasm for local foods and farm-to-restaurant networks has been
tempered through my educational, professional, and practical experiences. This is reflected
through my interview protocols, in which I not only asked my participants about the benefits
they experienced through their participation, but also the drawbacks and disappointments, and
would encourage them to share ideas on how they would adjust the network in order to better
meet their goals.
Ethical Considerations

Finally, regardless of the research methods implemented, any university-based study that includes the participant of human subjects must be presented before an institutional review board in order to consider the ethical dimensions of how data is both collected and shared (Creswell 2013). This study therefore underwent a review process by the Penn State Institutional Review Board, which included an examination of all research documents, such as the informed consent form, interview protocols, post-interview questionnaires. As per the regulations of the Institutional Review Board and the Office for Research Protection, all research participants signed an informed consent form that described the overall purpose of the study and outlined their rights as participants, (including the right to withdraw at any time, the right to skip or ask questions; see Appendix C). This consent form also outlined the promise of confidentiality and how the data was to be stored and protected after collection. This portion of the consent form was particularly important because I was collecting proprietary information from restaurants and farms about their business practices and decisions. By ensuring complete confidentiality, the participants were able to speak more freely and accurately about their participation in the farm-to-restaurant networks. As a result, no names are used and all information about the participants and the context of this research study is described in a way that conceals identity of the participants.
CHAPTER 4  
Research Findings: Farm-to-Restaurant Network A

This chapter presents the findings from the study of the larger, urban farm-to-restaurant network, based on data from semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, observations, and restaurant documents and images. Background and descriptive information are provided for the research sample. Findings are presented separately for each farm-to-restaurant network, with the findings from the second smaller and rural network presented in Chapter 5. This findings chapter is organized by the overarching research questions for which the results provide insight. The findings are further organized to differentiate perspectives of restaurant participants (proprietors, chefs, and floor staff) and food producer participants, when applicable. This first network, the larger urban one, will be referred to as Network A, while the second, smaller and rural network will be referred to as Network B. All restaurant participants will be referred to using their occupational position at their respective restaurant (eg. proprietor, executive chef, server), and the producers (which are defined as those who supply local food products to either Restaurant A or Restaurant B) are identified by the product they supply in highest quantities to the restaurant (eg. vegetable, cheese, pork).

Background and Description of Restaurant A

The restaurant in the first farm-to-restaurant network had been in business for a total of twelve years at the time this study was conducted. This was the larger of the two restaurants and situated within the limits of the nearest urban population center. Size of restaurant was based upon both seating capacity and number of total employees. Restaurant A had a seating capacity of over 350 people. It also employed nearly 100 people, with about half employed as front-of-house staff, a third in the kitchen, and a handful in the restaurant’s in-house brewery operation.
Restaurant A was open for lunch and dinner service all seven days of the week, with both a set menu and a rotating weekly specials menu available to customers. This restaurant also included a small gift shop, in which customers can purchase restaurant memorabilia and products, such as soaps or lip balm, made by nearby craftspeople that incorporate the brewery’s products. When asked to characterize the restaurant, the executive chef described their business as casual and family dining, with a service of eclectic pub cuisine. The inside of restaurant is broken up into three main dining areas, situated around their two bars.

In terms of local food use, Restaurant A works with 10 to 17 local producers, depending on the season and availability of goods. The percentage of their menu items that could be described as local is also very seasonally dependent. The executive chef said that during peak season, such as later summer or early fall, about 60 percent of the food incorporated into the restaurant’s menu could be considered local; in comparison, only 30 percent of the products used within the restaurant during the off-season, or late winter, were locally sourced. The chefs described the use of multiple local food products, including vegetables, fruits, dairy, meat, eggs, and honey. They also included the hops they used for the brewing process as local, as well as many of their fish or seafood selections. The proprietor also included their own beer as a local food product, as they use it as an ingredient in a number of their dishes, too. Of those listed on the interview questionnaire, grains were the only product not ever obtained through local sourcing. The sourcing of the local foods – including identification of potential local food partners – is performed primarily by the executive and sous chefs. Finally, to supplement the rest of their food needs, Restaurant A also orders from US Foods, a well-known broad line distributor.
The restaurant business itself was started by two friends who wished to build a microbrewery in this region of Pennsylvania. Now, two partners primarily run the business, the first of whom is one of the original founders and who oversees the brewing portion of the operation. The second partner joined after the other initial founder moved out of town, and he originally was hired to oversee management and marketing. Since then, they have hired an actual operations manager, and the second partner is more involved in marketing and promotions, as well as customer relations. The second partner was the proprietor interviewed for this study. Other interview participants included: the executive chef, the sous chef, a server, one server who also works in the gift shop, and a server/bartender. (For the sake of clarity, all three front of house staff members will be simply referred to as “servers” for the remainder of the chapter.)

Restaurant A also maintains their own on-site garden plots, in which they grow herbs, microgreens, and Brassica crops (cabbage, kale, tatsoi, arugula). The executive and sous chef maintain the garden and decide each spring which plants to grow based upon originality and what can be produced the most efficiently in a small amount of space. They use many of these ingredients to supplement their locally-sourced food supply that’s used in their weekly vegetarian/vegan special night.

**Description of Network A Producers**

The producer sample for Farm-To-Restaurant Network A included six food producers who had been in business for an average of 23 years and operated on an average of 36 acres, (excluding a fish hatchery for which this statistic was not relevant). Three were USDA-certified organic; their main sales came from vegetable crops. The other three food producers provided a variety of animal-based products: one farm sold solely cheese; another sold primarily poultry to Restaurant A; and the last was a fish hatchery. The food producers also varied greatly in the
amount of their gross annual sales that were accounted for by restaurant sales, as well as the number of restaurants with which they worked (see Table 1). Other market outlets in addition to restaurants included farmers’ markets, on-farm sales, community-supported agriculture (CSA) shares, cooperatives, and health food stores. Only four of the food operations had hired help, which ranged from two to eight employees. Two of the vegetable producers also operated a workshare-style CSA, which contributed 20 extra workers during the summer months. Two of the producer interviews were completed with the farm manager, as they engaged most directly with the restaurant for the farm. Of the other four producer businesses, two were supported partly by employment off-farm, while the other two relied on the farm as the only source of income.

Five of the six producers claimed to sell all of their product locally, based on their own definitions of local, as discussed later.

### Table 1. Producer Characteristics in Farm-to-Restaurant Network A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Producer</th>
<th>#1A</th>
<th>#2A</th>
<th>#3A</th>
<th>#4A</th>
<th>#5A</th>
<th>#6A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years Farming</strong></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Production Acreage</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>USDA Organic</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Product</strong></td>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>Cheese</td>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>Poultry &amp; Livestock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2013 Farm Sales</strong></td>
<td>$50,000-99,999</td>
<td>$50,000-99,999</td>
<td>$250,000-499,999</td>
<td>$50,000-99,999</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
<td>$1,000-9,999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adult Off-Farm</strong></td>
<td>1 Manager</td>
<td>0 Manager</td>
<td>0 Manager</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% Sales Restaurants</strong></td>
<td>49</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Second**</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong># Restaurants</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Information not provided by the producer due to personal or proprietary concerns.

**This producer chose not to provide information on the exact percentages for each of his market outlets,
and he instead ranked them according to largest amount of product sold (eg. first, second, third).

**Operation of Network A**

*Initiation of Business Relationships*

Restaurant A started sourcing local food products after the proprietor did research on what practices other brewpubs across the country were incorporating into their businesses. He found that many small breweries had begun to pair up with local food purveyors as a way of attracting a more solid customer base and therefore becoming more financially secure – for both parties. By using ties he already had with some local food producers in the immediate area surrounding the restaurant, the proprietor convinced the chefs to try local food sourcing. This initial experience was not a good one for the proprietor. Many of the small operations with which Restaurant A tried to work turned out to be less reliable and consistent than the restaurant needed in order to maintain their kitchen operation. After several years of working on business relationships with these producers, and with assistance from the state’s sustainable agriculture association, dependability and consistency were greatly enhanced and Restaurant A decided to expand its local food supply base.

According to the proprietor, local food partners were selected based upon what the restaurant wanted to incorporate into their menu: “You know, we’re not using all local food producers. There’s many more out there we could be using, so we kind of pick and choose. And we’re always adding new ones here and there.” Restaurant A also sought out local food producers who could provide a superior and unique product at a reasonable price and in a timely manner. The business particularly wanted such products for use on the restaurant’s weekly vegetarian/vegan specials night. Instead of the restaurant doing the necessary legwork to find the
producers who met their standards, the proprietor indicated that they wanted the producers to come to them.

Though the restaurant lacked a formal process for working with local food producers, the choice was ultimately left up to the interest and creativity of the chefs. Discussing their selection of local food partners, the executive and sous chefs emphasized their previous relationships with producers. The executive chef had done some local food sourcing at his previous place of employment, and he brought those relationships with him to his new position. The sous chef had worked as a manager on a nearby farm – one from which they now source produce – and therefore not only came to his position at Restaurant A with a knowledge and appreciation of local food products, but also knowledge of the surrounding farming community. The sous chef also indicated that close proximity to the restaurant, convenience, and amount of product available for sale were important characteristics of their chosen local food producers.

The food producers interviewed from Farm-to-Restaurant Network A indicated that their associations with the restaurants were developed through a variety of methods, each producer citing more than one way he or she started working with Restaurant A and other restaurants. These methods included their own efforts to approach the restaurants or personal knowledge of the restaurant proprietors or chefs. The most mentioned way of forming a restaurant relationship was by approaching the restaurant on the producers’ own time. All six producers cited instances of when they had sought out restaurant partners, which often included a restaurant site visit with products for sampling. Some of the producers cited specific characteristics they look for in a restaurant partner, and therefore only approach those that they deem promising. Characteristics included the type and reputation of the restaurant, with a focus on higher-end, independently owned restaurants that were willing to pay the extra money for local foods. One vegetable farm
manager shared that she looks for the restaurants that either have owners, staff or customers that are already interested in local sourcing, despite the amount of effort she must invest to do so:

Finding the restaurants that really like to [buy local], and work with us, and work with other farms, and just keep that idea going… To single those ones out might mean going and talking to a lot of different restaurants, and then building relationships with ones that are really interested.

Two other producers seconded this sentiment, as they both identified potential restaurant accounts based upon the targeted patron base. One of these producers, the other vegetable farm manager, admitted that he even goes into restaurants to look over the menu items and observe the customers to determine whether or not the restaurant would be a good prospect for buying fresh produce from a local farm.

The third vegetable producer indicated that he looks for those restaurant customers who he knows will be dependable:

When people start buying from us and they buy consistently every week and I know I can depend on them – that is the best kind of customer… Over the long run, it’s a lot better to sell a couple cases a week to this one place as opposed to ten cases every three weeks to someone… Sometimes not even hear from them for months. So what I’m looking for is consistency… I would say that {Restaurant A] is a core part of our sales mainly because I know they’re not going to go away.

Convenience was another characteristic cited by three of the producers. They relayed their preference for restaurant partners with whom a flexible business relationship was easy to maintain and delivery of food products to the restaurant site was convenient in terms of transportation distance and drop-off times.

The second most mentioned way these producers formed business associations with their restaurant partners, (after approaching the pre-selected restaurants with a sales pitch), was through pre-existing relationships with someone at the restaurant, be it an owner, chef, or staff
member. Four of the six producers indicated that they began working with Restaurant A (as well as other restaurants) because of relationships they had with chefs through their positions at previous restaurants or the presence of mutual friends between themselves and restaurant owners or chefs. Finally, two producers also cited the formation of relationships with Restaurant A through third party organizations, regional food cooperatives or cooperative extension.

*From Field...*

The business relationships between Restaurant A and these six local food producers are maintained by informal weekly or monthly communications. As indicated by the sous chef, Restaurant A has discussed the idea of contracts, but so far has not entered into any formal contracts with their local food producers because they know they can place an order through their broadline distributor if a local food order does not come through. While the sous chef thought that producers would prefer the stability provided through more formalized contract process, he also pointed out that the risk of crop failure could make a contract too complicated.

Of the six food producers interviewed, none of them have formal contracts with any of their restaurant buyers. As put by the cheese producer: “No, no formal contracts. They are open to say, tomorrow I’m done with him.” Two of the producers admitted that they would be unwilling to engage in a formal contract with a restaurant because they believed it would make the business relationship more difficult to maintain. As put by one of these producers:

I would be reluctant to get into a contract on something like that, because as a farmer, you don’t know what’s going to happen in any one year. So when you talk about a contract, you’ve got to talk about specific items. Unless it’s something that you know you can have every week for a certain amount of time – but even something as common as tomatoes, if you have a bad tomato year, then all of a sudden everything falls through.
But the other four producers were not as hesitant. All four indicated that while they may not themselves ask for a contract, they’d be willing to engage in a formal contract if it was what their restaurant partner wanted to do. Two of the producers did insert the caveat that if they were to pursue the more formal route, they would want flexibility clauses incorporated into the contract to account for the risks of farming, such as weather-related catastrophes. One vegetable farm manager admitted he thought “contract buying is awesome,” though he wasn’t sure if the types of restaurants he works with – whose menus change often – would want the consistency of a contract, either. Though not perceived as a formal contract, both vegetable farm managers have participated in early spring planning meetings with Restaurant A’s executive and sous chefs during which the chefs identify the specific crops that they would like to order from the farms throughout the season, giving the managers a good idea of what types and quantities of particular vegetables crops to grow in the coming season as well as the expected price per pound the restaurants are willing to pay. Both of the chefs and the two producers looked favorably upon these meetings because they alleviated some uncertainty and gave the two parties a way to work closely together to meet both of their business goals.

Product orders are placed with the local food producers in a variety of ways, all of which come directly from the executive or sous chef. Both the cheese and fish producers receive phone calls when Restaurant A’s product inventory is running low; the poultry producer communicates primarily via text message; and the three vegetable producers send out a weekly inventory list via email to all of their wholesale accounts, with a given deadline for ordering. Each producer appeared to be content with their ordering routine, as they had modified it with their own personal preferences or needs. Two of the vegetable producers have set aside a specific day for the ordering process, so as to provide structure and constrain the amount of time they spend on it.
As one of them said, “My sales day is Monday. They’re going to hear from me whether they like it or not.” And as indicated by the other producer:

We either need to harvest [the wholesale produce] Tuesday with the CSA stuff or we need to get it special on Wednesday. When we get phone calls from them… on Thursday… it’s like, we’re out transplanting or something, and we drop everything and go harvest. So that’s kind of what drove me to doing the wholesale availability sheet, as it kind of consolidated the labor aspect of sales as well.

One vegetable farm manager expressed her affinity for keeping all of her wholesale account communications on email, because texting – while initially preferred by the executive chef of Restaurant A – was not convenient for many logistical reasons. But the needs of the restaurant are taken into account, too. While the one vegetable farm manager did not want to use texting for orders, she chose instead to go with an emailed weekly inventory list instead because “restaurants are used to that… it’s how it all comes in.” The poultry producer doesn’t mind texting because she thinks it is what works best with the restaurant’s busy schedule. While the cheese producers’ other wholesale accounts place their orders through a third party answering system, Restaurant A’s executive chef calls the producer’s personal number directly to place his orders because, as the producer said, “That’s just the way they prefer to do it… it’s just easier for them and it kind of works.”

… To Kitchen ...

After the orders have been placed, each of the producers takes on the responsibility of delivering the food from farm to restaurant, which happens either weekly or as needed. All three animal-product based producers also rely on third-party processors, to whom they deliver their initial product, pick it up, and then store it on their farm until it is needed. Drop off times are flexible, and are usually mediated between restaurant meal services and when it’s most convenient for the producer. Again, the producers try to create a set schedule for deliveries,
setting aside a day or two per week during which they transport all of their wholesale deliveries. In rare instances, the sous chef may also visit one of the vegetable farms to harvest specific items directly from the field.

When the food products reach the restaurant, it is up the executive and sous chefs not only to design the menu that incorporates these products, but also decide how the food’s characteristics and use will be communicated both to other restaurant staff and customers. In Restaurant A, the local foods are used primarily as special features, especially focusing on the vegetables for their weekly vegetarian/vegan night. While the producers did not report many instances of specific product requests – outside what happened during the aforementioned spring planning meetings, four of the producers claimed to know off the top of their heads what Restaurant A wanted to order and in what ways they would be featuring it. For example, the poultry producer referenced that “in the past, the eggs were mostly a weekend feature. Sunday brunch… I know that they do cook things and put an egg on top, so… you can see the orange yolk.” One of the vegetable farm managers cited a summer Caprese salad for which the restaurant used their orange and red heirloom tomatoes. This manager said that he sometimes gets requests for unique, original items because, “all their vegetarian specials are pretty crazy, because you have to be inventive to get people to buy vegetarian food at a burger place.”

The sous chef and some of the producers also indicated that they exchange informal feedback, when necessary. As said by the sous chef, “Yeah, I think everyone I’ve dealt with is definitely open to input. And we are, too.” Feedback for the producers may include comments on how good or disappointing a product may be – or it may not be framed as feedback at all. As one of the vegetable producers put it, “They pay me! They keep ordering! That’s the feedback.” According to the sous chef, the producers might let the restaurant know if something unexpected
will be showing up in their order, but the producers shy away from telling the restaurant how to use their product, unless it’s a new or unusual product. The cheese producer does not bother with providing instructions with his variety of products because, “You can’t really just send [the chefs] information and expect that they’ll read it… We don’t by design because there again, I kind of feel the chefs are kind of the experts in their field… We’re not here to try to tell them what to do.”

... To Table.

In regard to staff and customer education, the executive and sous chef again take leading roles. The chefs educate the restaurant staff about the local food offerings through “line-ups” in which the chefs tell the staff what the specials are for the day, and allow them to ask questions and try a sample. These line-ups take place every day for every meal period, which the executive chef says, “helps everybody be involved.” One server also spoke about tests on the food menu that are given out every time a new menu is produced. Some of the questions ask from where certain products are sourced, including individual farms and nearby areas. The executive chef also indicated that he would like to encourage restaurant staff members to go out and visit the farms of their local food partners to build greater familiarity. The chefs themselves have been out to visit a few of the producer participants, and all producer indicated that they would be open to the visit. As one server put it, “But then when we actually go to the farm or you actually get to know the family who owns the farm, it kinda makes it a little more personal to you. So when you are serving and talking about it, it’s not more like robot, let me repeat what [the executive chef] said. It get to be more, like, ‘No, really, this stuff is great. You go visit the farm.’”

Restaurant A also has a number of other amenities geared not only towards the education of their staff, but also their customers. The standard menu itself has a page dedicated to thanking
and listing their local food producers, as well as descriptive qualifiers and specific farm names peppered throughout its pages, (including the specials insert page) to indicate when a local or house-made product is being used. The restaurant also lists their local food producers on a separate page of their website, which not only includes a description of the producer and what Restaurant A buys from them, but also links to the producers’ own websites, when applicable. The restaurant has also generated a large, framed map, which indicates where the local food producers are located, what products they provide, and their contact information. The map is hung on the wall of the restaurant’s entranceway, in full view of all staff and customers.

The final main source of customer education rests on the shoulders of the staff themselves. The floor staff must answer all customer inquiries that happen during the meal service. All three floor staff interviewed at Restaurant A indicated that they get a lot of questions about the restaurant’s specific uses of local food products, and one staff member in particular noted that these questions more often come from regulars who may actually know the local food producers than those customers who are visiting from out of town. Two of the staff members said that the customers’ questions about the local foods are often linked to health concerns, such as allergies or other dietary restrictions. As one staff member described it:

[Local food] is a good conversation piece with customers. They like to know, as a server, when you walk up to the table and can tell them stuff like that. And I guarantee you if a customer asks you and you don’t know the answer, either they do and they’re quizzing you and they you’re really like <server grimaces>… We really need to know so we can be informed, so they can be informed.

For my research observation, I attended the vegetarian/vegan night because it incorporated the most local food, according to the proprietor and chefs. When I asked my own questions about the local food options on the menu that night, my server was quick to point out the “most local” items on the menu – in his opinion – and referred to the products using specific
descriptions, like farm name and manufacturing practice. He also referred my questions to the chef, and came back to report a few additional options that the chef had recommended I try if I was interested in eating locally. The server indicated that he had received similar questions that evening from other interested folks – as he does every vegetarian/vegan night – but that the local options weren’t always at the top of the customers’ inquiry lists.

The producers also play a small role in staff and customer education about the local food products. This happens either through special events hosted by the restaurant, such as their previously annual – now monthly – “Meet the Maker” nights, during which the local food producers are invited to come into the restaurant for an evening and mingle with some of the restaurant’s club members. Five out of the six producers occasionally spend additional time at the restaurant, where they enjoy the restaurant’s fare and potentially engage in conversations with the staff or customers around them. As one server described, “A lot of [the farmers] are regulars, so I get them at the bar later and we talk about [the food]… Or they just tell funny stories about certain things… It’s nice for us… I’ve gotten bags of produce before, like as tips.” But the producers’ time is limited, and as the poultry producer put it, “[I] don’t want to go and pay for our chicken.” Or as a vegetable farm manager said, he knows what they serve at the restaurant is not always his product anyway: “Whenever I go to [Restaurant A] and get something that I sold to them, I always just picture them in the background, like, ‘No, use that bag. Use that bag! He grew this. He knows that’s not his salad!’” Finally, in terms of marketing their products, all six producers indicated that job is left to the restaurants. While a few indicated that they would prefer to have their stuff labeled by farm name and/or differentiated from the conventionally-sourced food, others choose to stay silent, as they do with food preparation, too. As one vegetable producer said about local food marketing, “That’s kind of a wishy-washy area.
If I were to go to a restaurant that had my name on it and I knew they had bought only one or two things during the year, I’d make a big stink about it. But… I don’t think about it.”

**Defining Local**

*Perceptions of Restaurant A Participants*

The Restaurant A participants described *local* in a number of different ways throughout their interviews. Each person using a variety of ways to define the term, which were coded into categories that broadly followed Eriksen’s (2013) taxonomy of *local* (see Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>LOCAL DESCRIPTION</strong></th>
<th>#PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>#REFERENCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geographical Proximity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Socio-political Region</em></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Biophysical Region</em></td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Travel Distance</em></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Propinquity</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Knowing the Producer &amp; Operation</em></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cooperation Btwn Producers &amp; Community</em></td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>In-House</em></td>
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<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Local as Not Corporations or Chains</em></td>
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<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Organic/Vegetarian</em></td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td><em>High Quality Product</em></td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Minimal Impact on Resources</em></td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Minimal Processing</em></td>
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</table>

When asked to define local in their own terms, five Restaurant A participants cited some form of geographical proximity. These five participants defined *local* using geographical
concepts first before all others, as was expected based upon Eriksen’s (2013) taxonomy of *local*. But the type of geographical proximity varied. *Local* was most often geographically described using specific socio-political and biophysical boundaries. The proprietor of the restaurant described the county in which the restaurant resided as its local geographical area, whereas the executive chef included both their county, and also contiguous counties. The executive chef further explained that *local* could also mean the larger regions of the entire state and east coast, depending on the product that was trying to be sourced. The sous chef shared this sentiment, beginning his definition by saying, “For here, I would consider the whole east coast local. It’s really hard to get enough supply from within the county or whatever to sustain itself as a business. So anything that comes from Florida to Maine over toward Ohio, I feel is fairly local compared to South America or California.” One of the servers also referred to the state of Pennsylvania as *local*, while another described a much smaller geographical area than the others, indicating that she viewed *local* as the community the restaurant resided in, comparing it to the area of the local school district.

Another common geographical measure of *local* was transportation distance of the food product. While none of the Restaurant A participants cited any specific distance as *local*, one server said that a mile radius would be appropriate, depending on the product one is trying to source. The sous chef described his perception of *local* transportation range to be “a reasonable distance, [so] that you can have it within a couple of days.” Another server emphasized that her idea of *local* would mean that the producers were located within a short driving distance of the restaurant, close enough that the staff or customers could visit the farm, if they wanted to. Lastly, the proprietor and executive chef described *local* travel distance as one that minimized the use of resources. The category of resources referenced changed depending on the participant. The
proprietor described *local* as that which could be achieved “without excessive cost of transport or shipping,” while the executive chef described it as using “the least amount of gasoline” or “carbon or fossil fuels” to procure the products needed.

Three of the Restaurant A participants also included relational propinquity in their self-generated definitions of *local*. After describing the geographical portion of his definition, the sous chef turned to relationships: “I think also, part of that is knowing the people you’re getting the product from, building a friendship with them, whether it’s directly or over the phone. I think that really plays a part into the locality also, because you know them better. You build a relationship and you can trust them.” Two of the floor staff included similar reflections. One participant described farm visits and seeing how the producers created the product as delineating *local*. The other server began her definition of *local* by describing it as those products that come from the restaurant’s producer partners. She went on to outline the restaurant’s relationship with their cheese producer, and how part of *local* was getting to interact with the producer at the restaurant during “Meet the Maker” events, as well as to exchange ideas about how the product could be used or diversified.

Looking to the last domain of Eriksen’s (2013) three-pronged *local* taxonomy, a number of different values were also incorporated into Restaurant A participants’ conceptualizations of *local*. In contrast to Eriksen’s (2013) findings, *local* for this population was more likely to be described in terms of geography and values than geography and relational propinquity. While a number of these value references occurred in response to the prompt for a *local* definition, many were also produced throughout other parts of the participants’ interviews. Taking all of these into account, participants shared a value-related definition of *local* as self-sufficiency or creating needed products “in house.” Four of the six participants included this value as part of their *local*
idea. The proprietor specifically identified the restaurant brewery’s beers as *local* because they’re created on-site and are incorporated into a variety of other restaurant products, edible and cosmetic. Both chefs and a server also referenced Restaurant A’s garden in their description of *local*. The executive chef pointed out that their bread could be considered a local product, as the majority of it is now baked in house. Finally, the server alluded to a beef farm that is jointly owned by the restaurant, implying that the beef could also be considered a local product that is, in some respects, produced in house. More broadly, the sous chef indentified the “in house” trend as the next step for restaurants that are dedicated to sourcing locally, emphasizing that Restaurant A will continue to look for more ways to do this.

Other values mentioned by Restaurant A participants included high product quality; vegetarianism/veganism; organic certification; minimal impact on resources; and minimal processing. The participants also used negative qualifiers to define *local*. Five out of the six participants embellished their definition of *local* by describing not only what it was – but what it was not. Sometimes this meant describing what regions or distances were not *local* – such as California or South America. But the proprietor and two servers discussed *local* as products that are not produced by chains or big-box stores, emphasizing instead the independent or original nature of the attribute.

Asked how their experience working at the business may have affected their definition of local, all Restaurant A participants responded positively. The proprietor indicated that his view on *local* had expanded with the business; as the restaurant became bigger and local foods became more popular, both among customers and the kitchen, he learned more about what the concept meant, particularly within the setting of Restaurant A. Both chefs indicated that they had come to their jobs with substantial previous experience working with local foods, but their time at
Restaurant A had taught them more about the area’s local offerings as well as in house options. All three servers indicated that their experience at Restaurant A had increased their awareness of *local*, as it wasn’t something they had necessarily thought about much before, at least not at the scale of a restaurant. As one server put it: [Restaurant A] made me more aware of [local food] and it’s much more a part of my daily life, both at work and at home now.”

**Perceptions of Network A Producers**

The producers from Network A also provided a wide range of definitions for *local*, each often citing different ideas within their definitions (see Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOCAL DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>#PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>#REFERENCES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geographical Proximity</td>
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<td>Local as Not Corporations or Chains</td>
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<td>Shared Values</td>
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</table>

Just like the majority of the Restaurant A participants, each producer in Network A initially defined *local* with measures of geographical proximity. In contrast to the Restaurant A participants, the producers focused somewhat more on the distance the product must travel to
define \textit{local} than the sociopolitical or biophysical region. Different distances were used to describe \textit{local}, ranging between 15 to 250 miles between the points of production and of consumption. Regions identified as \textit{local} reflected different sociopolitical and biophysical boundaries, such as school districts and communities; valleys; watersheds (or foodsheds); state; state-based region (Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia); and the United States. And like the Restaurant A participants, these producers also used descriptions of what is not \textit{local} to delineate what is – but the main majority of these qualifiers fell into the geographical proximity domain, (eg. \textit{local} is not international, California, Ohio, Philadelphia).

The given distances were justified by its relationship to the biophysical region. As one of the vegetable farm managers said,

\textit{It depends on where you care, I would say. If you’re in Philadelphia… they source I think from within 100 miles… But like here? 150 miles? I wouldn’t consider that to be local here anymore. You’re probably looking at about 60, once you get down out of these valleys.}

Another three producers justified their distance- or region-based definitions by claiming it’s the area in which their product sells – therefore, it’s local to their business. As one vegetable producer said, “The point is to sell the produce… I’m just a small guy – it’s how far I can go in a day and come back, and still be sane. So for me, local is 60 miles away.” As another example, the fish hatchery owner recognized that while his salmon might be not considered \textit{local} because it’s caught in Alaska, he himself is \textit{local} and he chooses to sell in Central Pennsylvania. Five out of six producers provided justifications like these because they also characterized local as a “flexible,” “vague,” or “buzz word” term that changes designation based upon the multiple conditions of any given situation. As one producer put it, “In terms of business, local shouldn’t
be restricted necessarily to an arbitrary geographical amount, but your ability to deliver fresh produce in a timely and efficient manner.”

After geographical proximity, the second most common way for Network A producers to define local was through relational propinquity. Five producers discussed how knowing the producer and/or his or her particular production practices is foundational to the concept of local – but two of these five only did so after being asked if relationships affected their definition of local. In response to that prompt, the fish hatchery owner and cheese producer claimed that knowing one’s regular customers personally helps further the idea of local by helping people learn about the origin of their food and provides a more personal service, respectively. When talking about the importance of social ties to the area’s local food movement, one of the vegetable farm managers proclaimed, “You see the same people all the time… You’re like, yeah, that’s the dude that does that. And I know them by face. I don’t know you particularly, but I know what you do. I value that as local.”

The same vegetable farm manager also went on to say that, “I think the best example of local would be the farmers’ market because you get that interaction with people that are somewhat involved in the produce.” He was not the only producer who included an element of relational propinquity in his definition of local, but attributed to a market form outside of restaurants and wholesale. The second vegetable farm manager also made similar claims. She indicated that relationships with their customers are so important to the ideology of their farm, that they will never do anything to threaten their Community-Supported Agriculture business, which is their first priority. The threats specifically included expanding their market to other restaurants and other wholesale accounts. While they valued those types of local experiences as well, and were friendly with the chefs they have sold to in the past, the manager claimed to find
her concept of local’s social domain to be more truly played out in a different market setting, particularly one where she can interact with both on-farm workshare holders and off-farm farmshare customers.

Values were not a commonly cited way of defining local among the Network A producers in this study. The only producer who included particular values in their description of local was the poultry producer. This interview was conducted with both the wife and husband who own the business, and so they didn’t just define local in their interview – they had a dialogue through which they co-created a definition for them and their shared business. Through this process, they started with geographical characterizations, but quickly realized that there are different “components” to local that make it far more complicated. It was their emphasis on relational propinquity that helped them identify values, because for them, local was also about interacting with those who share your values around food and agriculture. Essentially, the couple decided that local also could be defined by type and size of business that’s engaging in the local market, emphasizing independently-owned and small businesses as being more local. Further, they also associated the values of environmentalism and community support with their idea of local.

**Benefits of Participation**

*Perceptions of Restaurant A Participants*

Related to the definitions of local are the benefits participants identify from their participation in the Farm-to-Restaurant network. Study participants often naturally discussed both topics within a short conversational distance of one another, at their own initiative. In particular, many of the relationship-based and values-based definitions of local were both offered as benefits of being able to source (or sell) local food to a restaurant. The participants from
Network A cited many benefits, both when directly asked to list them, but also throughout their discussion of local foods. Those recounted by Restaurant A participants (as well as all other study participants) were categorized into six different themes: improved restaurant profitability; staff and customer development; extra network connections; improved producer profitability; personal business relationship; producer (See Table 4).

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<thead>
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<th>PERCEIVED BENEFIT</th>
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<td>1. Restaurant Becomes More Profitable</td>
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<td>39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Superior &amp; Unique Foods</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meet Customer Demand</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enhanced Profitability &amp; Competitiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cheaper Product Pricing</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Staff &amp; Customer Development</td>
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<td>32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Customer &amp; Staff Education about Food &amp; Area</td>
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<td>Encourage Relationship with Producers</td>
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<td>Chef Development</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Extra Network Connections</td>
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<td>Connection to Larger Social Movement</td>
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<td>Support Local Economy &amp; Community</td>
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<td>More Environmentally Friendly</td>
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<td>4. Producer Becomes More Profitable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enhanced Producer Profitability</td>
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<td>5. Flexible Business Relationship</td>
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<td>6. Producer Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage Relationship with Consumers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Producer Pride</td>
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The most frequently cited benefits were those within the category of improved restaurant profitability, and were mentioned by every Restaurant A participant. As stated above, the proprietor first pursued the incorporation of local foods after observing this growing trend among
successful microbreweries in the western United States. While he claimed to lack a good direct measure of its impact, the proprietor linked the use of local foods – particularly if one includes their own beer product as local – to their ongoing profitability and success as a food service business. Sourcing locally was considered to boost the business in a number of ways. The superior quality and uniqueness of the food, particularly when compared to what can be sourced from their more conventional supplier, were seen as good for the restaurant. One server said:

The food’s better. I mean, it really is. Just simple things, like our mac’n’cheese has [local dairy] cream in it. And people always get that, and they’re like, ‘Why is this so good?!’ I’m like, ‘Because it’s fresh, local cream in it.’ Really, there’s nothing crazy in there. It’s just because it’s like local stuff… It tastes better.

All Restaurant A participants also mentioned the benefit of meeting customer demand, as it related to improved restaurant business viability. The proprietor indicated that the weekly vegetarian/vegan night – a time when the kitchen actively promotes its local food use – arose out of demand from their “loyal customers,” and it was pursued, despite the barriers that stood in the way. When asked about customer interest, the sous chef replied, “Oh, yeah. Our customers love it. We get responses all the time how that’s one of the draws of [Restaurant A] is that we use local products.” Participants’ comments on benefits that supported the restaurant’s viability also centered on gaining a competitive edge. As the sous chef stated, “I think if we didn’t do local, we’d just be another restaurant in a sense.” A server took this notion a step further, describing Restaurant A as a lead innovator for the area’s local food scene:

We’re set above everyone else, because this place started the trend for using local foods. Other restaurants have used, like [local pork producer] or something like that, but [Restaurant A] is very well known for that. They started a name. So since [Restaurant A] did that, I think other restaurants have kind of… moved toward the direction where, ‘Hey, if it works well for [Restaurant A], then what could it do for us?

The second highest area of benefit for participating in a local foods network, as perceived by the Restaurant A participants was coded as staff and customer development, benefits of which
were mentioned by all six participants. Education of staff and customers about food production, agricultural livelihoods, and the physical environment was very important to the proprietor of Restaurant A. That’s why they stress such thorough staff education in the restaurant – both for the benefit of the individual staff members, but also because they are a direct contact point for the customers. The education of youth in particular was named by both the proprietor and the executive chef, as they hoped they’re reaching the next generation about local and healthy eating through the many families that frequent the restaurant on a regular basis. The executive chef even recounted a story of how he teamed up with one of the vegetable producers to do a garden and cooking demonstration at a nearby elementary school. In regard to staff and customer education, one server pointed out that the education is what makes the other benefits more possible:

It’s what we do here. It’s a purpose of the restaurant to further the local foods movement and to keep the things that we purchase, keep those farms alive, keep those businesses alive as much at they’re keeping us alive. So it’s important for everybody to know about it. Because if nobody knows about it, then nobody cares.

*Staff and customer development* benefits also included the increased availability of healthy food options, as local foods were perceived by the Restaurant A participants to be healthier than those that were sourced through a conventional distributor. As said by a server about local eating, “It makes you feel better about yourself. It makes you feel healthier, it makes you more aware of what’s going on around you.”

The third most frequently cited area of benefits that have been realized by the Restaurant A participants was the category of *extra-network connections*. All six of the Restaurant A participants believed that benefits of local sourcing included supporting the community and economy of the restaurant’s local area and/or the larger social movement around local foods.
These benefits are termed ‘extra-network connections’ because, while they may in fact benefit the network players as well, references around these topics were not tied back explicitly to improving the viability of the restaurant or farm business, nor were they put into terms that limited their reach to restaurant staff or customers. As said by the proprietor, “And I think the other good news, besides being a good education for our customers, it’s forced the big food suppliers to step up and pay attention. Big time.” Besides circulating money more centrally and supporting community initiatives, the two chefs also recognized that community benefit of environmental responsibility, as it’s related to local food sourcing.

The fourth benefit type cited by the restaurant participants was the category of improved profitability of producers. All six Restaurant A participants made reference to this benefit in some shape or form, stated generally that local sourcing benefits producer populations or even calling out the particular producers from which Restaurant A sources. The proprietor attributed the recent financial success of both the restaurant’s cheese and beef producers to the large accounts they have with Restaurant A, and he believed that the producers would say the same. When asked about benefits of going local, one server responded:

Because you’re securing someone a job. People don’t understand how hard it is to be a farmer and what it’s like to be them. And you have all these middlemen sometimes when you go to big corporations… Rather… I’m going to give ‘Farmer Dan’ this hundred dollars for this case of tomatoes, and I know where it’s been, where it came from, and here, now, it’s right here and I don’t have to pay anyone else. I know I am giving him and his family a job and sustaining them.

Three of the Restaurant A participants mentioned benefits of participating in a local food network that were categorized as flexible business relationship. Not only were they able to direct some of the producers towards what crops they would like to see in the coming season, but they had experiences where the producers have gone out of their way to keep the restaurant on track.
As stated by the executive chef, “And a benefit of [local sourcing], too, is that, you know, we’re human and forget something – ‘Hey, guys, can I get this?’ And nine out of ten of these guys say, ‘Yes, I’ll have it for you in an hour or so.’”

In addition to the direct benefit of participating in a relationship with Restaurant A, both the proprietor and executive expressed a belief that by working with their restaurant, the local producers have been able to develop in a way that makes them both more “accessible” and “consistent,” increasing and improving their market base and profitably beyond what they do with Restaurant A.

*Perceptions of Network A Producers*

The benefits articulated by the Network A producers were also coded into the same six categories, but in a slightly different order of frequency: improved restaurant profitability; improved producer profitability; flexible business relationship; extra network connections; staff & customer development; and producer development (see Table 5).
All six producers spoke about the significant benefits any restaurant had to gain from participating in a local foods network – so much, in fact, that the number of references to improved restaurant profitability surpassed those benefits gained by their own businesses. Like the restaurant participants, the producers cited the access to food of superior quality and uniqueness as the top benefit for the restaurant business, followed by meeting customer demand. As one vegetable producer put it, “…people were begging for local stuff because they knew how good it was. And they wanted to promote local stuff. These chefs know what they were doing. This was all a business decision. At the same time, they understood that it was really good stuff.” Several of the producers also claimed that the restaurant stood to benefit from the flexible
business relationship they could have with a local producer, in which a restaurant can set the
expectations for how to place orders, the type of product, and logistics of delivery. Two of the
producers expanded on this benefit category by including increased chef creativity as a way the
restaurant business benefitted by participating in Network A. Speaking about Restaurant A’s
chefs, one vegetable farm manager recounted, “But they do want something crazy. They want
something cool to show up that they can make a special off of… ‘Oh, wouldn’t it be awesome to
do this. You guys have white eggplants? Let’s do this with that.’”

A close second in terms of frequency cited were the benefits to the improved profitability of producers. Working with restaurants was cited as an important way for these producers to
diversify their market outlets, and four of the six are actively trying to increase their level of
restaurant sales or number of restaurant accounts. For three of the six producers, sales to
restaurants make up a significant portion of their gross annual sales, in which a third or more of
what they make relies on those particular wholesale accounts. These wholesale accounts allowed
the producers to move a higher volume of product at once than other direct-marketing outlets.
The other three producers did not rely as heavily on their restaurant sales, as they represented ten
percent or less of their gross annual sales – but were still explained as an important form of
supplemental income. These producers used restaurant accounts as a way to move excess product
and recover the costs put into supplying other market outlets. Like the restaurants, the producers
also realized the benefit of having an adaptable business partnership. While reflecting on the
deliberately small size of their production, the poultry producer said,

I think we knew that finding a fit with a restaurant was gonna be tough. And we didn’t go
out of our way to seek those out. I mean, [we] took advantage of the opportunities like
[Restaurant A] and [Restaurant X] because we knew that they would be flexible, given
our situation.
One vegetable farm manager even expressed his preference for restaurant wholesale accounts over his CSA accounts, not just because wholesale traditionally generates a higher profit for his particular business, but also because the chefs outwardly enjoyed the products they were receiving:

I like providing food for people that really like food… A chef is going to look at what they buy, and they’re going to make something awesome out of it. And they’re going to enjoy what they do. With some of our [CSA] customers, they don’t know what something is, which means they automatically distrust it… But I really like how there’s care put into everything that’s wholesaled to the restaurants. They’re buying it because they want to feature it. With the CSA, they’re getting it because they’re getting it.

Mentioned less often by the producers than the restaurant participants were benefits that were categorized as extra-network connections and restaurant staff and customer development. Only three producers made reference to any benefits that supported the larger local foods movement, in which two vegetable producers briefly recognized their sales to restaurants as a part of the movement, and the poultry producer simply stated that by selling to Restaurant A, they are “supporting their ideals and mission” around local foods. Comments about restaurant staff and customer development were also made by only three of the producers, and they focused on connecting consumers to their communities and bodies through more diverse, local eating options. And only one producer shared any benefits that were categorized as producer development.

**Drawbacks to Participation**

*Perceptions of Restaurant A Participants*

While both parties of Network A participants had plenty to say about the benefits that can come from participation in a farm-to-restaurant network, they also shared a number of drawbacks to participation. Mention of these drawbacks not only came to surface when the participants were directly asked to recount them; they were also heavily cited as asides outside of that particular
question’s context. I sorted all drawbacks mentioned during the participants’ interviews into four different categories: greater restaurant costs; greater producer costs; lack of consistency; and unaligned expectations. These categories were revealed through thematic coding of all research respondents’ interviews.

For the Restaurant A participants, these categories fell into a distinct order based upon the number of participants who mentioned these types of drawbacks and the frequency in which they were cited (See Table 6).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERCEIVED DRAWBACK</th>
<th>#PARTICIPANTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Lack of Consistency</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limited Food Options</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of Consistency in Service</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of Consistency in Product</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Greater Restaurant Costs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Restaurant Time &amp; Effort</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price of Local Foods</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Infrastructure Needed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Unaligned Expectations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative Customer Perceptions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hijacking of “Local”</td>
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<td>5. Greater Producer Costs</td>
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<tr>
<td>More Time &amp; Effort</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Necessity of Production Expansion</td>
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From most prominent to least, the categories that emerged in the interviews were: lack of consistency; greater restaurant costs; unaligned expectations; and greater producer costs. The biggest realm of drawback, *lack of consistency*, was cited by four of the Restaurant A participants. For three of these participants, buying local resulted in limited food options, meaning both type and quantity. While the sous chef reiterated Restaurant A’s interest in buying
from local sources, he pointed out that supply is an issue: “We’re constantly looking for more to branch out to, but one of the problems with local sourcing is, since we’re such a busy establishment, it’s hard to get the volume we need consistently.” Seasonality also limited food options. As said by one of the servers, “People might want to see something on our menu that we just don’t have… And maybe we only have one particular thing at one particular time of year because that’s the only time we can get it, that it’s fresh and good and local.”

Of the drawbacks that were categorized as lack of consistency, three participants also referred to various issues that were closely related to the local producers and their operations. Both the proprietor and sous chef made comments about the lack of consistency in service of the local food products, which could leave the restaurant in a precarious situation. As said by the proprietor when asked about what drawbacks they had experienced, “It’s still the reliability issue… There’s still been occasions where we’ve had to scramble at the last minute and go down to [the grocery store] to get something we didn’t have because somebody didn’t deliver it.” The sous chef and one server also brought up lack of consistency in product quality as another drawback for sourcing locally. The server recounted stories of when customers had found insects in their local greens, despite their careful washing. As she said, “Well, I mean, with local produce, or things that don’t have preservatives in it, a lot of times you have to be extra careful in the kitchen of things going bad or something getting snuck in there.”

The second most cited category of drawbacks among Restaurant A participants was greater restaurant costs, which was also mentioned by four of the Restaurant A participants. These costs were most often described in terms of increased effort and time investment, which included responsibilities like ordering and preparing the food, creating a new specials menu, or staff training about the local dishes. As said by the executive chef, “It makes your job harder
sometimes. Instead of seeing one vendor, you see five or six in one day.” The sous chef also mentioned the extra effort it took to clean some of the locally sourced produce. One server also described the amount of time and effort it took to stay on top of the rotating locally oriented specials, about which she said, “It’s a lot to remember sometimes, like when we get specials and stuff. I have to try to remember where everything came from, what farm, and then people ask me ‘Where is that?’ and I’m like, <shrugs shoulders>, ‘I don’t know.’”

*Greater restaurant costs* also included actual monetary costs for three Restaurant A participants, which were most frequently described as the higher price that Restaurant A had to pay for local food products as compared to those they could source through their conventional broadline distributor. When reflecting on how the price of local food products affected their menu, the proprietor said:

> You know, we’re holding our prices as best we can, but you’re paying a little more for a local product. So, it’s just the way it is. I mean, [the producers] have their costs, and they’re not mass-producing stuff. So you are paying more the product and therefore it is reflected in some of our menu prices…

The proprietor also mentioned another source of greater monetary costs for the restaurant due to participation in the local food network: additional infrastructure needed by the restaurant. Because many of the local products used by Restaurant A are incorporated into their vegetarian/vegan specials, these products have to be prepared on separate kitchen equipment.

The third most cited category of drawbacks by the Restaurant A participants was *unaligned expectations*, which came up in four Restaurant A interviews. This category can include unaligned expectations between the producers and the restaurant participants, between the participants and the larger local foods social movement, and those that occur between the research participants and the patrons they feed through the restaurant’s efforts. For the Restaurant A participants, the most prominent *unaligned expectation* was that which occurred
between Restaurant A and its patrons. All four Restaurant A participants who made references that were included in this category spoke about how customers reacted negatively – or not at all – to the local food sourcing efforts. The four participants included all three servers, who interact heavily with the Restaurant A patrons. They confessed that they have to spend a little more time explaining to some patrons the benefits of buying local and why these benefits make up for having a seasonal menu or occasionally decreased food quality. The server who mentioned finding insects in local salad greens said that, “people will freak out,” with which she empathizes, but also wants to explain that it’s the freshness of the greens that made the situation possible. Even the proprietor admitted, “I think there are people that are reluctant to try some of these items because they’re local.” The proprietor also expressed some dissatisfaction with the local foods social movement, because it has become hijacked by businesses who are not dedicated to local sourcing the same way that he thinks Restaurant A is: “But I do think that there are some folks… that are trying to go local in a way to get a piece of the pie, and it’s not really… they’re trying to fool us with their ads.”

The least mentioned category of drawbacks by Restaurant A participants was greater producer costs. Only two of the participants brought up any reference of what drawbacks the local food producers might experience by participating in a farm-to-restaurant network. Both the proprietor and sous chef recognized that the producers’ participation in the network took a lot of time and effort in order to make it a successful outlet for their business. While the proprietor thought some local producers could benefit from improving their business skills, he knew that they did not have the time or energy to sit through something like an accounting class, even if it would possibly benefit their business in the long run. The sous chef recognized that while Restaurant A has a fallback system, in which they can just order what products they need from
their broadline distributor, the producers must spend more time managing the risks associated with agriculture, like crop failure. The proprietor also brought up the idea of producer business expansion:

So I suppose that some of these folks could get to the point where they can’t keep up with capacity. I mean, you’re dealing with issues of expansion. I’m not sure how many… I don’t really know anything about the finances of our local food producers, but I guess you think about, well, how far can they go? Can they get the support they need if they need to expand? And then what happens?

Four of the Restaurant A participants also made comments about how there were no or few drawbacks to participation in a local food network, whether or not they had mentioned actual drawbacks elsewhere during the interview. Of the three participants that made these references, they closely followed talk of perceived drawbacks, but with the caveat that the drawbacks weren’t nearly as important to Restaurant A as the benefits. For example, the proprietor spoke a lot of about the problem of “reliability” but quickly followed up and said it was “mostly a non-issue.” A server who found it difficult to think of any drawbacks attributed it to the efforts of Restaurant A: “We’re doing it so well here that thinking of negative aspects of it is difficult because there’s a way to do it right and I think [Restaurant A] is doing it.” Along the same trend, several of the Restaurant A participants followed up any mention of drawbacks with how those drawbacks were being or have been alleviated. The proprietor attributed recent improvements to the area’s local food network to the efforts of the state-based sustainable agriculture association.

Even when the proprietor spoke of how the higher price of local foods made Restaurant A’s menu more expensive, he said “it’s not a huge factor.” When the executive chef expressed the extra effort it took to plan a menu with locally sourced products, he also included that while he would prefer to have the menu planned out two weeks ahead of time, he could work with just a few days, too, if that’s what worked for the producers. As a last example, the sous chef also
indicated several instances where Restaurant A has worked closely with their local food
producers to eliminate drawbacks, either by providing feedback on the products they liked or
didn’t like or by having crop-planning meetings with one of their vegetable producers.

Perceptions of Network A Producers

Drawbacks to participation in a farm-to-restaurant network were a much more common
topic among the Network A producers than they were among Restaurant A participants (see
Table 7). The drawbacks mentioned by these six participants were coded into the same four
categories, but emerged in a slightly different order than they were for the Restaurant A
participants. For the Network A producers, drawbacks were organized as such, from most cited
to least: lack of consistency; greater producer costs; unaligned expectations; and greater
restaurant costs.
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<td><strong>3. Unaligned Expectations</strong></td>
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<td>Undedicated Restaurant Proprietor or Buyer</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Greater Restaurant Costs</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price of Local Foods</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Restaurant Time &amp; Effort</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Network A producers described lack of consistency drawbacks as issues that existed both within their own businesses and restaurant businesses, as opposed to the Restaurant A participants who described lack of consistency in terms of the producers only. All six producers cited drawbacks that fell within the category of lack of consistency, and all six of these participants most heavily referenced lack of consistency in restaurant ordering as a drawback to working within farm-to-restaurant networks. As explained by one of the vegetable producers:
there’s certain rules about selling wholesale that will always be true, no matter what. And that is, you will always pretty much have a core group of people that are going to buy stuff from you. And there’ll always be people drying up, and there’ll always be people coming on. So you have to keep on your toes. You can’t just rest on your laurels and think, oh I have all these great customers. Because guess what? You’re not going to have that great customer next year. Or that customer is going to cut in half what they buy from you… Or there’s going to be a situation where I don’t really want to deal with this guy, and then all of sudden next year they’re buying lots of stuff. So you can’t take for granted what’s happening this year for next year. It’s always changing in terms of the buying situation.

Restaurants were described to be inconsistent in a few other ways by the Network A producers. Five of the six producers listed chef (or buyer) turnover as a drawback to selling to restaurants, often including stories of how the elimination of a chef (or buyer) affected their business negatively in the past. As said by the cheese producer:

…the turn-over in the chefs is quite high. So we meet with one chef, we get a relationship going with him, he goes somewhere else, ahs a different owner who may have a different focus, and we kind of lose…. Then we have to start over again with the new chef, and if the owner was just kind of so-so about us, it’s really hard for us to get back in there.

Additionally, three of the Network A producers also stated that restaurants are inconsistent or slow in their payments to the producers. The fish hatchery owner said that restaurants usually take “more than a month to pay” and are “pretty cheap.” Lastly, two Network A producers also cited restaurant closings as a drawback that fell into the restaurants’ contributions to a lack of consistency within farm-to-restaurant networks.

The Network A producers also recognized a variety of ways that they themselves or other local food producers affect the lack of consistency that may be experienced in farm-to-restaurant networks. Three of the Network A producers admitted that local food producers can be inconsistent in their service or product quality/type, respectively. When speaking about other local food producers who don’t work well with restaurants, a vegetable producer said, “Consistency is really important. You just can’t be half-assed about it. You have to do it every
week. We do it every week of the year, practically, except for Thanksgiving and Christmas… But you know what? People know who I am.” In regard to consistency of product quality/type, the same vegetable producer emphasized the effect this drawback could have by saying, “There’s a level of trust you have to develop. And part of that is based on your history as a farmer producing something consistent and of good quality.”

As for other ways the Network A producers saw local food producers contribute to lack of consistency in farm-to-restaurant networks, the two vegetable farm managers mentioned the consequence of farm manager turnover. One of these farms had recently undergone a chance in farm manager, and the new manager – the one who participated in the interview for this project – experienced a number of problems trying to become familiar with the farm’s restaurant accounts and expectations. Finally, two Network A producers also cited limited food options, both due to the types of things a producer might choose to produce and/or the effect of seasonality.

The second largest area of drawbacks cited by all six of the Network A producers was greater producer costs. For five of the Network A producers, these type of drawbacks were described as greater producer time and effort necessary for working with restaurants, when compared to other market outlets. As said by the fish hatchery owner, “[Restaurants are] sort of my least favorite customers. They want the fish all—most of them, they have to be boned, filleted, which is a lot more labor intensive.” As described by one vegetable farm manager, “So, the effort is pretty large for the benefit right now. Restaurants are so used to this easy system, that they can get whatever they want, whenever they want…” This vegetable farm manager went on to describe the many duties she must complete in order to make the restaurant accounts happen, which she described as “a struggle for one person.”
In addition to these softer costs of time and effort, the Network A producers also spoke of greater producer costs included a monetary component. Five of the Network A producers identified the costs of transportation – both monetary and time – to be a limitation in their farm-to-restaurant network participation. All six of the Network A producers also spoke in some way about the necessity of production expansion, a potential way for them to improve their business with restaurants, if they desired to do so. Three of the Network A producers described the area has having a limited market for their products, pushing them to consider scaling up or finding other ways of improving their competitiveness. Another three producers claimed that their products were mostly exhausted by other markets before even being offered to restaurant customers. While their restaurant accounts were helpful for moving excess amounts of products, they prioritized other market outlets, like their CSA or on-farm customers over restaurants – and would therefore have to scale up production in order to make more available for restaurants. As the owner of one of the vegetable farms spoke about feelings towards expansion of his farm’s production to meet restaurant demand:

So, hand in hand, your distribution method has to scale up with your production. And your production—you need your storage to scale up. So all these things have to scale simultaneously. And of course, the biggest variable is that scaling of your customer base. Are the restaurant customers going to be ready and receptive and there for us? And that’s the fear really. What if we scale up and have no outlet? So that’s a big risk.

Other drawbacks mentioned by the Network A producers that contributed to greater producer costs included the costs of managing food storage and packaging (n=2) as well as having to accept a lower return through wholesale pricing (n=1).

The third most cited topic of drawbacks for the Network A producers was unaligned expectations. All six producers made comments about the misuse or hijacking of the idea of local foods, usually by false or unclear advertising at the restaurants. One of the vegetable producers
referred to this experience as “green-washing” and had to ask one restaurant to remove their farm’s name from the restaurant’s menu because they were buying only a small amount and mixing it with food purchased through their conventional broadline distributor. The owner of the vegetable farm expressed his concerns:

People… go there and they see signage [for the vegetable farm], they taste the food—well, the food is likely not ours. It likely is that industrial food system that they’re eating. And now they’re associating the taste and the quality and the crispness or lack thereof with [the vegetable farm]. So now it creates this negative marketing campaign for us.

Five of the Network A producers also spoke about how a lack of general knowledge about the restaurant business may affect their ability to work with those businesses – and vice versa. Several of the producers said they learned when to – and when not to – drop by the restaurant with deliveries or questions, and that avoiding any meal times was the safest way to operate. But two of the producers also told stories about how the lack of knowledge that restaurant staff had about farming negatively affected their business relationship. For example, one of the poultry producer’s restaurant partners tossed out perfectly good product because it was of a new variety with which they were unfamiliar – causing a loss of profit on both sides of the business relationship. Closely related to this lack of knowledge were the high restaurant standards that four of the Network A producers also cited as drawbacks to network participation. As explained by the poultry producer, they would not want to rely on restaurant sales to support their entire operation because they are “fickle” customers.

In regard to unaligned expectations, three of the producers also mentioned the false expectations about or lack of interest in local food options by restaurant patrons. Closely related were the references made by two of the Network A producers about restaurant proprietors or buyers who were not dedicated to sourcing locally, even if the chefs in the kitchen were. As the
poultry producer said, “If a business doesn’t understand and the clientele don’t understand and appreciate local foods, it’s not gonna work.”

Finally, five of the six Network A producers also recognized some drawbacks that fell under *greater restaurant costs*. All five of these producers admitted that local products are often more expensive than conventional products, requiring a bigger financial input on the part of the restaurant. Three of the producers also recognized that using local foods may also require a bigger time and effort investment by the restaurant staff to order and prepare the foods.

Even though the Network A producers cited both more types and a higher frequency of drawbacks than did the Restaurant A participants, three of the producers also made claims about there being no or few drawbacks – even if they had mentioned drawbacks in other parts of the interview. As one vegetable farm manager described it, these were not “drawbacks” per se, but instead “barriers” that would be overcome through ongoing negotiations. Five of the Network A producers also offered a number of suggestions about the alleviations of the drawbacks, often mentioned in close proximity to the drawbacks that were being relieved by the cited efforts. The large majority of these alleviations recalled the ways that the producers themselves had made adjustments to their operations to better fit with their restaurant partners’ demands and/or expectations, such as the ways in which they collected orders or distributed their products.
CHAPTER 5
Research Findings: Farm-to-Restaurant Network B

The previous chapter described the findings from the first farm-to-restaurant network, Network A. This next chapter will present the findings in a similar manner for the second farm-to-restaurant network, Network B. Background and descriptive information are provided for the research sample, both restaurant and producer participants. Findings will again be organized by the overarching research question for which the results were collected, differentiated by the perspectives of the restaurant and producer participants. These findings will allow for comparison of the two networks in the following discussion chapter.

Background and Description of Restaurant B

The restaurant in the second farm-to-restaurant network had been in business for a total of seven years at the time this study was conducted. This was the smaller of the two restaurants and was located approximately 25 miles from the nearest urban population center, making it also the more rural of the two restaurants. Restaurant B had a seating capacity of about 125 between its two dining rooms. It employed a total of about 30 people, with two-thirds working the front of the house, less than a third in the kitchen, and a few in Restaurant B’s in-house brewery operation. When asked to characterize the restaurant, the proprietor described the business as a “gastropub,” with a service of creative reworkings of classic Central Pennsylvania fare. The restaurant was open for dinner service four days out of the week; lunch service for two days; and Sunday brunch. The main dining room also included a small stage where musicians could perform throughout the week and wall art that featured regional artists on a monthly rotation.

In regard to local food procurement, the restaurant claimed to work with about 18 different producers throughout the year. At peak season, the executive chef said that about 90
percent of the food leaving the kitchen was made from locally sourced ingredients. The proprietor described the use of multiple types of local food products, including vegetables, fruit, dairy, meat, eggs, and honey. He also included a small portion of the hops they buy for Restaurant B’s brewery operation. Also described as “somewhat” local by the proprietor were the grains Restaurant B used to produce its own bread and pastry products as well as other bulk dry goods acquired through a cooperative located in Western Pennsylvania. The sourcing of the local food products was distributed among the proprietor, executive chef, and assistant general manager, with the majority of the responsibility falling to the executive chef. To supplement any out-of-season or special needs, Restaurant B also ordered from Pocono Foods, a Pennsylvania-based broad line distributor, which the proprietor claimed sourced its products from Pennsylvania and the surrounding states.

Restaurant B was started by the proprietor and a set of partners, who bought the space in the late 1990’s. A smaller restaurant operation occupied the space until the mid 2000’s, when there was a change in partners, and the restaurant business was expanded for more space and to include a full brewery operation. The business become a community-owned limited partnership, with the proprietor at the helm of operations. The intent of the proprietor, and each of his business partners throughout the years, was to “created a community gathering space, more than a restaurant or brewery” that aimed to bring the community together around “the three pillars” of great beer, food, and music. The proprietor was the first person interviewed for the Network B portion of the study, followed by the executive chef. Floor staff members included the general manager (formally a server), a bartender (also formally a server) who helped in paperwork tasks for the business, and a current server. The former executive chef was also interviewed, as he had
been a part of the Restaurant B’s foundation and had only recently left his post, making him a common reference in the interviews with both Restaurant B staff and Network B producers.

**Description of Network B Producers**

The producer sample for Network B included six food producers who had been in business for an average of 19 years and operated on an average of 55 acres. Three of the producers sold plant-based products, including one vegetable producer, another vegetable producer who also operated a greenhouse and cut-flower business, and an orchard owner who sold apples, cider, and maple syrup. The other three producers sold a variety of animal-based products, including a farmer who raised a variety of livestock and poultry breeds, but sold primarily pork and chicken to Restaurant B; a pasture-based beef producer; and a grass-fed cheese producer. Of all six, only the vegetable/greenhouse operator was USDA-certified organic. These producers also varied in their gross annual farm sales, the portion of sales attributed to restaurant accounts, and the total number of restaurants with which they worked (see Table 8). Other market outlets in addition to restaurants included most commonly farmers’ markets, followed by on-farm stands and cooperatives. Four of the six producers had hired help, and their number of employees ranged from one to eighteen people. Three of the producers’ households were also supported by one or two adults who held an outside job. All six producers claimed to sell at least 90 percent (or more) of their product locally, based on their own definitions of *local*, as discussed later. (Further, the one pork and poultry producer will be referred to from here on as just the “pork producer” for the sake of clarity.)
Table 8. Producer Characteristics in Farm-to-Restaurant Network B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Producer</th>
<th>#1B</th>
<th>#2B</th>
<th>#3B</th>
<th>#4B</th>
<th>#5B</th>
<th>#6B</th>
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<tr>
<td>Years Farming</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Production Acreage</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>USDA Organic</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Product</td>
<td>Hogs &amp; Poultry</td>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>Cheese</td>
<td>Beef</td>
<td>Vegetables &amp; Greenhouse</td>
<td>Orchard Products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 Farm Sales</td>
<td>$100,000-249,999</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
<td>$50,000-99,999</td>
<td>$25,000-49,999</td>
<td>$250,000-499,999</td>
<td>$50,000-99,999</td>
</tr>
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<td>Adult Off-Farm</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Sales Restaurants</td>
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<td>N/A*</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Restaurants</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Information not provided by the producer due to personal or proprietary concerns.

Operation of Network B

Initiation of Business Relationship

The proprietor explained that from the beginning of the business, he had intended for Restaurant B to incorporate local food products into Restaurant B’s model. He had a long history of participation and leadership in local food movements across both the state and country, and therefore felt obligated to include this mission in any business model with which he had ownership. The proprietor went on to explain that he and several of his friends and colleagues had also spent a great deal of time traveling around the Northeastern US to enjoy venues for good music, beer, and music, and therefore wanted to establish a place closer to their homes that met these qualifications. And the “innovative, creative food” that the proprietor sought to recreate in Central Pennsylvania included fare from local food producers in order to establish “an authentic choice and experience” for Restaurant B’s patrons.
With the mission of staying as *local* as possible for Restaurant B’s food sourcing, the proprietor established many of the initial business relationships with local food producers. According to the proprietor, many of these business relationships evolved out of familiarity. He already had personal or professional relationships with the producers from which he first chose to buy, and then from there he used quality of product to determine whom else to approach. After taking some time to reflect, the proprietor described the process of selecting local food producers as a “calculus” that took into account more than economics and quality, including history with the producer and the overall mission of the business to support local foods as much as possible:

First and foremost, they’ve gotta be able to get it out of the ground and to us on a consistent basis. And of the quality that we require. And if they can do that, then there are these other nuances that go into the calculus of how much we get form this person and how much we get from that person. We’re trying to support as many farmers as we can, but we obviously have a definitive amount of demand that we have. And just a lot of variables. Most restaurants, it’s just straight up math… And that works in that system. But not our system.

The former and current executive chefs entered their positions with pronounced interest in incorporating local food products into their menu offerings, and were therefore also tasked with identifying local producers that met the proprietor’s vision, including familiarity, quality, and price. The former executive chef worked closely with the proprietor to secure partnerships with local food producers by visiting the operations of those whom the proprietor knew and having conversations with those who were interested in working with a restaurant. The current executive chef picked up many of the accounts left behind by the former executive chef, but was given some freedom to make decisions that would help benefit the financial security of the restaurant business, as long as it didn’t threaten the solid relationships Restaurant B had formed with its current local food producers.
As for the Network B producers, most of them had started working with Restaurant B because of a pre-existing personal or professional relationship with the proprietor. Five of the six producers said they had known the proprietor previously as a friend or had met him through specific agricultural organizations, and then he later approached them to ask if they would be willing to sell their product to Restaurant B. The sixth producer did not have a prior relationship with anyone at Restaurant B, but was approached by the proprietor and the former executive chef who drove out to the farm one day to see if the producer would be interested in a partnership. Beyond Restaurant B, five of the six producers said that nearly any other relationship they had formed (or had considered forming) with a restaurant was because they had been approached by the interested restaurant party. The producers indicated that they had been found by the restaurants via “word of mouth,” often associated with their reputation for good quality products. Only two of the six producers indicated that they had ever approached a restaurant with samples of their product with the intent of forming a more formal relationship – but they had specifically chosen those restaurants because of their specific menu offerings or reputations. As put by the pork producer:

There’s some people, that if there’s three restaurants in a row, they want to sell to all three of them. Me, if there’s three restaurants in a row, I want to sell to the best one, and I don’t want to be in the other two. I want to maintain some exclusivity. Again, with those people, it gives them an advantage—anything that gives them a leg up. We’re not out there pushing that business just to see how much stuff we can push through restaurants; we’re out there looking at ways to push products through a restaurant that you’re proud to have your name on.

*From Field...*

The business relationships between Restaurant B and the producer participants are maintained by casual weekly or monthly communications between the producers themselves and the executive chef. No formal written contracts exist between any of the six producers and
Restaurant B, nor is there much interest in pursuing them. The cheese producer referred to his business relationship style as an “honor system,” while two producers and the former executive chef all used the idea of a “handshake” when describing how the business relationships are maintained. Only the beef producer considered part of her business relationship with Restaurant B to be “kind of a contract,” in that they agree upon a set price system at the beginning of each season, so that the producer knew she could recover her input costs, like cattle feed, and Restaurant B could plan their finances accordingly. But the other five producers, besides the beef producer, did not see how a formal contract would fit the informal business relationship they had already established with Restaurant B. When asked if he would be interested in pursuing contracts with his restaurant partners, the pork producer said, “It’d be a pain in the ass. If you intend to screw me, the fact that you have a contract won’t make any difference. I want your word and that’s all I need… Tell me what you want, and if I can provide it, we’ll do business.” Some were even more adamant about the negative effects contracts may cause. As put by one of the vegetable producers when asked about his potential interest in contracts:

No. Not for me. A contract would put too much pressure on me, and then if I was getting shy, I of course would need to fill the contract. Which in the end, would lower my profit. I’d have to take away from retail, where I’m getting ten bucks for whatever it is, and I sell it to him for seven, just to fulfill the contract. So I’d be losing the three in the middle.

The former executive chef believed that formal written contracts are “necessary in a lot of ways,” but did not create any when setting up the initial partnerships with producers when Restaurant B first opened. Following his positive feedback on contracts, the former executive chef did point out that the contract would have to be flexible, and allow restaurants to recuperate in times of slow business as well as allow producers room for the risks of bad weather and crop failure. The proprietor did indicate that he or the executive chef had conducted planning
meetings with a few of their local producers in the past, during which each business agreed upon their product and payment expectations for the coming season, much like a contract but without the written formality. But the meetings are not as regular as the proprietor would prefer. He saw these meetings as something that should occur on a more continual basis with the animal-based producers and annually with the vegetable producers, due to the different nature of products. Yet, as he said, “Communication is key, as with a lot things – and as with a lot of things, it never seems like there’s enough time to do it as well as you’d like to.”

As for the actual ordering of food, most orders are requested as Restaurant B needs to restock its inventory. Most ordering communications happen directly through the executive chef and occasionally through the proprietor or assistant general manager. Both the beef and cheese producers receive text messages when Restaurant B is ready for more product, as it is stored on farm due to limited capacity at the restaurant. One vegetable producer receives phone call messages, which he responds to when convenient, while the other vegetable producer sends Restaurant B a weekly availability list via email that contains any items that are up for purchase that week. The pork producer maintains standing orders with all of his restaurant partners, and he makes sure to call each restaurant before delivery to make sure the order is still expected and does not need any last minute adjustments due to changes in the restaurants’ calendars. The orchard owner takes orders via phone, but also indirectly from Restaurant B through his stepdaughter, who is a server at the establishment and is sometimes tasked with passing along the message for more syrup or apples. The current executive chef also pointed out that many of Restaurant B’s local food producers sell at a nearby farmers’ market, so sometimes he or another staff member may run over to the market to place/amend orders or pick up last minute items.
None of the Network B participants indicated any discontent with the ordering process, as it was often individualized based upon the restaurant’s or producer’s needs. As the beef producer described their ordering process, “Pretty much it’s just a text message from [the executive chef]. <laughs> Saying, ‘I need ground beef’ or ‘I need a whole steer.’ ‘Can you deliver sometime this week?’ And then we figure out a delivery time. Everything’s pretty routine right now. It’s pretty set… I mean, they pretty much don’t change what they need or what they want. It’s the same thing.” The cheese producer said switching to texting as a form of communication – what the current executive chef said he preferred – even helped alleviate some problems he was experiencing: “Since I got a cell phone, they text me. I like that because I don’t have to answer a phone, and I got that because my landline has a short in it or something. It was ridiculous, and I used it for my business, so I was kind of frantic.”

... To Kitchen ...

Five of six Network B producers performed the majority of product delivery responsibilities. This included getting the product to and from a processing facility, of which three producers – the ones who provide animal-based products – use Pennsylvania-based facilities to prepare their products for sale, as well as travel from production site to restaurant site. The producers bring in the food as needed, which could vary from weekly to monthly, depending on Restaurant B’s needs. The producers appeared content with the delivery style, some calling it “easy,” “flexible,” and “routine.” When asked if he had a specific day set aside for delivering his product to his restaurant partners, the cheese producer said, “No, not specifically. They’re pretty flexible, they give me a lead time, and sometimes I have to make a special trip, but I go [to market] every Tuesday, and the one restaurant always sends somebody there to pick it up, so that’s real handy. [Near Restaurant B] a guy helps me on his way home, he
can drop it off, so it’s really easy to take care of that.” As for the sixth producer who does not deliver his own product due to transportation restrictions, the proprietor and executive chef would instead travel out to the farm to pick up the vegetable order. As described by the former executive chef, “The Amish don’t have a system in place to just drive by, like [other producers]. So I’d pick up on the farm, which was kind of refreshing. A good part of the day for me. To see them doing what they do, on their territory, was priceless.”

Both the current and former executive chefs of Restaurant B made some passing references to how they used the locally sourced foods to plan Restaurant B’s menu, but without sharing any specific details or stories. The Network B producers shared a few short anecdotes about special requests they had received from Restaurant B or other restaurant partners, including requests for a specific type of cheese, cut of meat, or hops for Restaurant B’s in-house brewery operation. But overall, the producers were also relatively silent on the topic of product requests or preparation. For the most part, it appeared that the food products were incorporated into both weekly specials and the standard, permanent menu served at the restaurant. From my review of Restaurant B’s menu, many of the dishes were made from products that could be sourced or stored year-round from the study area, indicating that the local products could be both a common and novelty item in Restaurant B’s service, depending on how Restaurant B’s chef decide to present them.

Even though specific product requests or uses of the local products were not an overly popular topic in the Network B interviews, all six of the producers and the executive chef did discuss the feedback they provided for one another on specific products. While the other four Network B producers indicated that they had coached a restaurant on their different product offerings and uses, two said they had so far avoided doing so. As said by the beef producer when
asked if she provided instructions to Restaurant B on how to prepare her product: “No. That’s – they know that far better than I. They’re the chefs, they know what to do with the product. Certainly, if they ever came with questions, we would work to help them with that, but we don’t get involved with how they use the product, how they price the product.” From the restaurant side, the executive chef indicated that he liked speaking to the producers about their fare:

> It’s nice when I have to talk to all the farmers, and also give them feedback on things that we’re doing. You know, what customers think. I always make sure any time I’m doing anything unique or different with their product, I make sure they taste it, just so they can understand it. As many as I can, you know, get to eat it.

One of the vegetable producers actually shared a story about one such instance, one where he not only got to try the end product, but it had come from a specific item that he had recommended to Restaurant B in the first place:

> For instance, this year we grew this amazing pumpkin, Winter Luxury. It’s a real old-fashioned pumpkin. But it’s an eating pumpkin… and we had enough of it extra, so I said, ‘Hey, try this pumpkin.’ And [the executive chef] did, and he made an amazing soup. And I was in the next week, and he goes, ‘You gotta taste this.’ Which [the former executive chef] never did… So I did, and he did a great job with it.

... To Table.

For Restaurant B, the person identified by the proprietor for being in charge of staff training and education was the assistant general manager (GM). According to the assistant GM, Restaurant B had made an effort over the past couple of years to improve its staff training to make sure that the servers had the resources they needed to do their jobs to the best of their abilities – and this included in-depth knowledge of the food and beer products. Especially with the change in executive chef, the assistant GM has found it even more necessary to work closely with the kitchen to make sure servers were getting the information they needed to answer
customers’ inquiries about background and origin of particular foods or dishes. As laid out by the server participant,

Sometimes the local things are pretty straightforward and [the assistant GM] can just give us the low-down from [the executive chef] and that’s all we need, and other times [the executive chef] does kind of talk to the server a little bit if there’s anything more in depth that we need to know about. And… if there’s ever questions from the customers, I’ll always go to [the executive chef] and clarify things.

Yet, while the proprietor said that the assistant GM and the executive chef are doing “tremendous” job in elevating the staff training, he also recognized that Restaurant B has its issues when it came to staff training about the local food products. While the assistant GM will do her best to communicate what’s coming from the kitchen, and the executive chef may provide some tasting now and then, Restaurant B did not follow the traditional line-up model, where all staff meet in the kitchen to hear and taste what the chef(s) have to offer that evening. That’s due to the staggered work schedules by which the staff operated, which made training “tougher,” according to the proprietor. He also went on to elaborate:

And quite frankly, there’s different motivations among different people and maybe positions in the restaurant about how much they really wanna absorb. I mean, their job is to be able to communicate to the customers. And some do better than others. And we could do better at getting all that across.

The executive chef identified the two main parts of staff training to be knowing where the product is coming from and how it’s being prepared by the kitchen. The executive chef also spoke about the importance and challenge of staff training when he said during his interview:

I can be the best chef in the whole entire world, but if my wait staff doesn’t communicate how things are done, I’m nobody. I’m not trying to sound arrogant or cocky, but that’s the best way of putting it… They’re your sales people. They’re the ones that are going out there to sell your food, whether it’s a special or whatever it is, but when it comes to their education, they have to understand what they really should learn and always know.
When the Network B participants were questioned about restaurant staff visits to the local food producers’ sites of operation, it emerged that very few staff members – beyond the proprietor and former executive chef as well as those staff members who pick up from the one vegetable producer’s farm – have been out to see the operations. The proprietor claimed that he’d like to see the Restaurant B staff out at the farms more often, but did point out that they often get to interact with some of the producers that regularly come into the establishment. When asked about farm visits, all six producers were open to the idea. The beef producer even laughed and said,

I’m laughing because this is a long-standing point of contention. I always say our gates are open. We welcome any of them… They’re all very familiar with our background in the cattle industry in Pennsylvania and our facilities and our cattle, but they actually have not seen them. It’s something that I’ve been working on and working on since we started. I think it’s important that they come out and see… I want the servers and the people there to be able to answer questions about what they’re serving and what they’re providing.

Based on the executive chef’s statement about staff education shared above, the methods and content of communication with restaurant customers is another area for which local food products are an important topic. When asked if customers inquire about the local foods or producers, the proprietor indicated that they used to, but the situation had changed with time, “…maybe we were more of a novelty [at the beginning]. People didn’t know much about [local food]. I think local food – quote unquote – has come a tremendously long way in the last five-six years, so it’s not such a new, innovative thing… So I don’t hear it as much.” Both the server and bartender indicated that they received questions now and then from customers about the local options, but not all that often – which they attributed either to people not caring about the origin of their food or already knowing enough about the food based on past visits. However, the assistant general manager believed that food origin and locality were becoming a more common topic among customers, but went on to explain that, “I think [Restaurant B] is interesting in that
you could go there, have dinner, leave, and not necessarily know that we tried to source a lot of things locally. But I think that’s a huge appeal of the place and we do have people coming in wanting to know.”

During my research observation, I asked my server for a recommendation on the most locally-oriented menu item I could order that evening. In response, she claimed everything on the menu was local – *everything*. She explained that the chefs often pick up food from the nearby farmers’ market; many items were made in house, like the bread; and she mentioned the pork producer by name. She did not mention the special boards, which then promoted a number of seafood options, like salmon, oysters, and scallops, (the restaurant observation was conducted on a Friday during Lent). In addition to the floor staff, the executive chef had explained that he often tried to use the special boards to identify the special local foods being used that evening, including the name of the particular producer that provided the local goods. No producer names were included on the board during the night of my research observation, but there was an additional board located near Restaurant B’s bar that listed all of the local food producers from whom they sourced throughout the year, written in brightly colored chalk, one name after another.

The proprietor indicated that the menu was another source of customer education about the local food, or at least it used to be when contained all of the producers’ names. During my observation, I counted four different producers’ names on the menu – in addition to numerous mentions of “house-made” breads, chips, and dressings. Looking forward, the proprietor explained, “You know, maybe we started taking it for granted that people just assumed that if they’re eating here, they’re eating local… I think there’s more that could be done.” Both the proprietor and executive chef indicated that future additions to the menu had been discussed, like
re-integrating all of the producers’ names into the menu and creation of a map of all the producers’ operation locations. This type of customer education was important to the executive chef, who said, “Because it then becomes a little more personal. And then when they go to the farmers’ markets, they see the people and then they can understand how far they really are away. And, you know, it really kind of makes the world a little bit smaller.”

At Restaurant B, the local food producers play a relatively small role in staff and customer education about their products. This is largely through their presence in Restaurant B, which happens often for some producers, but seldom for others. Four of the Restaurant B participants told stories of how a few of the local food producers come out weekly for lunch at the bar, following their shift at the nearby farmers’ market. The assistant GM said that this ritual has “allowed [her] to build a relationship with the farmers.” The bartender confessed that some of the producers will bring her a couple of products when they know she missed the market due to her shift at Restaurant B. In regard to how their products or operations are promoted within the restaurant, all six Network B producers said they don’t talk about that topic with Restaurant B staff. The beef producer indicated that she’s asked for her farm name to be used to distinguish the product, but that’s it. When asked by his restaurant partners, the pork producer said he always says yes, because it makes him “proud to have it on there.” But the other four claimed that they deliberately stay silent about the marketing of their products at Restaurant B. As said by one of the vegetable producers, “I think that the chef gets paid to do that correctly. I don’t think it would be my place and I don’t have enough knowledge, it would be bad advice.” He went on to joke that the idea of requesting particular marketing strategies would be “interesting” saying that maybe he should demand “golden letters on the front window” the next time he stopped by.
Defining Local

Perceptions of Restaurant B Participants

The Network B participants were also asked to define local, and these responses were also categorized into the three domains of local as identified by Eriksen (2013) (see Table 9).

Table 9. Descriptions of Local by Network B Restaurant Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOCAL DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>#PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>#REFERENCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geographical Proximity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biophysical Region</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Distance</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-political Region</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Propinquity</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation Btwn Producers &amp; Community</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing the Producer &amp; Operation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values Proximity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local as Not Corporations or Chains</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Quality Product</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-House</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Values</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slower Lifestyle</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal Processing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants from Restaurant B used a variety of ways to describe the concept of local throughout their interviews, but when asked directly to provide a definition, five out of the six participants began their response with a measure of geographical proximity. Three of these five participants – all floor staff members – defined local as using resources from within their immediate biophysical region, utilizing terms like “foodshed” and “community.” The executive
chef also initially defined local in regional terms, but focused more on socio-political boundaries, claiming that local to him was largely limited to within the county or sometimes the whole state, especially because he believed all of Pennsylvania had high quality and unique products to share. The proprietor was the fifth participant to begin his definition with geographic references, but instead of region, he used the concept of food miles, and explained that local definitions based upon mileage would, by necessity, have to vary by environment and product quality. As explained by the proprietor,

I hate to use the euphemism of the Supreme Court judge, but you know [local] when you see it. And it varies. There’s no good reason for us to buying vegetables from 150 miles away ‘cus there’s plenty of vegetables being grown here in the valley. It does make sense for us, and we do buy steers from somebody on the other side of [the county]. Yeah, there are steers closer, but they’re producing steers in a way that nobody in [the valley] is. Their quality is better.

The sixth participant, the former executive chef, did not use measures of geographical proximity at all in his definition of local, and instead began his description with Eriksen’s (2013) second domain of local: relational propinquity. As he said, “[Local] is really a combination of things. It’s the people that are making a living, it’s the people that are spending, it’s the producers that are trying to make a living and using site-specific climate advantages… It’s all about building relationships.” Three other participants also used terms of relational propinquity to describe local, immediately following their use of geographical proximity. The current executive chef, the assistant GM, and the server also talked about local as cooperation between community members, like the former executive chef. The proprietor also cited a kind of relational propinquity as a follow up to his explanation of food miles, by describing within his definition of local his knowledge of the Network B producers, their operations, and their products.
A few values were also mentioned within three Restaurant B participants’ definitions of local. Immediately following their geographical, regional descriptions of local, two of the floor staff members went on to describe local as something that was unattached from corporations or large business chains. As put by the bartender, local meant to her an “individualized” experience, and not one that was solely driven by a business’s desire to meet their financial “bottom line.” For the proprietor, local meant having “shared values,” one’s that centered around sustainable production and high quality food. For him, physical distance mattered less when choosing local food producers for Restaurant B than if they shared his vision around food and agriculture. For example, even though the cooperative that supplied their grains was located a three hour drive away from the restaurant, since they shared his values about agriculture and nobody else closer to the restaurant did in the same way, he considered the cooperative to be a local resource.

The Restaurant B participants also defined and described local outside of the context of that particular question during the interview. Overall, geographical and values-based definitions of local prevailed as nearly equal, both categories being identified within five different participants’ interviews, and with 21-22 references distributed among those five participants, respectively. All descriptions that included an element of geographical proximity referenced biophysical regions most frequently, followed by travel distance of the food products. Socio-political boundaries were only used by the current executive chef to describe local. Values-based descriptions of local included a number of different values, with local most often being explained as something that exists separate from national chains and corporations. Three Restaurant B participants described local as consisting of high quality products. For example, the current executive chef described local as products that are “amazing stuff” and the proprietor described local products as “some of the greatest food around.” Another value associated with
the conceptualization of local was the idea of in-house production, which was cited in three participants’ interviews. When talking about how local products were used in Restaurant B, the former executive chef recounted, “In another kind of local way, we hired someone to be able to take care of our bread and take care of our desserts. And I guess that’s local in a way, or kind of a homegrown producer of those things.”

The Restaurant B staff members – excluding the proprietor – also spoke about how their experiences at the restaurant had shaped their perception of local. All five indicated that their time with Restaurant B had helped develop their idea of what it meant or how it could be applied. Both executive chefs spoke positively about the relationships – both business and personal – that they were able to form with local food producers by working at Restaurant B, and how those relationships showed them how local was operationalized. As described by the former executive chef, “Yeah, it was great… those relationships that you build with people. Because those same people that I worked with at [Restaurant B] now I’m still dealing with no matter where I go. So that’s kind of big.” The current executive chef said that his work at Restaurant B “totally” influenced his ideas about local as a concept because, “I never knew I could so much control… And I think the main reason is that, one, [Restaurant B] is super local, and number two, the people that I work with have been great about compromising and changing with me and supplying what I need.”

The three front-of-house staff members shared similar reflections. The assistant GM said she had seen local as a growing trend among lots of different people in different parts of the country, but she followed up by saying, “And so I guess I’ve seen it in action at [Restaurant B]. I’ve seen the perks of having things that are sourced in the local community.” Both the bartender and server indicated that they did not think about the concept of local before they came to work
at Restaurant B, so it had not only made the initial connections for them. It had pushed them both to think more about their lifestyles and food choices. As said by the bartender when asked if her time with Restaurant B had influenced her definition of local in any way:

Yeah, I definitely think so. I think more so in the way of introducing me to so many more new people. It made me so much more a part of this community. Because I didn’t grow up here, it enabled me to get to know all these people. And them to get to know me, too… Maybe I never would have bought cheese from [the cheese producer]. Or maybe I wouldn’t even know who he is!

Perceptions of Network B Producers

The Network B producers also provided a variety of local definitions (see Table 10).

Table 10. Descriptions of Local by Network B Producer Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOCAL DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>#PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>#REFERENCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geographical Proximity</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area Where Product Sells</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Distance</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-political Region</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biophysical Region</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Propinquity</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing the Producer &amp; Operation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation Btwn Producers &amp; Community</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values Proximity</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Quality Product</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Values</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organic/Vegetarian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local as Not Corporations or Chains</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal Processing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the context of being asked to provide a definition of *local*, all six Network B producers began their definitions with concepts that were categorized as geographical proximity. Three of the Network B producers specifically used food miles to describe what *local* meant to them, ranging anywhere from 30 to 60 to 100 miles, depending on the business and product. The other three Network B producers initially cited various, specific regions as their way of envisioning *local*. For one vegetable producer, this meant the socio-political region of Pennsylvania; the other vegetable producer described his *local* region as a “geography thing,” delineated by the surrounding hills and valleys; and finally, the pork producer described his region as Central PA, which was distinguished from other Pennsylvania regions by the prevalence of different industries and population characteristics, like ethnic background.

Common among all six producers was the way they had come to their geographical definitions of *local* – it was where their product sold. Whether their definition included food miles or regional descriptions, for each of the six Network B producers described *local* as where the majority of their product sold. As told by one of the vegetable producers when describing the geographical aspects of *local*: “That is our market. That’s where we make our money.” These definitions were not only set by where the product was sold, but also, as said by the pork producer by, “as far as I will go to sell something.” As explained by the cheese producer when he defined *local* as a 30-mile radius, “Well, I think I did 30 miles because 30 miles from here is [two towns]. If you go north 30 miles or south 30 miles, it’s just not the same… I guess I just didn’t want to drive any further.” And, as described by the orchard owner, not only did *local* mean where his product sold, but he also recognized that other producers may use the same means for defining their own *local* concept:
Local, regional, I think they are all user-defined terms. For me, local’s within 60 miles maybe. I’m sure for some retailers, local could be within a three state area. I’m fine with that as long as the user of the term is open to disclosing what their concept of local is, and I don’t think there are any hard and fast rules and will or should there ever really be, but that’s just my take.

When specifically answering how they would define local, only one of the Network B producers included any mention of relational propinquity – and the same producer was the only one who made any sort of reference to values as a part of the local concept. The beef producer was the one who mentioned any ideas that had to do with relationships, for which she focused on knowing not only the producer, but the production practices that he or she employed in growing and processing the products. The values embedded into her local definition included local as a being a high quality product. Both of these additional aspects – the relational propinquity and values of proximity parts that were included in her local definition were described as being more important to her than the geographical proximity piece. While she initially described local as a 100-mile radius, she then reflected on her own beef operation, and went on to explain,

Now, granted, when the cattle go on feed, they may be a little further than 100 miles away, but to me, more local is just knowing how it’s been produced through the whole cycle. And what has gone into that process is more important than [being] five miles away and not done well. It could be 200 miles away and done very well, which to me is more important than right next door, and it’s a poor quality product…

While the local definitions shared by the Network B producers appeared to be pretty straight-forward, these participants also provided further descriptions and conceptualizations of local during their interviews that fell outside of answering the direct definition question. Yet, these overall results remained relatively similar to those found by examining their individual definitions, as done above. Taking into account each of the Network B participants’ full interviews, local was still overwhelming defined using concepts of geographical proximity, with each producer providing such comments that amounted to a total of 24 references across all six
interviews. Local as a geographical concept was most often described as the area where the producers sold their products, as discussed before, as well as the distance that is traveled to get there. Ideas about local that involved concepts of relational propinquity were only used by four of the producers for a total of eight references, that focused most on local meaning that one knew the producer or consumer of his or her food. Lastly, values-based definitions of local were only used by four producers, for a total of eight references. The different types of values described by these four producers varied widely, including: high product quality, independent from national chains; minimal food processing; organic production practices. Two of the producers also made comments about how local could be about shared values between different parties, as well. When asked how he thought his ideas about local compared to those of his restaurant partners, the pork producer said, “The folks at the restaurants all understand local very, very well.”

Benefits of Participation

Perceptions of Restaurant B Participants

Often mentioned in close conjunction with the definition of local were the benefits of participation in a farm-to-restaurant network. Network B participants were asked to recount the benefits that they perceived from participation in this particular local food network, which ended up being varied in both number and type and were also offered freely throughout the participants’ interviews (see Table 11).
Table 11. Benefits Described by Restaurant B Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERCEIVED BENEFIT</th>
<th>#PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>#REFERENCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Restaurant Becomes More Profitable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet Customer Demand</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Profitability &amp; Competitiveness</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior &amp; Unique Foods</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheaper Product Pricing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent Product</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Staff &amp; Customer Development</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer &amp; Staff Education about Foods &amp; Area</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Health</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chef Development</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage Relationship w/Producer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Extra Network Connections</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Local Economy &amp; Community</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to Larger Social Movement</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Environmentally Friendly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Producer Becomes More Profitable</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Producer Profitability</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Producer Development</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Creativity</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Flexible Business Relationship</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with Network A, the Network B participants’ responses were coded into six overarching categories, each containing subcategories based on the participants’ own perceptions. For the Restaurant B participants, these categories fell into order from those that were mentioned by the greatest number of participants and most frequently to those that were mentioned by the smallest number of participants and least frequently as follows: restaurant becomes more profitable; staff and customer development; extra network connections; producer becomes more profitable; producer development; and flexible business relationship.
All six Restaurant B participants mentioned benefits that were categorized as *restaurant becomes more profitable*, with an overall frequency of 63 references. The subcategory of benefit under *restaurant becomes more profitable* that was mentioned the most by Restaurant B participants was the use of local foods to help meet customer demand. All six participants mentioned this benefit at least once during their interviews. But customer demand meant different things to different participants. For the two executive chefs, both former and current, using local foods met the customers’ demand for better quality food. Both chefs talked about the high quality of the beef provided by the local producer and how its quality made it the most popular item on the menu. As said by the current executive chef, when explaining the impact of the local producer’s beef quality, “It’s unbelievable how much cow we go through. We sell so many hamburgers, it’s ridiculous.” The bartender also commented on customers’ demand for the local food based upon quality, but quality for her was more closely related to the interest people had in agricultural production practices: “I think people come to places where they know they can—I mean, there’s definitely this world out there of people who want to eat clean, you know?... So they go to those places that they know where they can find [local food].” For the proprietor, meeting customer demand was also about the quality of the local food, as well as the community impact the patrons wanted to promote: “I think for some people it’s the fact that it’s locally produced and therefore fresher. For some people it’s that they know it’s supporting local farmers and keeping the money in the valley.” Similarly, the server said customer demand was about more than the general patron’s interests. According to her, many of Restaurant B’s patrons came from the restaurant’s “local community” who were “major supporters of local food” and therefore were responsible for the majority of the local-foods customer demand that the restaurant experienced.
Other benefits mentioned by the Restaurant B participants that were categorized as *restaurant becomes more profitable* included references to the superior quality and uniqueness of local food products. Five of the Restaurant B participants made comments related to this subcategory of benefits. The assistant GM referred to local foods as “extremely fresh and flavorful” because they didn’t have to undergo the same amount of travel or processing as more conventionally sourced foods. The two executive chefs also talked a lot about the superior quality and uniqueness of the local food products with which they worked, describing them as “better,” “really, really good,” and “absolutely amazing.” The former executive chef reflected fondly on the “interesting produce” he was able to use “whenever it was popping up throughout the year, when it was in season.” The current executive chef had a similar reflection, in which he admitted that, “There are some things you just can’t get, but that’s the uniqueness about [local food].”

Five of the Restaurant B participants also made comments about general enhanced restaurant profitability and competitiveness, another subcategory of *restaurant becomes more profitable*. When the proprietor was asked how the use of local foods may have affected the profitability of Restaurant B, he responded in the affirmative, saying that the business has clearly benefited:

I mean, if we were making a huge profit every year, I’d said that with a bit more resoundingness, but I—that’s why we’re still in business. You know, we opened in the worst economy in the last 100 years and restaurants in general have a pretty depressing track record for staying in business. So I guess, six years in, something is setting us apart from our competition. And I think the local foods are a big part of that.

Three Restaurant B participants also mentioned that they receive local food products at cheaper pricing than they would through more conventional supply channels, again benefits that were categorized as *restaurant becomes more profitable*. The proprietor and the two executive
chefs – the ones who performed most of the buying at Restaurant B while it’s been in operation – indicated that the shorter travel distance, the ability to work closely with the producers, and creating more in-house products resulted in less money being spent on food that they considered to be of greater quality anyway.

The second most commonly mentioned category of benefits among the Restaurant B participants was staff and customer development. This category of benefits were found among five of the participants’ interviews, with a total of 29 references overall. This category was most often referenced through the subcategory of customer and staff education about foods and their geographical area. The two executive chefs spoke about the ways using local foods is an important way of reconnecting customers to the production and preparation of both common and unique foods. As put by the current executive chef, using local foods not only shows off the product, but also the features of the area in which it was produced:

So instead of just eating a piece of cheese or getting a slice of bread or just eating a vegetable… Showing off those vegetables in cooking them the proper way really accents the whole ‘this-place-is-absolutely-amazing-for-farming’ thing. Like it really does. And so I think that’s the best thing about local, and that what I think it should be… Seeing it done in a way that’s, one, really a good experience to go out and eat, and number two, to also experience what can be done with the food.

The bartender said that working at Restaurant B had influenced her own knowledge of and interest in food. Her experience there has influenced the way she shops and cooks for her own family, and as she shared, “It’s definitely influenced me a lot. You know, I’ve realized a lot more about what we eat. So—because as a girl I was raised with my mom gardening or—now half my yard are gardens.”

Some Restaurant B participants also shared other types of comments that were also categorized as staff and customer development. Four participants spoke about how being a
locals-foods restaurant helped to encourage the relationship between producers and consumers, in a way that largely benefitted the consumer. The majority of these comments were reflections on how the Restaurant B participant had largely benefited from getting to know the producers that supplied products to Restaurant B, resulting in their own enjoyment and expanded social or business ties. Two of the Restaurant B participants also claimed that using local foods benefitted staff and customers because they considered the local food products to be healthier than those sourced more conventionally. As said by the proprietor when initially asked about the benefits of using local foods, “I mean, I don’t feel qualified to get in to the health benefits, but I’m sure they’re there, ‘cus our food is clean, cleaner.”

The third most commonly mentioned category of benefits realized from participating in a farm-to-restaurant network by the Restaurant B participants was *extra network connections*. This kind of benefit was described by five of the Restaurant B participants most often in terms of supporting the local economy and/or community. These participants all said some variation of buying local food “kept money in the community.” Four of the Restaurant B participants also connected the restaurant’s sourcing of local foods to the larger local foods social movement as well as potential structure change in the national food supply system. For example, the proprietor explained that while some businesses may consider their local sourcing and preparation strategies to be proprietary information that they would keep from their competitors, he would be willing to work with other restaurants that were interested in joining a local food network by supplying them with producers’ names and other information. For him, supporting the local food movement as a whole was a large benefit of getting restaurants to work more closely with local producers – and therefore, he would do what he could to help others do it, too.
A less commonly mentioned benefit category among the Restaurant B participants was one that related directly back to the local food producers. Four of the restaurant staff mentioned benefits that were categorized as *producer becomes more profitable* for a total of 15 overall references. The chefs in particular talked about how restaurants were a good market outlet for local food producers, and that investing money in these local food operations was not only a good thing to do, but was also in the interest of the restaurant. As said by the former executive chef, “You need to invest with these producers so that they can build their businesses up… Only then can you help expand them and help expand what you’re trying to do locally.” Three of the Restaurant B participants also made comments that were categorized as *personal producer benefits*. These three participants talked about how participation in a farm-to-restaurant network encouraged familiarity between producers and consumers, to the benefit of the producer. The current executive chef spoke about how it was part of his job to raise awareness among their customers about local food options, because, as he said, “I’m selling everyone else everybody else’s food.”

The last two categories of benefits cited by Restaurant B participants were *flexible business relationship* and *personal chef benefits*. While these categories were only discussed by two participants – specifically the two executive chefs – they were discussed at great length and cited often. Because these were the restaurant staff members who worked most closely and frequently with the producers, they reflected often on those experiences. As the current executive chef explained his experience of moving into this new position, he said:

The farmers I’ve been able to work with have been awesome. Every single one of them. And it’s great, ‘cus my situation is, I took over a kitchen that was being run by someone for six years. So it was tough… Every chef’s different, you know? But every single farmer has been amazing in trying to work with me more and more to make changes that I want or things that I’m looking for.
Both chefs also talked about how working with local food products enhanced their creativity and made their job seem more interesting or worthwhile. As put by the current executive chef, he feels “spoiled” by the amount and quality of products he is able to get his hands on. Or as explained by the former executive chef, as he reflected on why he chose to work with local food products over others, “For me, I need to stay interested and passionate with what I do. If I see that, hey, any joe-schmoe can run this kitchen with this line of product, then I feel like I need to move on. So I kind of have a mission here.”

Perceptions of Network B Producers

Benefits identified by the Network B producers were coded into the same categories as the Restaurant B participants, and were cited by the most participants and most frequently to the lowest number of participants and least frequently as follows: producer becomes more profitable; flexible business relationship; staff and customer development; personal producer benefits; restaurant becomes more profitable; and extra network connections (See Table 12).
Table 12. Benefits Described by Network B Producers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERCEIVED BENEFIT</th>
<th>#PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>#REFERENCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Producer Becomes More Profitable</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Producer Profitability</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market Diversification</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moves Excess Product</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent Ordering</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Flexible Business Relationship</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Staff &amp; Customer Development</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer &amp; Staff Education about Foods &amp; Area</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chef Development</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Health</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage Relationship w/Producer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Producer Development</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage Relationship w/Consumer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producer Pride</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity Enhanced</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. Restaurant Becomes More Profitable</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior &amp; Unique Foods</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Demand</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Profitability and Competitiveness</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent Product</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Extra Network Connections</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to Larger Social Movement</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Environmentally Friendly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All six Network B producers cited benefits that were characterized as producer becomes more profitable, for a total of 29 references overall. Overall half of these references were statements made about how participation in the farm-to-restaurant network enhanced their operation’s profitability. One of the vegetable producers identified the enhanced profitability of his business as the most important benefit he’s experienced from working with Restaurant B:

I think the number one [benefit] has to be the profitability. The whole idea is to stay in business. I watch, at farmers’ markets, these idealistic young people, and they just don’t
have the plan. They get all this cash in the middle of summer, and in February they’re starving because they didn’t think it through. And you see them go down. It’s sad. So you can’t keep your eye off the making money. So that’s the first thing about the relationship… We make money selling to them.

All six of the producers made comments that contributed to *producer becomes more profitable* that were about the diversification of market outlets for their business. While three of the producers also shared that they preferred some of their other outlets, like direct marketing at farmers’ markets, because they can sell things at retail rather than wholesale price, they did benefit from having an additional source of income through their restaurant partners. As put by the orchard owner: “I don’t want to say [Restaurant B is] just another customer, but they sort of are. And they need to fill out an invoice, which is fine, I see no problem with it. They’re a wholesale [account], to the extent that exists.” Half of the producers also said that their business account with Restaurant B gave them a way to sell their excess products, which would otherwise go to waste. The pork producer saw this a mutual benefit to him and the restaurants, as the chefs could use the products to come up with a creative special, while he got to make a profit.

The second most common category of benefits cited by the Network B producers was *flexible business relationship*, which was mentioned by all six producers for a total of 25 references overall. All six of the Network B producers reflected positively on their relationship with Restaurant B, and cited instances of how the restaurant had been flexible in regard to orders and delivery – or how the producer him- or herself had been flexible in a way that benefitted the restaurant. When asked about her relationship with her two restaurant partners, the beef producer replied, “I’m very loyal to these two. They were the first two to go with us, so we have to make sure that can meet their needs… So we work with them on that.” The pork producer also spoke to how he maintains flexibility in his relationship with his restaurant partners:
Once you get in the door with a couple of items for the chefs and get to know the chefs… then at that point… they’re interested in what else we got, and I’m interested in what else do [they] want, and if it fits what I can do, we’ll do it for [them]. The caveat there is if it’s something brand new that I haven’t done before, okay, we’ll raise it for you… use it as your specials. And then once we know we can do it… and if you want to put it on the menu, put it on the menu.

Six of the Network B producers also included benefits that were categorized as restaurant staff and customer development, but with only 16 references overall. The Network B producers who provided such benefits focused mainly on the education staff and customers received about food and the local area, in general. Two of these producers spoke specifically about how they considered visits to the actual local food operation to be an important way other people could learn more about how food is produced and processed. When talking about how she liked to provide more information to Restaurant B for customer education, she said, “I think as producers, the more transparent we can be, and the education that we can provide, the better.” Two of the Network B producers also shared that they thought the customers benefited from the restaurant’s participation in a farm-to-restaurant network because they believed their products were healthier than those sourced through a more conventional supply channel. Three of the Network B producers also shared benefits that were coded as personal chef benefits, which also related back to the high quality of products they thought they were providing for their restaurant partners. As shared by the cheese producer, “I think that’s what really sets those restaurants apart from the Sysco provided restaurants, is that they get creative.”

All six of the Network B producers also cited benefits to participation in the farm-to-restaurant network that were coded as personal producer benefits. Four of the Network B producers made comments that were included in this category about the relationships that they were able to form with consumers, through their participation in the network. Two of these producers shared how they enjoyed knowing the people at the restaurant specifically, while the
other two spoke about how they enjoyed having their farm and product recognized by customers who frequent both the restaurant and the farmers’ markets. One vegetable producer was very happy to share that he (and his whole family) had been invited down to Restaurant B for a special dinner prepared with their product. And as told by the cheese producer, “I’ve been sitting at [Restaurant B] and there’s hardly any times that I’m in there that someone doesn’t want to bring up the fact that the cheese up there is made by me, you know. Point me out.” Four of the producers also spoke about how having their product featured in a restaurant made them feel proud. As said by the orchard owner, “It’s gratifying to be on somebody’s menu…” and, when asked what the benefits of selling to restaurants were, the pork producer’s first response was: “Ego trip! <laughs> The first time I put my feet under a table and they handed me the menu and my name was on it, I mean that was a real special time. I was kind of, ‘okay you’ve made it.’”

The Network B producers also recognized benefits of participation that were experienced more so by their restaurant partners. Five of the Network B producers shared benefits that were coded at restaurant becomes more profitable, with most of the 27 overall references mentioning the superior and unique foods that the restaurants received through the farm-to-restaurant network. All five of these producers described how their own products were of high quality and uniqueness – and how they think that makes it worthwhile to the restaurants to keep up their participation in the farm-to-restaurant networks. As said by the cheese producer, “Chefs really appreciate good product,” and one of the vegetable producers said that while the lack of a formal contract meant that Restaurant B could switch providers at any time, he believes the superior quality of his products would prevent them from leaving him. Four of the Network B producers also recognized that the use of local food products at the restaurants helped those businesses meet customer demand, and three others provided comments on how sourcing locally helped to
enhance the general profitability of their restaurant business partners and make them more competitive in comparison to others. As said by one of the vegetable producers, “I can easily guess why [the restaurants] do what they do. And it clearly is winning for them. They seem to be a popular restaurant… This whole local thing has caught on.”

Finally, three of the Network B producers did provide a few small comments about benefits that were coded as *extra network connections*. These producers saw their farm-to-restaurant networks as connected to the larger local food movement. When reflecting on the changes he’s observed in both the local food networks he’s participated in during his career as a farmer, the pork producer connected it to trends he’s been watching on broader levels:

There will be a very, very long time that there will be two food systems. There’s going to be a conventional cheap food system and then there’s going to be a more expensive local food system that is going to be more nutrient dense and will have an emphasis on providing food that is better for you, healthier, and something that is worth the extra money. It’s here to stay.

**Drawbacks to Participation**

*Perceptions of Restaurant B Participants*

In addition to the various benefits mentioned previously, the Restaurant B participants also cited a number of drawbacks to participation in a farm-to-restaurant network (see Table 13).
Table 13. Drawbacks Described by Restaurant B Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERCEIVED DRAWBACK</th>
<th>#PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>#REFERENCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Greater Restaurant Costs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Restaurant Time &amp; Effort</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price of Local Foods</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Infrastructure Needed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Staff Investment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Lack of Consistency</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Food Options</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Consistency in Product</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Consistency in Service</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Unaligned Expectations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Customer Perceptions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Obligations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undedicated Restaurant Proprietor or Buyer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hijacking of “Local”</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Greater Producer Costs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Necessity of Production Expansion</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Producer Time &amp; Effort</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These drawbacks were categorized into the same four categories used for the Network A participants. In order from most cited to least, these drawback categories referenced by the Restaurant B participants as follows: greater restaurant costs; lack of consistency; unaligned expectations; and greater producer costs.

Five of the Restaurant B participants cited drawbacks that were categorized as greater restaurant costs for a total of 54 references overall. All five of these participants described how participation in a farm-to-restaurant network resulted in an increased investment in time and effort, on the part of the restaurant. The proprietor and the two executive chefs explained how using local foods required more time and thought for both ordering and preparation than would be necessary if they just sourced through a more conventional supply channel. The current
executive chef explained how ordering food for a restaurant could be like a game of “Tetris,” where one must consider how to fit together many moving pieces in a very short time period. Comparing his experience at Restaurant B to those he had in the past, the current executive chef said:

Usually whenever you have orderings, you only go through, like, three people, so now I go through, like, 12 people. So I have a certain person that I call for this certain item, and I have a certain person that I call for that certain item… And I have to get in touch with this person at this certain time of the day on this certain day of the week… So, instead of just calling up at the end of the day, and being like, ‘I just need this, blah, blah, blah,’ and hanging up the phone. It’s like, everything is timed. You really, really, really have to look ahead.

The proprietor reported that the use of locally sourced foods increased the time needed for preparation because they are producing their dishes “from scratch” and “not just opening bags and dumping them in hot water.” The proprietor and the two executive chefs also spoke about the effort it took to not only balance the restaurant’s costs, but the costs for all businesses involved in the farm-to-restaurant network, including the producers. As said by the proprietor, “I mean, that’s the thing. Everything’s gotta work on both ends. It’s gotta work for the farmer, it’s gotta work for us. Business is very unforgiving…” Both of the chefs also talked about how they have to put in extra time and mental effort to understand the producers’ various operations in order to make the business relationship work for the restaurant. These two participants plus the assistant general manager also remarked on how sourcing from local food producers made it much more difficult to plan Restaurant B’s menu, in regard to what’s being featured on the menu and how to price out the dishes. According to the chefs, they often did not have much advance knowledge of what will be available to purchase from the producers, and the products would sometime arrive in odd quantities that make pricing difficult to figure out.
The category of *greater restaurant costs* also included references to the monetary costs that the Restaurant B participants perceived as being higher due to participation in a farm-to-restaurant network. Five of the Restaurant B participants indicated that local food products cost more than those that could be sourced through a conventional distributor. The assistant GM and the current executive chef said that the higher cost of local foods affected their menu prices because they have to charge more in order to cover their kitchen costs. Another source of economic cost related to local foods was the need for storage infrastructure, as brought up both of the executive chefs. As said by the current executive chef, when he “orders a cow, he gets a COW,” which he has to creatively store until he can use all of it. But while these economic drawbacks were mentioned by four of the Restaurant B participants, both executive chefs and the proprietor made sure to point out that they thought the price of local foods wasn’t always higher, and that it often was worth the extra cost when they were. As said by the proprietor about both the economic and non-economic costs he had cited as drawbacks:

> But I can’t separate those drawbacks from the fact that if we just ordered all of our meats, for instance, from Sysco, it would take less time to procure them and less time to prepare them, but I bet that we would sell a helluva lot less. So, yes, it is more—slightly more expensive in terms of labor and maybe costs of goods, but it is our business proposition. You know, we’re not here to be a heat and serve restaurant. We wouldn’t still be here, I don’t believe.

Five of the Restaurant B participants also talked about drawbacks to participation in a farm-to-restaurant network that were coded as *lack of consistency*, for a total of 20 references overall. This category mostly included references to the limited food options that the five Restaurant B participants perceived as being a problem with sourcing locally. Local food options were described as limited in a few different ways. Four of the five participants who made comments about limited local foods attributed that limitation to seasonality. As described by the proprietor, “You know, we struggle from season to season. Depending on what season it is, we
do a little better than other seasons and that’s because people are coming out or there’s more in the fields.” Local food options were also said to be limited by type of food and quantity that was being produced locally. As told by the assistant GM, potatoes were a particularly hard item for Restaurant B to source exclusively from local producers because they were a main ingredient in popular menu items. Unable to access the type or quantity of food needed by the restaurant at different times of the year resulted in the need for Restaurant B to vary their orders with their broadline distributor, affecting the consistency of orders and tasks of the executive chef. In addition to food products being limited, lack of consistency was also described by the former executive chef in terms of lack of consistent product, especially when they worked with a CSA farm who delivered a wide variety of vegetables each week. The assistant GM also indicated that there was lack of consistency with delivery and when things could be brought to or kept by the restaurant.

The third most common category of drawbacks among the Restaurant B participants was unaligned expectations, which were found among four of the Restaurant B interviews, with 24 references overall. Four of these participants described how the use of local foods sometimes resulted in negative perceptions or misunderstandings by the restaurant patrons. Both of the chefs spoke about how the products that were available for local sourcing weren’t always products that the customers were interested in eating or buying, like daikon radishes from a vegetable producer or odd cuts of meet from the beef producer. The assistant GM and the server made comments about how not all of Restaurant B’s customers appeared interested in the local foods, at all, and therefore might not understand why prices were higher. The server went on to explain that some customers also are disappointed when they ask for particular products, but are told no because the product is unavailable locally or out of season. For example, the server said,
It occurs relatively often, people will ask what’s our vegetable for the night, or you know, if we have a side of vegetables that we do. And we really don’t because the only really local vegetables that we have are the ones that are going with the feature for the night, and then we only have a limited quantity of them. So that is something that the customers have been a little bit dissatisfied with…

Other references included in the *unaligned expectations* category of drawbacks included the proprietor and current executive chef discussing how other restaurants misrepresent the idea of local sourcing by claiming they do it, but in reality they don’t – at least not in same way these participants thought Restaurant B did it well. The two executive chefs also discussed how having a restaurant proprietor or buyer that is not interested in local sourcing or wants it done in a very specific manner could making local sourcing more difficult. Finally, the two executive chefs also mentioned how sourcing locally can be difficult because of the social obligations you feel towards the local food producers. The current executive chef felt obligated to maintain the producer accounts that he inherited from the former executive chef because of the important relationships they entailed, even though he wanted to source newer and less expensive products from elsewhere. And as explained by the former executive chef,

You can’t just be anonymous and say, ‘I want these ingredients.’ You need to really be able to understand where there people are coming from and why they’re pricing this way. And let them know what you can afford to do. Only then can you really be able to buy from these people and be their friends at the same time.

The least cited category of drawbacks mentioned by the Restaurant B participants was *greater producer costs*, which were found in only two of the participants’ responses, with five references overall. Both of the executive chefs recognized that for local producers to become successful suppliers for the restaurant industry, the producers were going to have to invest in the expansion of their operations. The current executive chef also recognized that local sourcing requires an increased time and effort investment on the part of the producers, as well as the restaurants.
When discussing the drawbacks to participation in a farm-to-restaurant network, four of the Restaurant B participants also included comments downplaying the drawbacks that they had shared. This included comments about how the benefits they experienced from participation in the network were greater than the drawbacks; that there really weren’t any drawbacks; or how they had gone about alleviating the drawbacks so that they could continue to source locally. For example, the former executive chef said that the lack of consistency in product fed his creativity and kept him interested in his work at Restaurant B. As the current executive chef shared after listing some of the drawbacks he had experienced during his time at Restaurant B, “So, I don’t know. But nope—I see no drawbacks. That’s what it is. It’s the food industry, you know? People have to give and take a little bit. If I can’t give with something else, I’ve got to do something else with something else, you know what I mean?”

Perceptions of Network B Producers

The Network B producers also shared a number of drawbacks that they had experienced during their participation in farm-to-restaurant networks (see Table 14). Their comments were coded into the same four categories used in all the other participant samples, and were found to be most to least cited as follows: greater producer costs; lack of consistency; unaligned expectations; and greater restaurant costs.
All six producers discussed drawbacks to participation that were coded as *greater producer costs*, with a total of 59 references overall. All six producers shared drawbacks that they had experienced that included a greater investment of time and effort on the part of the producer. The producers explained that working with restaurants, as opposed to their other market outlets, required more time and mental effort because they order and use products differently than their other customers. Several of the Network B producers primarily sold a lot of their product through farmers’ markets, which required different responsibilities than selling wholesale to a restaurant partner. Communication was a particularly salient theme among these

### Table 14. Drawbacks Described by Network B Producers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERCEIVED DRAWBACK</th>
<th>#PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>#REFERENCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Greater Producer Costs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Producer Time &amp; Effort</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Necessity of Farm Expansion</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale Pricing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Storage &amp; Packaging</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Lack of Consistency</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chef Turnover</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Consistency in Service</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slower Payments</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Consistency in Product</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Consistency of Ordering</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant Closes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Unaligned Expectations</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Knowledge about the Other’s Business</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Restaurant Standards</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Obligations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hijacking of “Local”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>False or Negative Customer Perceptions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Greater Restaurant Costs</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price of Local Foods</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Restaurant Time &amp; Effort</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
types of drawbacks, where a few of the producers mentioned that the way the restaurants preferred to communicate (email, text messages) sometimes didn’t coincide with their preferred methods, which made it more difficult for the producer to keep up on his or her restaurant accounts. As shared by the cheese producer, “I was a little hesitant to work with restaurants because I just heard stories and people saying they’re really difficult and stuff.”

The Network B producers also shared a number of ways that participation in a farm-to-restaurant network required greater producer costs of a monetary nature, too. All six producers spoke about how it would be (or was) necessary for them to invest in expanding their operation in some manner in order to work more efficiently with restaurant businesses. Two of the Network B producers claimed that expansion of their operation would be necessary because the nearby market for their product was fairly limited; therefore, they would need to reach out to restaurant located further away if they wished to continue investing in those relationships. Four of the Network B producers said they would have to expand their operations to work more thoroughly with restaurants because their product base was already exhausted by their market outlets. When asked if he makes an effort to expand his restaurant customer base, one of the vegetables producers replied:

No. For us, the farmers’ markets continue to get bigger and bigger… We’re pretty much just keeping up with the farmers’ market. We can sell virtually everything at market and haven’t thought about producing a lot of extra to see if we could sell to a restaurant…. We’re fairly sure we’re going to sell it at farmers’ market, but then [we’ll] produce extra and then have a chef come, ‘Eh, we don’t want it this week.’ You know?

Other monetary costs described by the Network B producers included the loss of money on wholesale pricing (as opposed to retail), which was cited by two different producers. The beef producer also shared that she’s in charge of storing all of her product until Restaurant B can make room for it in their smaller freezer.
The second most mentioned category of drawbacks mentioned by the Network B producers was lack of consistency. Five of the producers shared comments that were coded into this category, with 34 references overall. The majority of references within this category were about lack of consistency on the part of their restaurant partners. Four of the producers discussed the effect of chef turnover, and how it had (or would) negatively affected their business. Four of the producers also claimed that restaurants were slower to pay for their product orders than their other market outlets—sometimes even resulting in no payment at all. The cheese producer shared a story in which he had payment issues with one of his restaurant partners, but wasn’t quite sure how to deal with it: “And there were four invoices that were outstanding, and I copied them and sent them to the owner and she sent me a check for one of them. This is unchartered territory. I don’t know whether to put them through a collecting agency or just have a chat with them or go in and bust up their kitchen <laughs>.” Two of the producers had also experienced a lack of consistency in ordering from their restaurant partners. The pork producer touched on a number of aspects contributing to this area of drawbacks when he said:

I’ve been through [chef turnover] many times, and everything that I have a pretty hard fast rule on when I’m dealing with a restaurant or any big customer like that—I keep their share of my business under ten percent… When you’re dealing with small, one location restaurants run by an individual, you always have to remember that one auto accident, one fire, one disaster of any kind, and they’re out of business… And if that happens the day before your delivery, then you can’t expect them to take delivery.

The Network B producers also mentioned a few ways that they thought they, or other local food producers, contributed to the lack of consistency in farm-to-restaurant networks. Four of the Network B producers discussed how local food producers can be inconsistent in delivery to the restaurant businesses. As said by one of the vegetable producers, “You gotta deliver what you say you’ll deliver.” Three of the Network B producers also recognized that consistency in product type or quality could be an issue. As described by the cheese producer,
The other thing I’ve had some issue with is the consistency of my product. So they’ll get used to it and all of a sudden now the cheese doesn’t slice because it’s too soft, or it doesn’t slice because it’s too hard. It’s like, well, I can’t really change it, it’s already made, and I’ve had people drop cheese because they didn’t work for them, and that’s fine. But I’m not going to jump through all these little hoops just to satisfy somebody else’s bottom line.

The third category of drawbacks most often cited by Network B producers was **unaligned expectations**, which was mentioned by five of the producers for a total of 20 references overall. For the Network B producers, this was most often described by talking about how either business party lacks knowledge about the other’s operation. This could mean that the restaurant folks did not fully understand the producer’s operation, or vice versa. As said by one of the vegetable producers, “Well, I think as a chef, you don’t totally understand farming, that it’s not just like there’s all this extra product sitting out there waiting, that I’ve invested all this money out in the field just saying, ‘Hey, maybe somebody will buy this.’” On the other side, the cheese producer admitted that he didn’t have a full grasp on how his sales prices affected his restaurant partners: “I sell mostly retail at the farmers’ markets, but you can get that from the restaurants. And I don’t know much about the restaurant business because I’ve never worked in it, but I’m sure they have their margins.” Related to these drawbacks were two of the Network B producers’ comments on the high standards restaurants set for their products, making it more difficult to sell to them consistently. **Unaligned expectations** also included the social obligations two of the Network B producers felt sometimes added stress to their business relationship with restaurants. As said by one of the vegetable producers, “The social thing’s a two-edged sword.”

The least cited category of drawbacks by Network B producers was **greater restaurant costs**, which were mentioned by only three of the producers with 13 references overall. Two of these producers admitted that local food products often cost more than those sourced through a conventional distributor. The cheese producer described restaurants as “very price sensitive”
even if they do “really appreciate good product.” Two of the Network B producers also discussed how participation in a farm-to-restaurant network requires the chef or other restaurant staff to invest more time and effort into finding local food providers and generating a menu based off of what’s available in that area seasonally.

Three of the Network B producers also claimed that there were no or few drawbacks to participating in a farm-to-restaurant network, even if they had shared a few elsewhere in the course of their interview. As shared by the beef producer, “…We value the relationship, so we work with [the restaurants] on that. So that’s—I mean, I wouldn’t even call them drawbacks, or a negative. It’s just a different way.” All six of the producers also provided feedback on how they think any of the drawbacks are outweighed by the benefits that they or their restaurant partners reap from the farm-to-restaurant network, particularly how the money gained from having a customer makes the trouble worth it, or how the quality of the product justifies the extra monetary and non-monetary costs it may take for the restaurant to secure it. Four of the Network B producers also shared how they’ve found ways to alleviate the drawbacks so they can continue to work with their restaurant partners. These alleviations may include educating the restaurant staff on their product, educating themselves on the food service industry, or making adjustments to their business to limit how vulnerable they are to changes within their restaurant partners’ businesses. For example, when talking about Restaurant B’s recent turnover in chef, one vegetable producer shared, “You’ve gotta get used to [the chef’s] style, since you’re the guy trying to sell to him. It’s my job to figure out his style.”
CHAPTER 6
Discussion: Cross-Case and Cross-Sample Comparisons

Drawing on the findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5, this chapter aims to provide a look at the similarities and differences between the different study population samples by comparing the network operation, definitions of local, and benefits and drawbacks perceived from participating in a local food network. First, comparisons will be made across the two study cases, Farm-to-Restaurant Networks A and B. Second, comparisons will also be drawn between the restaurant and producer participants, as they represent broadly different locations in the overall local food supply chain. The comparison discussions are organized by the three overarching research questions. The frameworks and literature introduced in Chapter 2 will be used to guide comparisons between both the overall networks and the research samples when addressing the latter two research questions: how local was defined and the benefits and drawbacks that were perceived and experienced by the network participants.

Comparing the Two Farm-to-Restaurant Networks

The operation of these two farm-to-restaurant networks were relatively similar, from the beginning to the end of the supply chain. One of the most prominent differences between the two network cases was how the restaurants became involved with local foods. Restaurant A and Restaurant B first initiated their respective local food networks for very different reasons. Restaurant A sought to increase the profitability and viability of its business by following a national trend toward local food sourcing, while Restaurant B opened with the intent of using local foods due to experiences and values of its proprietor. This difference in orientation may be reflected in the fact that Restaurant B executive chef claimed to use more local foods on its menu than did Restaurant A’s executive chef – and that Restaurant B’s broadline distributor is a state-
based company, not a national supplier like Restaurant A’s. Restaurant B was also a significantly smaller operation than was Restaurant A, both in terms of capacity and hours of operation, meaning it needed a smaller quantity of food to operate on a weekly basis than did Restaurant A, perhaps allowing Restaurant B to be more selective in its food options. The menu of Restaurant B was also much shorter than Restaurant A’s, and contained more items that could be sourced year-round within the study region than did Restaurant A’s extensive menu. Reflecting the history and the personal commitments of the proprietor to local sourcing and sustainable agriculture, Restaurant B appeared to have organized its menu from the start to include a large majority of locally sourced products – whereas Restaurant A fit them in when and where it was more seasonally convenient, as well as created specials to showcase other local food options that did not have a place on the larger, more permanent menu.

Both Restaurants indicated a process for selecting their local food producers that included different considerations. Both restaurants began supplying local products with the proprietors identifying the producers with which they wanted to work initially – either based upon product interests (in the case of Restaurant A) or prior relationships (in the case of Restaurant B). But after the initial business relationships were formed, it was up to the executive and/or sous chefs at each restaurant both to maintain those relationships and establish new ones. While the chefs at Restaurant A were given complete freedom to select local food producers and products, Restaurant B had its “hands tied,” as put by the current executive chef. Just because a less expensive local product could be purchased from a different producer did not mean that Restaurant B (or its chefs) could make the switch – especially not if it threatened previous personal and business relationships that the proprietor or previous executive chef had formed with other local food producers. This was of particular importance at Restaurant B due to the
recent turnover in executive chef. It structured the amount of effort the current executive chef had to put into understanding how sourcing decisions were made at Restaurant B.

As for bringing the local food products from their place of production to the restaurant establishment, similar methods were evident in both farm-to-restaurant networks. Neither network imposed formal contracts on any of its suppliers, with mixed interest among the network participants in pursuing formal contracts in the future. Even those who viewed contracts positively admitted that any contracts would have to be flexible and allow for failure on either end of the farm-to-restaurant network, due to their perceptions of both farming and food service as unstable businesses. Ordering was the responsibility of the executive/sous chef at both Restaurant A and B. Communications between the restaurants and the local food providers in both network cases were mixed both in method and frequency. While chefs at both restaurants indicated a need for quick and efficient communication that could happen as needed (like a text message), many of the producers stuck to methods that worked well for them, but were still relatively convenient for the restaurant staff (like email and phone calls). Local food deliveries to the restaurant were mostly performed by the producers in both network cases, with Restaurant B taking slightly more initiative than Restaurant A to pick up products from the sites of production, when needed.

Both networks engaged in some form of staff education around the local food products at the restaurant. The education efforts were split between the executive/sous chefs and managers at each of the restaurant sites. Restaurant A’s process was more formalized than Restaurant B’s, as it included line-ups at every meal and a staff quiz – but again, its operation was larger and employed more people, perhaps making a formal process of education more necessary than at a restaurant that has fewer front-of-house employees to train. Based on the interviews with the
front-of-house staff at each restaurant, customers in both networks appeared to be interested in the local foods, but didn’t necessarily ask a lot of questions about them. Servers in both networks indicated that “locals” were the people who tended to be more interested in the local food options than those from out of town, and perhaps they didn’t ask more questions because they already had the information they would want about the local options from their own knowledge or past visits. As for other outlets of staff and customer education – such as informational boards, menu inserts, websites – Restaurant A had more extensive resources than did Restaurant B. Resources were not only in greater number at Restaurant A than Restaurant B, but the resources themselves contained greater detail as well. For example, both restaurants had boards on the restaurant wall that identified their local food producers, but while Restaurant B simply listed the names of the producers, Restaurant A had a full map that displayed the location and contact information for each producer. Producers played a relatively minimal role in staff and customer education in both network cases.

**Defining Local**

*Network A vs. Network B*

When taken as a whole, (combining the information shared by both the restaurant and producer participants of each network), the two network cases described *local* in very similar ways. As posited by Eriksen (2013), nearly all research participants across both cases began their definitions of *local* first in terms of geographical proximity. Both networks most prominently used the idea of travel distance (eg. food miles) to geographically describe *local*. The difference that existed between the two networks in regard to their geographical descriptions of *local* was that Network B participants also often used ideas of biophysical region in addition to comments on travel distance. This discrepancy may be due to the locations of the restaurants, and their
respective local food producers. Restaurant A existed within very close proximity to an urban center, and their local food products came from producers located in a scattered number of nearby regions. Restaurant B was located in a rural area, one that is often identified by its specific valley name and its surrounding mountain peaks. The local products sourced by Restaurant B were also largely produced within that biophysical valley, providing the Restaurant B participants with a more specific frame of reference for local - one that was maybe not as fully formed for the Restaurant A participants.

In contrast to the conclusions suggested by Eriksen (2013), definitions of local for both of the farm-to-restaurant networks were more often a combination of geographical and values proximity than geographical proximity and relational propinquity. Both networks showed a wide distribution of the types of values mentioned by their participants. Both sets of participants stressed that local was not associated with corporations or chains. Instead, local was more so associated with independent businesses and originality. All businesses involved in this study – including the restaurants – were independently owned, so this aspect of local may reflect the way in which the participants perceived their own respective businesses (or places of employment).

As for differences between the two networks, Network A participants talked more about the values of self-sufficiency/made in-house more often than did Network B participants. This may be explained by Restaurant A’s house-gardens and the proprietor’s tendency to stress their brewery’s beer products as a local product – something that did not occur in any interviews with Restaurant B participants, even though they also had an in-house brewery operation. The Network B participants more often described local as a high quality product than did the Network A participants. Local products were certainly used in higher volume in Network A. Network B participants may have thought about local more in terms of the products they were
sourcing for the restaurant than the ones they were creating at the restaurant, which seemed a more self-conscious feature in Network A.

Ideas of relational propinquity were not mentioned nearly as often as the specific values that the participants attributed to *local*. However, Network A participants described *local* more often in terms of knowing the producer and how they produced their food products. Some Network B participants also discussed this aspect of the relational propinquity domain, but several Network B participants also mentioned how *local* was defined by the cooperation between the producer and their respective community – something that goes a step further than just knowing one another. Again, I think this difference between the networks may be explained by the locations of the restaurants and their respective local food producers. Because Network B was more fully contained within one, distinct biophysical region – more so than Network A was – the participants from Network B may have associated this region with their community, therefore making the connection between the local food products and ideas of community cooperation. Because the producers and restaurant in Network A were more widely dispersed than those in Network B – and therefore, maybe identified with different communities – perhaps this “cooperation” aspect of *local* was not as prominent for those Network A participants.

*Restaurant-based vs. Producer Participants*

When considering differences between the ways restaurant participants and producer participants defined and described *local*, bigger discrepancies arose than did between the two networks. Ideas of geographical proximity were still prominent, but were discussed more frequently and with greater details by the producer participants than the restaurant ones – which is a finding similar to that of Ostrom (2006) who found that farmers’ constructions of *local* had less fluid boundaries than those described by the food consumer sample. Nearly all of the
producers in this study provided a specific mileage or distance when defining *local*, even if these distances varied widely among them. The geographical terms used by the restaurant participants were fairly evenly split between distances and different types of regions, both biophysical and socio-political. Three-fourths of the producers also described *local* as the area in which they sell their products, therefore allowing the reach of their market outlets to define *local* for their business. For example, the cheese producer from Network B limited his definition of *local* to a 30 mile radius because that was all the more he was willing to drive to sell his product; but the cheese producer from Network A went as far as to describe the entire United States as *local* because he does ship some of his product to shops in California. This concept of letting the products’ markets define *local* was not mentioned by any of the restaurant participants, as they experienced *local* more from the purchasing end of the network, not necessarily the selling.

As noted above, ideas of relational propinquity were not often mentioned by any of the research participants. The number of participants who did discuss relational aspects of *local* and the frequency with which it was discussed was similar across the restaurant-based and producer groups. In the few instances where this came up, the producers overwhelmingly described *local* as knowing the producer and his or her production practices, while the restaurant participants were more evenly distributed between that aspect of relational propinquity as well as the cooperation between producers and their respective communities. The producers, as the ones closer to the product, saw knowledge of themselves and their operations to be important to the idea of *local*, whereas the restaurant participants might have had a broader view of what relational aspects of *local* may mean, as they are more separated from the production operation.

Turning to Eriksen’s (2013) last domain of *local*, restaurant participants used values to describe *local* far more than did the producer participants. This finding is similar to that of Selfa
and Qazi (2005), who found that farmers relied more on geographical definitions of local than those that drew on relationships or product attributes and other values, which were far more common among their consumer sample. Nearly all of the restaurant participants mentioned some sort of value they attributed to the concept of local, while less than half of the producers did so. The values that were used by the producers were fairly scattered across a number of different categories, with none becoming more prominent than others. As for the restaurant participants, values were also scattered in type, but coalesced around local not being associated with large corporations or chains, as well as self-sufficiency and in-house production. The values used to define local were fairly similar to what the restaurant participants described as benefits for participating in the system, and therefore naturally conflated the two (local definitions and benefits) during the course of their interviews. The producers were more apt to keep the two subjects separate during the course of their interviews. As the restaurant participants are closer to the consumption side of the local food network, they may more closely associate their own desired values with the local products they wish to consume – whereas the producers are more deeply involved in the production, and therefore might dwell less on the values that consumers are attributing to their product, and more on the actual logistics of their operation.

**Benefits of Network Participation**

*Network A vs. Network B*

When comparing the benefits of participation described across the two farm-to-restaurant networks, one finds that there is not much of a difference between the types of benefits mentioned by the network participants nor in the frequency with which they were mentioned. Examining the coded categories of benefits, the participants of Network B mentioned slightly more types of benefits and with a higher occurrence than Network A’s participants, which may
be due to more frequent use of local food products. But overall, the benefits categories were organized very similarly for the two farm-to-restaurant networks, resulting in strong, common themes across the networks. With frequencies and counts supporting much of the analysis, the category of benefits coded as improved restaurant profitability was shared by the most participants and with the highest frequency in both networks. Participants in Networks A and B both described the improved profitability occurring due to farm-to-restaurant network participation as helping the restaurant to meet increased customer demand for local foods. A number of participants from both networks also said that the profitability of the restaurant was being enhanced because the local food use made the restaurant business more competitive and gave them superior and unique food products to incorporate into their menus.

*Improved producer profitability* and *staff and customer development* were also coded benefit categories that were brought up by many of the Network A and Network B participants, following improved restaurant profitability. *Improved producer profitability* was described most often in both networks using general statements about improved profitability or increased overall sales. Again for both farm-to-restaurant networks, *staff and customer development* was most often described in terms of educating both staff and customers about the local food options and the environment in which the foods were produced. When considering the grassroots sustainability innovations framework discussed in Chapter 2 (Seyfang and Smith 2007), these top three categories of benefits – improved restaurant profitability, improved producer profitability, and staff and customer development – indicate a more “simple” niche orientation for both of these farm-to-restaurant networks, as the benefits are directed towards the businesses within the network and those that directly interact with those businesses, making them more “intrinsic” in nature.
Examining the other three categories of benefit codes is when some small differences between the networks become apparent. While extra-network benefits were less frequently described than the first three categories discussed above, more Network A participants mentioned this type of benefit than did Network B participants. All participants described this area of benefits in a similar manner, by which they mostly talked about how their respective farm-to-restaurant network effects were related to a larger social movement around local foods or how participating in their network provided benefits to their local economy and community, beyond the benefits reaped by the businesses and participants inside the network. This benefit category is the most diffusion-related category of the six, as it describes benefits that were said to occur for those who were not necessarily a business or individual who belonged to the network. Therefore, the Network A participants could be said to have had a slightly more “strategic” orientation than the Network B participants, even though they were both more “simple” overall since the extra-network benefits were not mentioned as often as the ones that directly benefitted those directly involved in the farm-to-restaurant networks.

The same number of participants from each network also spoke about benefits that were categorized as flexible business relationship, in which they reflected on how they had gained from and enjoyed the relationships they had been able to form in the network – but this type of benefit was discussed with slightly greater frequency in Network B than Network A. Since this type of business relationship benefitted those within the network, it could be called intrinsic – and again, as just noted above, Network B was found to have a more “simple” orientation than Network A because they focused more on the benefits of their business relationships. Finally, while producer development was the least mentioned category of benefit in both networks, more participants from Network B shared this type of benefit than from Network A. This benefit is
also of a more “simple” nature, attributing even more “intrinsic” benefits to the Network B participants than Network A.

**Restaurant-based vs. Producer Participants**

As with the local definitions, there exist greater differences in the responses about network benefits between the restaurant and producer participants than there do between the farm-to-restaurant networks. The restaurant participants talked slightly more about the benefits than did the producers, but the producers shared a wider variety of benefits than did the restaurant participants. As might be expected, both research samples most heavily emphasized the benefits of participating in the farm-to-restaurant network that provided gains directly back to their businesses. Every restaurant participant shared ways in which their participation in the local food network increased the profitability of the restaurant, mostly through helping them to meet customer demand, making the business more competitive, and providing superior and unique foods for the menu. All but one producer also shared ways in which the restaurant businesses stood to benefit from participating in the network, emphasizing the same specific rewards shared by the restaurant participants.

All of the producers shared some benefits that were directly related to improving the profitability of their own businesses. Most of the producers described the benefits to their own businesses as bringing in additional revenue and diversifying their market outlets for increased business stability. Several of the restaurant participants also mentioned ways in which producers’ businesses stood to benefit from participating in the network, but their references were far fewer and less varied. The restaurant participants only made passing comments about supporting their local farmers and providing them income – focusing more on promoting the viability of the producers’ businesses, less than increasing their actual profitability. This discrepancy may be
explained by the restaurant participants knowing less about the details of their producers’ businesses, and therefore having less to say in regard to these benefits – even though the producers appeared to understand the restaurant side of the network well enough to provide restaurant-business benefits in similar enough number and type to the restaurant participants themselves. Overall, these benefits are largely “intrinsic” and show a heavy orientation towards a more “simple” innovation niche for both of the research samples – as was shown through the discussion of other studies who had identified similar benefits from similar research samples (Barham et al. 2005; Futamura 2007; Inwood et al. 2009).

Nearly all of the restaurant participants also shared a number of benefits that were coded under the category of *staff and customer development*. These participants mostly stressed the ways in which participating in a farm-to-restaurant network could educate staff and customers about food choices and preparation and their local area, as well as sharing knowledge with them about the local food producers so that they may know them and their operations better. The producers cited benefits that were also coded as *staff and customer development*, but these responses were only shared by eight of the twelve producer participants, and they focused only on the educational component around food. Only one producer had anything to say about how a staff member or customer would benefit from learning more about the local food producers themselves. Just like the restaurant participants were limited in the types of benefits that could help producers’ businesses, perhaps this is where the producers’ limited knowledge of the operation and/or reach of the restaurant operation shows. Or, since the staff and customer components of the network are further removed from the producers themselves, this is not an area they think of often. In terms of intrinsic and diffusion benefits, I would claim that the restaurant participants’ greater focus on staff and customer education is more “strategic” while
the producers are more “simple” in their orientation. While these benefits do affect those in the network, they are not necessarily directly affecting the profitability of the network’s businesses, so they may be considered diffusion as well as intrinsic benefits, depending upon the way it was described by the participant.

The way the restaurant and producer participants cited benefits that were coded into the other three categories follows that similar trend – in which the restaurant participants cited slightly more diffusion benefits than did the producers, who focused more on the intrinsic benefits of the network. Benefits that were coded as extra-network benefits were much more common among the restaurant participants than the producers. The restaurant participants talked about how their participation in the network was related to larger social change as well as the support of their local communities and economies – yet, only half of the producers made any references that were coded as extra-network benefits, and these mostly had to do with their relationship to the larger local foods movement. Benefits that were coded as flexible business relationship – an “intrinsic” benefit area – were also much more common among the producers than among the restaurant participants. Finally, producer development was one of the least mentioned category of benefits among both research samples, but it was more common among the producers than the restaurant participants – again, stressing that “intrinsic” or “simple” orientation. While restaurant participants’ responses about producer development were scattered, the producers mostly referred to how participation in the network boosted their pride and helped them form relationships with the consumers of their products, or other network participants.
Drawbacks of Network Participation

Network A vs. Network B

Like the definitions of *local* and the benefits to participation, drawbacks to participation were similar across the two farm-to-restaurant networks, as well. The two networks (with the perspectives of the respective restaurant and producer participants combined) identified various drawbacks to participating within a local food network. All drawbacks mentioned were those that affected the wellbeing of the participants’ own businesses (or places of employment). When considering the grassroots innovation framework, all discussion of drawbacks appeared to reinforce the more “simple” niche orientation of both farm-to-restaurant networks, as no mention was made of drawbacks for the greater agrifood system at large, nor for any community entities that existed outside of the network’s boundaries – even though these entities were sometimes mentioned when discussing benefits. This orientation towards a more “simple” grassroots innovation is similar to those that were included in Chapter 2’s discussion of drawbacks as well, in which those study samples may also be considered more “simple” than “strategic” in their perception of drawbacks (Gregoire and Strohbehn 2002; Gregoire et al. 2005.; Sharma et al. 2012).

Comparison of drawbacks across networks proved to be especially difficult because responses about drawbacks were very different between the restaurant and producer participants, causing the combined network results to be very scattered and inconsistent. This indicates that intra-network differences are more prominent in this study than cross-network differences. While this variation of drawbacks between the two study samples will be discussed further below, there are a few noteworthy discrepancies between the two network cases, as well. For example, drawbacks that were coded *lack of consistency* were the most mentioned type of drawback in
both networks. But more often mentioned in Network A than in Network B was also a lack of consistency on the restaurant’s part, wherein the restaurant was inconsistent in the way they placed orders, either by standards of communication or volume. A couple of Network B participants mentioned this drawback as well, but the difference in how the restaurants used the local products (with Restaurant B relying much more heavily on local products to meet their menu needs than Restaurant A), might explain this difference between the two networks.

The drawbacks categorized as *unaligned expectations* were the next most mentioned type of drawback for both network cases – but these types of drawbacks meant different things to each network, and differed in whose ‘expectations’ were not being met. Network A’s participants more frequently discussed how they thought *local* was misused or hijacked by other businesses, meaning they claimed to use local products but weren’t doing it in a way or at a level of commitment with which Network A’s participants agreed or respected. A number of Network A participants also discussed how misunderstandings or particular expectations among their customers about the local food products made participation in the farm-to-restaurant network more difficult. This could include customers’ dissatisfaction with lower quality local products or the higher price they had to pay for their meal. While these kinds of drawbacks were mentioned by a few of Network B’s participants, concerns about the use of *local* and dissatisfied customers were less prominent in Network B. Insight on these discrepancies may be explained by a few comments made by Restaurant B’s proprietor. The proprietor said that first, he was not worried about other people using the idea of *local* to promote their businesses because he thought Restaurant B was doing local sourcing at a level at which other restaurants in the area could not yet compete – and he welcomed the future competition as he thought it would only mean good things for local farmers and the economy. Second, he also explained that many of the customers
that came to the restaurant thoroughly understood local food products, and therefore knew what to expect, in regard to quality, type, and price.

As for costs incurred by the restaurant, both sets of network participants often identified the higher price of local foods to be a drawback to participation. But a good number of Network B participants also discussed the increased amount of time and effort that the restaurant staff had to invest in sourcing the local food products. This type of drawback was not mentioned by nearly as many participants or as often within Network A. As Restaurant B did use higher amount of local products more regularly, perhaps this increased the amount of time and effort that had to be spent on the process than it did in Network A, where they sourced fewer local products. The tasks associated with local sourcing also fell mostly to the executive chef at Restaurant B, whereas they were split between the executive and sous chefs at Restaurant A. As for economic burdens that fell on the producers, participants from both networks focused on increased time and effort that was spent by the producer to provide for the restaurants, as well as the costs of expansion that may be necessary to continue working in farm-to-restaurant networks.

*Restaurant-based vs. Producer Participants*

Great differences in the type, amount, and diversity of drawbacks recognized by participants existed between the restaurant and producer participants in this study, irrespective of network. Overall, the restaurant participants offered fewer and a smaller variety of drawbacks they had experienced while participating in a farm-to-restaurant network than did the producers. Both restaurant-based and producer participants were relatively content with their experience in their networks, but the restaurant participants more commonly expressed that there were nearly no drawbacks to being a part of the network or that the benefits outweighed any of the drawbacks they had experienced. The two restaurants chosen for this study had deliberately
decided to incorporate local foods into their menus, and they had been doing so (and promoting this practice) for a number of years when this study was done. The restaurants also both used broadline distributors from which they could source foods as needed, providing them a safeguard that made local sourcing more achievable, even if it was inconsistent at some times. On the other hand, many of the producers had only been working with restaurant customers for a few years, and they needed to distribute their sales across a number of different outlets in order to make their businesses viable. Many of the producers stressed that they in some way deliberately limited the amount of their sales they allowed to go to restaurants because they did not yet consider that market outlet to be fully reliable. The producers who had other sources of household income in addition to their food operation were, in general, less likely to stress the drawbacks of participating in a local food network, and a few even shared comments that indicated that the drawbacks they had experienced were negligible because they were not entirely relying on their product sales for income. Therefore, the amount of experience a business had with local sourcing and the risk that the business – either restaurant or producer – felt that they were taking by participating in the network seemed to influence the way they talked about network drawbacks.

As might be expected, restaurant participants mentioned many more drawbacks that were experienced by their own businesses than by the producers; and the reverse was true for the producer participants. Participants from both groups stressed the increased time and effort that was demanded by participating in a farm-to-restaurant network, from their respective positions within the network. Producers tended to mention cost-related drawbacks that they perceived a restaurant might experience from participating in a farm-to-restaurant network, focusing on the high price restaurants had to pay for local food products. However, restaurant-based participants
mentioned very few cost-related drawbacks for producers, despite producers recognizing a
number of their own.

This discrepancy may be explained by another type of drawback that was brought up by
the producers – but not mentioned at all by any of the restaurant participants. Categorized under unaligned expectations, a number of producers indicated that they thought restaurants didn’t have much knowledge or understanding about how local food producing or farming worked – and therefore had unrealistic expectations or misunderstandings about what the local food providers could deliver. This lack of knowledge about the producers’ operations could have also influenced the way restaurant participants thought about drawbacks, and the fact that they did not list any that affected the producers’ costs. Both restaurant proprietors, and a few of the chefs, had also indicated that the local food producers had had to learn more about restaurant operations over time in order to be successful business partners, which may account for why the restaurant participants made no mention of any drawbacks that would have indicated that producers did not know or understand enough about the restaurants’ operations.

The drawback category of lack of consistency was the second most mentioned area of drawbacks shared by both the restaurant and producer participants, but the ways in which they described lack of consistency differed greatly. Restaurant participants focused much more on the ways in which they thought producers were inconsistent, sharing drawbacks about the seasonality and type of produce available to them, and the service and delivery the producers provided to the restaurant. Producers, on the other hand, shared a number of ways in which the restaurants were inconsistent, including the ways in which they placed orders, how much (or how often) they ordered products, and turnover of restaurant chefs – none of which were mentioned by any of the restaurant participants. In contrast, the producers also recognized a number of ways
in which they knew they – or other local food producers – were inconsistent (eg. product quality, delivery), and how that may have negatively affected the restaurants’ business. As mentioned above, the proprietors had indicated that local food producers had become more aware of how restaurants operated and the specific demands and standards they had to meet if they wanted to continue doing business with restaurants. In this way, it appears that producers did become aware of how the way they did business might negatively impact their relationship with a restaurant, and many of the producers shared ways in which they had alleviated these drawbacks by making adjustments within their own operations.

While the concerns of the restaurant and producer participants’ drawbacks did indicate a more “simple” niche orientation overall, the fact that producers were also very aware of the drawbacks experienced by the restaurant businesses in addition to their own may indicate that the producer participants were more willing to consider the negative impacts of participation beyond their own experiences. Yet, this concern may have arisen out of the producers’ desires to increase their business with restaurant partners, therefore making their intent to learn more about how restaurants operated and experienced local food networks more about their own business interests, which would be more “simply” than “strategically” oriented.
CHAPTER 7
Conclusion

This final chapter provides a brief summary and discussion of this research study’s key findings. In order to better understand what conclusions and suggestions may be drawn from the research, the first part of this chapter will also be organized according to the initial research questions: (1) How do these farm-to-restaurant networks operate, and how are tasks shared among the participants? (2) How do these participants define the concept of local? (3) What are the benefits and drawbacks that are experienced or perceived by the farm-to-restaurant network participants? These key findings will be compared to those found in the literature and frameworks discussed in Chapter 2. It was found that the participants definitions of local were relatively similar to those shared by participants in other studies, centering mostly on geographical and values proximities. Also, it was determined that the network participants were overall more “simply” oriented, in terms of grassroots sustainability innovations, which is similar to the results of similar studies on restaurants, but deviates somewhat from similar studies on local food producers. Next, the potential limitations of the research study will be discussed, focusing on research methods and researcher position. Finally, this chapter will also discuss the implications of this research, for practice, theory, and policy, as well as suggestions for future areas of research.

Key Findings

Farm-to-Restaurant Network Operation

While some general insight was provided on the US restaurant industry in the literature review of Chapter 2, the operation of farm-to-restaurant networks has been discussed less in the literature. Therefore, this study helps to address that gap by examining the details of these
networks’ operations. Both farm-to-restaurant networks were found to function relatively similarly, employing six main steps to bring the food products from their point of consumption to the customer’s restaurant table: initiation of relationship between the producer and the restaurant; production and processing of the local food products; communication of the order from the restaurant to the producer; delivery of the products to the restaurant; preparation of the products and transference of staff knowledge for meals; presentation of the meal to customers. The majority of these responsibilities were split between the local food producers and the restaurant chefs, even if it had been the original intention of the restaurant proprietor to initiate the farm-to-restaurant network. As a number of study participants noted, the interests of the restaurant proprietor were really the most important determinants as to whether a farm-to-restaurant network would or would not initially form or succeed. These individuals are the driving force behind restaurant decisions, even if they do not carry out the full plan.

It was found that the relationships between the restaurants and the producers occurred through two main methods: through past relationships and sales pitches performed at the restaurant by the interested producer. Reputation of business also played an important role both in whether a restaurant decided to work with a producer, and vice versa. While the proprietors and chefs played a small role, the formation of these business relationships was mostly left to the knowledge and the abilities of the producers, as it was their former relationships and their sales know-how that made the difference in whether a producer gets a restaurant account or not. This situation potentially closes the farm-to-restaurant networks to producers who do not have the relationships or skills to initially form these partnerships. The amount of risk one is taking by participating in a farm-to-restaurant network also influences how much effort is put into forming these relationships, with the restaurants being more particular in how they choose to work with
local producers – a comfort allowed for them by having the fallback of their more conventional ordering channels. The producers who were less reliant on restaurant sales to keep their businesses viable were also more likely to be particular and less proactive in the identification of restaurant partners.

In addition to initiation of the relationship, the delivery of the products, and the steps that were needed to process the product so it met the restaurants’ standards and expectations, were the sole responsibilities of the producers. As a few of the producers expressed, this was the way the network worked because it was most similar to the conventional system with which the restaurant staff were already familiar. Communications about food orders were carried out in a similar manner, in that the producers were either flexible in their means of receiving orders or went as far as to create systems that were again very similar to the broadline distributors’ methods for ordering. Ordering responsibilities were split between the producers and chefs, with both taking the extra time and effort it required to make the relationship work. Even though Restaurant A had a professional buyer on staff, it was the executive and sous chefs that made sure the producers received their orders as needed.

The chefs were also the ones in charge of the local-food related tasks once the product reached the restaurant. It was on their shoulders to figure out the best ways to incorporate the local food products into their standard and special menus, as well as how to best educate staff and customers about the use of the foods. While other staff members played a role in figuring out methods of promotion and education, it was ultimately up to the chefs’ time and abilities to decide how the restaurant will present the local food products. As shown by my own observations at the restaurant, as well as through some of the staff interviews, when there were
questions on the floor about the local food products, staff could only go so far in answering those questions before turning to the chefs for further support.

Defining Local

In conclusion and matching other research, local was still found to be a very amorphous term, one that varied with a participant’s position within the farm-to-restaurant network and their experiences and goals in regard to local foods. As predicted by Eriksen’s (2013) taxonomy of local, definitions were largely described in terms of geographical proximity. In regard to the producers’ geographical descriptions, the reaches of local also greatly depended upon the types of locations of their market outlets – which could have been a 30 mile radius or all of the United States. Where their product sold was what was local to them; restrictions on distance were made due to convenience, not because they thought they were stepping over local boundaries. As suggested by Abatekassa and Peterson (2008), size of the business did affect how local was defined – a fact that was true for both restaurants and producers’ operations. The larger the business, the further their boundaries of local extended.

Eriksen’s (2013) second domain of local, relational propinquity, was not as pronounced in this study’s participants’ descriptions of local, and it often took some prompting during the interview in order to discuss how social relationships may be related to ideas about local. In contrast to the suggestions of Eriksen, geographical proximity measures were often combined or outweighed by different values that participants attributed to local. In addition to values also found by Barham et al. (2005) and Inwood et al. (2009), the restaurant participants also described local using the products they created in-house, such as restaurant-grown vegetables/herbs, freshly baked bread, or beers from their in-house brewery operations, showing that local to these participants was not just about what could be sourced from the producers, but also the food areas
in which the restaurants could be more self-sufficient. Like in the studies by Selfa and Qazi (2005) and Ostrom (2006), values of local were not as prevalent in the producers’ descriptions of local, as they focused more on the geographical delineations instead.

Overall, those participants who had greater experience with local foods or with local food network participation provided more thorough and/or precise definitions of local. But no matter what descriptions they provided, a number of participants suggested that local was a very difficult term to define, often taking their time to provide an answer or admitting that it was their own personal interpretation, and that others probably thought differently. While the producers’ ideas about local were largely dependent on their business and market outlets, nearly all restaurant participants indicated that their experiences at the restaurant had positively shaped the ways in which they understood and/or interacted with local foods. This speaks to the impact that staff education, both deliberate and unintentional, may actually have on staff members, supporting this idea as a benefit, but also enforcing it as an important area of action.

*Simple or Strategic Niche: Benefits and Drawbacks*

As grassroots sustainability innovations, the two farm-to-restaurant networks were found to be more “simple” niches than “strategic” as they focused more on the benefits and drawbacks that affected those businesses and individuals that were a part of their own network, and not those that were deliberately looking to cause a shift in the dominant agri-food regime (Seyfang and Smith 2007; Kirwan et al. 2013). The restaurant participants had a greater tendency than the producers to talk about the ways the farm-to-restaurant network affected both the community/economy that existed outside of the network, as well as the larger food system, perhaps making them more strategically-niche minded than the producers. This both supports and contrasts with discussions in other studies that examined motivations, benefits, and
drawbacks in Chapter 2, where consumers’ ideas of benefits and motivations were more
diffusion and strategic, intermediaries were more intrinsic and simple, and producers were fairly
mixed between the two.

In this study, the restaurant participants both represented the restaurant business
intermediaries, but participants like floor staff members may be considered more closely related
to consumers, as that’s who they interact with more closely, and not as much with the actual
business workings of the restaurant. Because this sample was not just restaurant owners or
executive chefs, I think the perceptions of the restaurant, while still fairly “simple,” had a slight
“strategic” spin. This is also reflected in the proprietors’ initial intentions for sourcing local
foods, which were a mix of supporting their own restaurant businesses, but also contributing to
national trends about food system change and benefitting their wider communities. These
original motivations also contain a mix of intrinsic and diffusion benefits.

Both restaurant and producer participants shared many comments about how their first
priority was to keep their businesses afloat, a challenge for any one in the current unstable
economic climate. I believe this contributed to the restaurant and producer participants’ tendency
to focus more on the intrinsic side of the networks, rather than the diffusion. Since we were
talking about their participation in farm-to-restaurant networks in particular, perhaps the
producers were thinking more in terms of how this choice had affected their business, as it was
not a huge market outlet for many of the producers, and often just served as a supplement to
other outlets or other forms of household income. Maybe responses would have been different if
our conversations had been more about local food networks in general or focused on their more
popular market outlets, like farmers’ markets, for which their motivations, benefits, and
drawbacks could have been different due to the larger share of money and time spent at these outlets.

It should also be noted that the type of sustainability these grassroots innovations may be aiming to achieve (either simply or strategically), was more in the realm of social and economic sustainability. Environmental or ecological sustainability was mentioned only a few times across all participant interviews, and was not present in any of the restaurant documents, minus maybe a few asides about appreciating the environmental surroundings of the restaurants through the diversity of local foods. Instead, these participants more so described social and economic aspects of sustainability through their comments about supporting rural and farmer livelihoods, as well as the restaurant as locally- and independently-owned businesses. When diffusion or extra-network benefits were mentioned, the comments were more about supporting the local community and economy and pushing the agrifood system to provide healthier and more whole food options, as perceived by the participants. Only a few participants even defined local with environmental values, which was more common in other studies on local food networks (Barham et al. 2005; Selfa and Qazi 2005).

**Study Limitations**

Some potential limitations of this study are methodological, due largely to time and resource constraints. While the diversity of the research sample, including members from different stations in the restaurants and producers of various backgrounds and operations, provided a broad view of the farm-to-restaurant networks, it led to a wide array of differing opinions and limited the amount of generalization that could be made about the restaurant or producer samples. Though the analysis did rely upon somewhat generalized frequencies and counts, diversity still abounded. For example, proprietors, chefs, and servers all answered
interview questions differently due to their different experiences and responsibilities at the restaurant – but the sample sizes were so small that no generalized statements could be made about the opinions of the sample at any of those respective positions. While generalization is not the ultimate goal of this study, this diversity among the research sample still made drawing conclusions more complicated. Customers were also excluded from this study, yet their views could have provided further insight on the experience and operation of the farm-to-restaurant network at the consumption end.

Sampling also posed a potential limitation. While purposive sampling techniques are an acceptable and common way of identifying participants for a qualitative research study (Creswell 2013), I chose to focus on participants that deliberately source and sell local foods and who are currently engaged in business relationships with their restaurant partners. This may have limited their willingness to talk about the drawbacks they had experienced. For example, one of the vegetable producers had used to work with both restaurants, but their account had been recently dropped by Restaurant B. This producer spoke more freely about the former relationship he had with Restaurant B, both the benefits and drawbacks, because the pressure of maintaining a business relationship had been eased for the time being.

Another potential limitation for this study was my own position as a backyard researcher. While my position did aid my access and rapport with some study participants, it may have also made others more wary and caused the participants to alter their responses to my interview questions. For example, sometimes incomplete responses were given to interview questions because the participant indicated that I “knew what they were talking about” or provided personal details that I understood as a local, but would not fully translate to a research finding without a fuller explanation of the background situation. It is impossible to know exactly
how my prior relationships with some of the participants or the disclosure of my own local food interests influenced the participants’ responses. The “insider” part of my researcher position may have somewhat accounted for the overwhelmingly rosy picture painted by some participants during their interviews, but it is also possible their responses were genuine.

**Implications for Practice, Theory, and Policy**

While the findings of this study indicate that network participants perceive a number of benefits from participating in farm-to-restaurant networks, there are also a number of ways in which they may be falling short. Scaling up and scaling out is how grassroots sustainability innovations may hope to create change, both locally and at larger scales (Seyfang and Smith 2007), but these innovations will not necessarily achieve those goals if they still produce challenges that negate the potential benefits. In particular, many of the study participants had identified education of staff and customers about local foods and the surrounding landscape as a benefit to participating in a farm-to-restaurant network – yet, one of the drawbacks cited by a number of producers was the restaurant staff’s lack of understanding about their operations. If the restaurants want to be a greater influence in educating staff and customers, perhaps there is more to be learned in order to be more effective educators.

Many different methods were discussed during the course of the interviews, such as developing additional materials, like maps and more menu language about the local foods, local food production site visits, and local food education and awareness events, like the Meet the Maker nights Restaurant A was in the process of establishing. Facilitating more communication between the restaurant and producer network participants may help to meet these needs, and alleviate other drawbacks cited by the participants, like their concerns about inconsistency and unaligned expectations. Some of the producers remarked on the role of other parties in the farm-
to-restaurant network, like cooperative extension, the state’s sustainable agriculture association, and food cooperatives, for making initial introductions to new restaurant partners. Perhaps entities like these could expand their role in aiding farm-to-restaurant network participants by facilitating the necessary discussions between restaurants and producers, as well as provide training on skills and other resources that would help to alleviate other costs and drawbacks within the networks. A few of the producers who discussed relevant workshops hosted by cooperative extension and the state’s sustainable agriculture association indicated their interest in such educational outlets, but said they didn’t participate due to limited time and monetary resources and a concern that the workshop may not be relevant for their type or size of production. In potentially expanding outlets like this, such feedback from the producers should be taken into account.

In regard to theory, the application of the grassroots innovation framework helped to display how combining both agrifood systems research and sustainability transitions literature may help to benefit and develop both areas of study. This approach allowed for a closer dissection of the experiences and motivations of the farm-to-restaurant network participants, and a better understanding of their intentions for change. There is agrifood literature that brings into question the ability of local food networks to create shifts towards greater sustainability in the dominant agrifood regime (Allen 2004; Dupuis and Goodman 2005; Harrison 2008; Mariola 2008; Winter 2003). But to understand farm-to-restaurant networks as simple innovation niches, ones that intentionally seek change at the local level, and not necessarily strategic ones that would intentionally be seeking change at the regime level, affects the ways in which we evaluate and make conclusions about these local food networks. If the original intention of these networks never was to create regime-level shifts, then should they be criticized for not doing so? Instead,
we should be examining the areas in which they are hoping and claiming to create change, such as within the network and their local, respective communities.

This application of sustainability transitions literature was also an exercise that pointed out potential ways in which this literature is helpful for agrifood system studies, but also the ways in which it falls short and needs further development. While ideas of grassroots sustainability innovations were applied in this study, this area of literature may need further definition and expansion to be a full framework of analysis. While the concepts of simple and strategic niches may be defined in the grassroots innovation literature, there is a lack of specifics on how to identify them. The analysis portion of this study raised a number of questions about this conceptual framework. For example, how does one determine whether a benefit is truly intrinsic or diffuse – and does it have to be either/or? Can an actor’s particular motivation exhibit elements of both at once? Must the enactment of intrinsic or diffuse benefits be purposive, or do unintended benefits also count? And at what level should the benefits be assessed? This evaluation deemed intrinsic benefits to be those that benefited the business under consideration, as well as its immediate community – but perhaps there is a better way to make this distinction (Seyfang and Smith 2007). With further elaboration, the concepts of simple and strategic niches can potentially contribute to the field of agrifood systems studies. But until then, their utility is limited.

As for policy implications, both the network operation experiences and definitions of local prove to be insightful. In regard to the latter, the United States Congress and Department of Agriculture (USDA) are currently attempting to establish policy in which the definition of local plays an important role. With the development of new food safety legislation in the works, a point of concern is the exemptions that may or may not be granted to producers who are smaller
in scale or sell their products in local or regional markets. As these producers are usually smaller in scale and therefore don’t necessarily have the money to make the required adjustments to meet the new food safety regulations, the USDA and its researchers have been trying to find a way of describing local sales. As such, Congress has recently called for an updated report from the USDA on the use and practice of local food systems, set to come out in late 2014 in order to inform their policy decisions (Low 2014). Studies such as this one that take a closer look at local food networks and how their participants define local will hopefully set the foundation for added insights that this report will contain.

**Areas for Future Research**

This study has raised a few issues that point to areas for future investigation, many of which were derived directly from the limitations of this study. This was a relatively small study that took place in a region where resources for agriculture are relatively abundant and interest in local foods is growing and supported by strong networks of interested groups and individuals. Performing similar studies, ones that examine farm-to-restaurant networks as well as participants’ perceptions of local and the benefits/drawbacks of participating in these networks, in areas with different characteristics could provide important points of comparison or further insight for the conclusions proposed in this study. While the farm-to-restaurant networks in this study were relatively well-established, they were still fairly young, having only been around for five to twelve years at most. Examination of networks that have been in operation for much longer – or much less time – or in places where local food products are more – or less – abundant would provide an interesting view on the function and intentions of this type of local food network.
Participants in these networks also deliberately chose to participate, and all but one viewed their experience in an overall positive frame. Research to gain insight on why specific restaurants and producers may choose not to participate in farm-to-restaurant networks could provide further clues to the drawbacks or shortcomings of these networks, and the ways in which they must be improved if they are meant to scale up and out, like other sustainability innovation niches. Finding those businesses that previously participated in farm-to-restaurant networks, but no longer do, could also provide instructive insight on how to improve operation and experience of belonging to these networks. And while there is much agrifood systems literature already examining the motivations and experiences of consumers in local food networks, expanding this literature by including restaurant patrons – both those that deliberately seek out local foods at restaurants and those that don’t – could help to understand the fuller impacts of these farm-to-restaurant systems. Including other parties that have information on and experiences with farm-to-restaurant networks, like cooperative extension, sustainable agriculture associations, cooperatives, and food hubs could also provide shed light on the real significance of the benefits and drawbacks, (and the methods of their promotion or alleviation, respectively) for these particular local food networks.

Finally, if we are to understand the greater implications for bringing together agrifood systems research and the frameworks of sustainability transitions and grassroots innovations, future studies should explore how these two fields both support and impede one another. While these is certainly future promise (Hinrichs 2014), we will not know the extent to which these areas of inquiry are complementary until we invest time in examining how other civic agriculture or local food activities fit into the sustainability transitions and grassroots innovations frameworks. This framework could be applied to studies involving different actors and local food
activities, like at farmers’ markets or community gardens, not only to assess these actors’ orientations towards food systems change, but also how this framework may or may not fit into other alternative agrifood scholarship.

Conclusion

This study examined the ways in which two farm-to-restaurant networks operated, taking a close look at the ways in which participants defined, practiced, and experienced local foods. By applying frameworks provided by other agrifood system and sustainability scholars, it was found that local, while largely understood as geographic in nature, is still a fairly amorphous term. Its definition is greatly affected by the values and experiences of the person who is being asked the describe it. By considering these farm-to-restaurant networks as grassroots sustainability innovations, this study also probed the intentions and goals of the network participants, showing that while there may be some action towards creating larger agrifood system change, the goals of actors in these two networks are more locally-focused, centered more on accruing sustainability benefits within their own business and communities. The findings and analysis of this study offer a number of implications and areas for future study that can to further our understanding of both local food network operation and the ways such networks conceptualize and initiate change.
REFERENCES


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Restaurant Proprietor Interview Protocol

1. How did you start your business?

2. How do you define local for your business?
   a. How do you share this definition with your employees? Your customers?
   b. How has your use of local foods changed over time?

3. How did you choose your local producers?

4. How does the food come from farm to restaurant?

5. Do you hold any formal contacts with the local food producers?

6. How do you communicate with your producers?
   a. Do you provide any specific feedback about the products to the producers?

7. Why have you chosen to source locally?
   a. How does your business benefit from this choice?
   b. What drawbacks have you experienced?

8. How has sourcing locally affected the profitability of your business?

9. In your experience, to what degree are your customers interested in local foods?

10. How do you see the community for this restaurant?
    a. How does being a local-foods restaurant impact your role within your community?

11. Which staff member(s) do you recommend speaking to about their experience here at the restaurant?

12. When would be a good time to do an in-house observation?

13. May I revisit you for a follow-up interview?

14. Obtain list of local suppliers, complete with contact information.
Restaurant Staff Interview Protocol

1. What is your position at the restaurant?
   a. How long have you worked here?
   b. How does this establishment compare to other food service experiences you may have had?
   c. How did you come to work at this restaurant?

2. How do you define local foods?
   a. How has working at this restaurant affected your definition of local?

3. What are the benefits of sourcing local food products? The drawbacks?

4. Does the use of local foods affect your job duties in any way?

5. In your experience, how interested are the customers in the use of local foods?

6. How does the use of local foods make this restaurant different from those that don’t deliberately use local foods?

7. How do you see the community for this restaurant?

8. What have you observed in terms of restaurant-community interactions?
Producer Interview Protocol

1. How did you start your farm?
   a. What is your position/responsibilities at the farm?

2. How do you define local in your business?
   a. How much of your product stays local?

3. Have you always marketed to restaurants?
   a. How would you describe these relationships?
   b. How have these relationships changed over time?

4. How many restaurants do you source to?
   a. Do you have any formal contracts with these restaurants?

5. How did you connect with these restaurants?

6. How do you communicate with the restaurants?
   a. Do you provide any feedback on the use or promotion of your products?

7. How is the food transported from the farm to the restaurants?
   a. Has anyone from the restaurant ever visited your farm?

8. What specific product requests are made by the restaurants?

9. What motivates you to work with restaurants? Benefits?
   a. What, if any, drawbacks have you experienced in selling your products to restaurants?

10. How do these relationships affect the profitability of your farm?

11. Have you ever participated in any education or training events about working with restaurants? (eg. extension)
APPENDIX B
POST-INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRES

Restaurant Questionnaire

1. What is your year of establishment?

2. What is your seating capacity?

3. What is your current number of employees? (#)
   o Front of house:
   o Back of house:

4. How would you classify your restaurant? (eg. casual dining, fine dining, pub, café, bistro, etc.)

5. How would you describe your restaurant’s style of cuisine?

6. How many farms do you source from locally? (#)

7. Who in your restaurant picks the foods to be sourced locally?

8. How much of the food used in your restaurant is sourced locally? (%)

9. Please select which foods you source from local farms:
   o Vegetables
   o Fruit
   o Dairy
   o Meat
   o Eggs
   o Honey
   o Grains
   o Other: _______________________________

10. Who is your broadline distributor?
Producer Questionnaire

1. How many years have you been farming?

2. Total farm acres (owned and rented)?

3. Of your total acres, how many are in vegetable, fruit, and grain production (if relevant)?
   Or are in grazing (if relevant)?

4. Herd size (if relevant)?

5. Is your farm Certified Organic?

6. Other than yourself, how many people worked for pay on your farm during the 2013 calendar year?

7. How many people worked unpaid on your farm during the 2013?

8. Approximately what percentage of your farm’s total sales come from the following products?
   - Vegetables:
   - Small fruits and berries:
   - Orchard fruit:
   - Grains:
   - Livestock or dairy:
   - Poultry or eggs:
   - Value-added products (baked goods, nursery products, wool, honey, etc.):
   - Other: _______________________________

9. Approximately what percentage of your farm’s total sales are made through which market outlets?
   - Farmers’ Market:
   - On-farm Stand:
   - Community-Supported Agriculture:
   - Growers’ Cooperative:
   - Restaurants:
   - Other: _______________________________

10. Which category most closely captures your gross annual farm sales for 2013:
    - Less than $1000
    - $1,000-$9,999
    - $10,000-$24,999
    - $25,000-$49,999
    - $50,000-$99,999
    - $100,000-$249,999
    - $250,000-$499,999
11. Approximately what percentage of your total household income in 2013 came from the farm?

12. Do you or any other adult in your household have any paid non-farm jobs?
APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: The Operation and Experience of Sourcing Locally-Grown Foods for Central Pennsylvania Restaurants
Principal Investigator: Elyzabeth Engle (Graduate Student)
307 Armsby, The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA 16802
1-814-404-8947; ewe5019@psu.edu
Advisor: Dr. Clare Hinrichs
112-F Armsby Building, The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA USA 16802
1-814-863-8628

1. **Purposes of this study.** The main purposes of this study include exploring how the term “local” is defined within the Central Pennsylvania farm-to-restaurant context; how farmers and restaurant personnel work together to build and maintain local-foods supply chains; and why restaurants and farms establish these business relationships. You were selected because you either own or work at a local-foods restaurant or because you operate a farm that supplies food to one or more of these restaurants.

2. **What is involved.** If you agree to take part in this research, you will participate in an interview for 30-90 minutes, depending on your position in the local-foods network. During the interview, you will be asked details about your business; how the term ‘local’ is used and defined within your business; your experience within the farm-to-restaurant network; and why you chose to participate in this local-foods network. The interview will be audio recorded. The recordings will be locked in a filing cabinet in the researcher’s office and stored digitally on a password protected computer. Only the Principal Investigator and her advisor will have access to them. The recordings will be destroyed within two years from the time the interview takes place.

   Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. It is not expected that you will have any discomfort from participating. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. The information you provide will be used to prepare written materials intended to assist academics and practitioners who study, participate in, and promote institutional sourcing of locally-grown foods.

3. **Confidentiality.** Your participation in this research is confidential. We will use a code number and not your name to identify your participation in the interview. Only the Principal Investigator can match names with code numbers. If quotes are used in reports they will be reported using types of positions (e.g., “a farmer said…”) that will not be identifying of any individual. No information about you specifically will be released. The information you provide will only be used for research and preparation of publications and educational materials. Entire transcripts will be confidential. The only exception is if we think that you or another person, including a child, is in danger.

4. **Contact information.** Please contact Elyzabeth Engle at (814) 404-8947 or ewe5019@psu.edu with questions, complaints, or concerns about this research study. You may also contact Dr. Clare Hinrichs at (814) 863-8628.
You must be 18 years of age or older. If you agree to take part in this research study, please sign your name and indicate the date below. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

_________________________  ____________________________
Date                                    Participant Signature

_________________________  ____________________________
Date                                    Signature of Person Obtaining Consent