THE RECONFIGURATION OF PRODUCER-CONSUMER RELATIONS WITHIN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES IN THE UK AGRO-FOOD SYSTEM: THE CASE OF FARMERS' MARKETS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the UK agro-food system, and in particular the emergence of 'alternative strategies' ('AS') that seek to overcome, or at least circumvent, some of the problems associated with the globalised and industrialised practices on which it is based. Underlying the emergence of these 'AS' is the intention to reconnect the processes of food production and consumption in various ways, and to reconfigure the relationship between producers and consumers. Commercial imperatives remain important within 'AS', but they are overlain with social, cultural and ethical constructs that can significantly influence the motives of those involved, as illustrated by Fair Trade produce which seeks to introduce a sense of equity within the exchange process. This research focuses on the relationship between producers and consumers within the context of Farmers' Markets (FMs). FMs have been used as the portal for this purpose because they are considered to be an exemplar of how producer-consumer relations are being reconfigured within a concrete exchange context. FMs aim to re-locate production within specific localities and specific personal relationships, in an attempt to facilitate produce traceability and give food a sense of identity. In order to examine these emerging relationships, data were drawn from a questionnaire survey of FM managers across the UK, semi-structured interviews with producers and focus group discussions with consumers at five FMs in England. In the first instance the data were interpreted through the notion of 'embeddedness', which established that the exchange process at FMs is modified by social interaction within a localised setting. As this did not permit an explanation of aspects of the relationship that were clearly of value to the participants, but extraneous to their commercial evaluations, the data were also analysed within the notion of 'regard', which established that there were additional benefits to the producers and consumers at FMs, intrinsic to the human-level interaction between them. For example, producers sometimes felt personally valued for the effort they make to produce high-quality food produce. On this basis, it was possible to establish what distinguishes FMs as a retail outlet, in terms of how the producers and consumers relate to each other and to the produce available. In order to better understand the significance of these results within the wider agro-food system, they were subsequently assessed within Conventions Theory (CT). CT is based upon a number of conventions, of which the 'civic' and 'domestic' conventions are of particular relevance in this instance as they

are concerned, respectively, with the general societal benefits of a product, and the development of trust in a product on the basis of attachments to specific places or people. The concept of conventions enables an understanding of how the participants at a FM define the quality of the products to be exchanged between them. However, CT does not specifically address the benefits of regard and so this thesis proposes that a *regard* convention should be considered, which can specifically incorporate this aspect of quality evaluation. Each of the conventions of quality identified for FMs is the subject of ongoing negotiation, and the concept of a *bubble of FM alterity* is suggested as a means of understanding the durability of FMs as an 'AS', before their underlying integrity is breached and they cease to have a distinctive identity. In this context, the term bubble is used to convey flexibility and elasticity, whereas alterity means 'otherness' which implies an intention to produce change within the agro-food system.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AEM	Agri-Environmental Measures
ANT	Actor-Network Theory
AS	Alternative Strategies
BSE	Bovine Spongiform Encephalophy
CA	Countryside Agency
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CSA	Community Supported Agriculture
CT	Conventions Theory
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DETR	Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
EHO	Environmental Health Officer
ERDP	England Rural Development Programme
EU	European Union
FABBL	Farm Assured British Beef and Lamb
FG	Focus Group
FM	Farmers' Market
FMMS	Farmers' Market Manager Survey
FOE	Friends of the Earth
FRCA	Farming and Rural Conservation Agency
HACCP	Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points
LETS	Local Exchange and Trading Systems
LFM	London Farmers' Markets
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
NAFM	National Association of Farmers' Markets
NFU	National Farmers Union
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PDO	Protected Designation of Origin
PGI	Protected Geographical Indication
QAS	Quality assurance schemes
RDP	Rural Development Programme
SFPs	Speciality Food Products
SFSC	Short Food Supply Chain
TNC	Trans-national corporation
TSO	Trading Standards Officer
UK	United Kingdom
WFM	Wiltshire Farmers' Markets
WI	Women's Institute
WTO	World Trade Organisation
WoP	World of Production

Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Throughout human history, most food has been consumed within the social, economic, environmental and geographical context of its production. However, as trade in food has grown (gradually at first) these connections have become increasingly tenuous. This tendency was given particular impetus by the demands of a rapidly industrialising UK (and Europe generally) in the 19th century, and more recently by the processes of globalisation in the latter half of the 20th century (Atkins and Bowler, 2001). The rationale for the development of this globalised[1] industrial agro-food system[2] has been a cheap and plentiful supply of food[3]. However, this has often led to food travelling hundreds of miles between its production and its consumption, whereby the "specificities of production and consumption...[and] the true social and environmental costs [associated with these processes] are occluded by the very globalised and generic nature of the industrial food system" (Marsden *et al.* 1999: 297-298; Bernstein *et al.* 1990). Largely as a result of this disconnection, a diverse set of tensions, demands and concerns over the last two decades are now starting to reshape the agro-food system and rural areas within the UK. These include increasing pressures within agricultural policy, consumer concerns about the origin and safety of the food they eat, and the marginalisation of many rural economies.

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[1] Some authors suggest that the term transnationalised is more appropriate than globalised, in that in reality most of the trade is controlled from within the developed world, rather than through truly global cooperation. Nevertheless, the term globalised is used by most authors (and in this thesis) to denote the global sourcing of raw materials, global finance, and the actions of deterritorialised transnational corporations (TNCs) (Atkins and Bowler, 2001).
[2] The agro-food system is defined by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as "the set of activities and relationships that interact to determine what, how much, by what method and for whom food is produced and distributed" (quoted in Whatmore 1995: 37).
[3] It is acknowledged that the impact of globalised processes is highly variable, and that most food is still consumed within its country of production. For example, only 6.8% of crops were internationally traded in 1998 (Atkins and Bowler, 2001). However, within a UK context, over 30% of its overall food needs were imported in 2000, and nearly £9 billion worth of food exported (DEFRA, 2002b). In addition, over 95% of consumers do the majority of their food shopping at supermarkets, which are inextricably linked to the globalised agro-food system (DEFRA, 2002a).

The processes of globalisation have tended to been seen as ineluctable, but more recently there has been a growing realisation that there is the potential for 'alternative strategies' ('AS') to develop, which can overcome, or at least circumvent, some of the problems associated with the globalised industrialised agro-food system (or 'conventional' agro-food system)[4] (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997). These 'AS' are still likely to be based on commercial imperatives, but may also incorporate a broader range of exchange logics than simply profit maximisation. Underpinning these 'AS', is the reconnection of the consumption of food with the social, cultural and environmental context of its production. This not only allows consumers to make more individualised decisions about the food they are buying, but also enables those producers and areas marginalised within the globalised system to access a market for their produce in which they have a comparative advantage.

As a result, 'AS' are being accorded greater significance by both academics and policy-makers. For example, the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food[5] in its report *Farming and Food: a Sustainable Future*[6] (DEFRA 2002a: 6), stressed the importance of reconnecting the various elements of the food chain, and that "the real reason why the present situation is so dysfunctional is that farming has become detached from the rest of the economy and the environment". The report also recognised that producers should capture a larger share of the retail value of food by:

> "Build[ing] on the public's enthusiasm for locally-produced food, or food with a clear regional provenance...In discussing this area, [they] draw a distinction between local food - which comes from near the purchaser - and what [they] have called 'locality food', which comes from farther afield but has a strong sense of provenance" (DEFRA 2002a: 43).

Within the academic literature there has been an implication that somehow these 'AS' result in discrete entities, which occupy 'the interstices' of globalised food networks (e.g. Whatmore 1995). However, whilst this analogy may be useful in abstract terms, the concrete reality appears to be much more complex, as 'AS' tortuously engage with the 'conventional' agro-food system. There is a need to provide a framework for

[4] In this context, the term 'conventional' is being used as a shorthand for the globalised, industrialised agro-food system, to simplify its distinction from emerging 'AS'.
[5] The Commission on the Future of Farming and Food was set up to advise the Government on how to create a sustainable, competitive and diverse farming and food sector.
[6] Known as the Curry Report, named after the Chairman of the Policy Commission, Sir Donald Curry.

understanding these emerging 'alternative geographies of production' (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997), which Murdoch *et al.* (2000) suggest can be achieved through an analysis of changing perceptions of quality. Quality within 'conventional' agro-food systems revolves around notions of efficiency and cost, whereas within emerging 'AS' it is based less on efficiency and cost, and more on linking products to particular places and means of production (Murdoch and Miele, 1999). Effectively, there has been an attempt to reconnect the production and consumption of food through processes of embedding, or embeddedness.

The notion of embeddedness is central to this thesis, and concerns situating the production and consumption of food within particular relationships. This may be through making direct linkages to the locality of production (local embeddedness), or through social connections in the exchange process (social embeddedness). The term re-embedding is frequently used in the literature to denote the purposive action of re-incorporating these elements within transactions (e.g. Raynolds (2000), or Thorne (1996)). However, embeddedness within the agro-food system requires critical examination, in that it is variously incorporated, and sometimes appropriated (Goodman 2000; Murdoch *et al.* 2000). This thesis develops a conceptualisation of the utilisation of embeddedness within the agro-food system in Chapter Three.

1.2 The use of Farmers' Markets as a vehicle for the examination of 'alternative strategies' within the UK agro-food system

The corollary of the processes of reconnection within 'AS' is that the relationship between the production and consumption of food is being reconfigured, which demands an investigation of the changing relationships between producers and consumers. Research into the 'conventional' agro-food system has tended to be from a macro-level perspective, however, there is a growing recognition that a more micro-level perspective is required to elucidate the nature of 'AS'. The main focus of this thesis, therefore, is an examination of these relations within a tangible micro-level exchange context. Farmers' Markets (FMs) have been chosen as the vehicle for this purpose, in that they are considered to embody many of the issues involved in this reconfiguration. For example, they re-socialise food by ensuring that there is face-to-face contact between producers and consumers, and re-spatialise food by insisting that it is locally produced. They also encompass more than purely economic objectives, as the following quote demonstrates:

> "Food is a cultural as well as a commercial exchange [and] much of the interest in Farmers' Markets arises from their ability to transform our increasingly isolated and disconnected food-relations into a real and vibrant cultural process" (Orbach 1998: 10).

Since their inception in 1997 there have been a number of studies conducted on FMs in the UK, although these have often been poorly described. Even where more rigorous enquiries have been undertaken, the emphasis has tended to be on quantitative data and the dissemination of 'best practice' with little attempt at undertaking critical analyses. Nevertheless, these studies provide a useful context for this research. A number of actors and agencies are involved with FMs[7], but it is the producers and their produce, together with the consumers, who actually embody the dynamics of FMs. Consequently, they form the focal point of this study, both in terms of how they relate to each other, but also in terms of how they perceive FMs in relation to other food outlets. This study's approach is essentially qualitative, based upon in-depth telephone interviews with producers who sell their food produce at FMs, and focus groups with consumers who buy their food produce at FMs. The resultant data have been analysed through the notions of 'embeddedness' (as originally espoused by Polanyi (1957), and subsequently Granovetter (1985)), and 'regard' (as espoused by Avner Offer (1997)). In essence, the notion of 'embeddedness' enables an exploration of the role of social relationships within economic exchange processes, and specifically how commercial practices are modified by social contact. However, its use has been extended by some authors to include the locality and nature of the production process (e.g. Murdoch *et al.*, 2000). The notion of 'regard' can be seen as a complementary approach to 'embeddedness', where there is *face-to-face* contact between the producer and consumer of a good, in that it enables an examination of those elements that are intrinsic to face-to-face contact, but beyond the exchange process itself.

An analysis of the data in these terms is spatially confined, which necessarily restricts their relevance to understanding processes of embedding within the wider food system. As such, this thesis develops a theoretical framework which incorporates the resultant

[7] For example, local authorities. Their pivotal role in setting up FMs will become clear in Chapter Two.

data within an adapted Conventions Theory (CT). CT is concerned with how different conventions or understandings of quality are determined or brokered in reality to create stable networks, and the impact of this on processes of production. Indeed, Murdoch *et al.* (2000: 122) suggest that CT can enable "the discussion of embeddedness as it affects food production" and is incorporated into food chains at various levels. An examination of FMs in this way can help to elucidate the characteristics of the relations between producers and consumers at FMs, whilst allowing for inferences to be drawn about processes of embedding in the food chain at a level beyond the physical space of FMs.

1.3 Research aim and objectives

The main aim of this research is to examine critically the characteristics of producer-consumer relations within emerging 'alternative strategies' in the UK agro-food system, through their in-depth analysis in the context of Farmers' Markets. There are three principal objectives, and three sub-objectives associated with the study:

1. To provide detailed empirical evidence of the extent to which producer-consumer relations are being reconfigured within the context of a particular 'alternative strategy' within the UK agro-food system.

   1a. To investigate the motivations of both producers and consumers for attending FMs.

   1b. To explore the way in which producers promote the quality of the produce they sell at FMs, and the way in which consumers assess the quality of the produce they buy at FMs.

   1c. To examine the way in which producers and consumers interact at FMs in order to facilitate the exchange proccss between them, and the relevance of management decisions to this interaction.

2. To elicit the potential role and durability of FMs within the UK agro-food system, through the eyes of the producers and consumers who attend them.

3. To develop a theoretical framework that can enable an intellection[8] of the wider significance of 'alternative strategies' within the UK agro-food system.

[8] An understanding or perception of something.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

Chapter Two begins with a review of the 'conventional' agro-food system, and of how growing pressures from a variety of quarters are leading to the emergence of 'AS'. It discusses how various 'AS' are seeking to overcome, or at least circumvent, some of the perceived problems associated with the above system. FMs in particular are highlighted, and a case is made for utilising them as a medium for analysing the underlying exchange logics within these emerging initiatives.

Chapter Three explains the theoretical framework for this thesis, which includes changing the scale of analysis from the macro- to the micro-perspective, in order to better understand the local-level contingencies inherent within 'AS'. In particular, the notions of embeddedness and regard are explored as a means of elucidating the exchange processes involved, before explaining the pertinence of Conventions Theory (CT) in this context. The chapter concludes with a model showing the theoretical conceptualisation of 'AS' within the UK agro-food system.

Chapter Four sets out the research methodology in detail, as well as presenting selected results from a survey of FM managers. This survey was conducted in order to provide a snapshot overview of FMs in the UK, and to facilitate the subsequent selection of the case study markets. The case study data on the producers and consumers who attend FMs provides the bulk of the empirical data, and are reported in Chapters Five and Six respectively. Chapter Seven further analyses the data through the notions of 'embeddedness' and 'regard', before appraising the alterity (or 'otherness') of FMs within the UK agro-food system. This alterity is then assessed within the context of CT, before the concept of a 'bubble of FM alterity' is proposed as a means of explicating the dynamics involved.

Chapter Eight then summarises the conclusions of this thesis, and reflects on the significance of the research process and findings, and their implications for the role and durability of FMs. It concludes by suggesting a number of areas for future research, both with respect to FMs, but also in terms of understanding the wider implications of 'AS' within the UK agro-food system.

Chapter 2
THE 'CONVENTIONAL' AGRO-FOOD SYSTEM AND THE EMERGENCE OF 'ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES'

2.1 Introduction

As introduced within Chapter One, growing pressures within the UK agro-food system since the 1980s have led to the emergence of 'alternative strategies' ('AS'). This chapter begins by outlining the characteristics of the 'conventional' agro-food system and the associated tensions within its operation. It then explores the impetus for the development of 'AS', before assessing the underlying rationales of three types of 'AS' (local exchange and trading schemes (LETS), organic food, and fair-trade). The final sections of this chapter focus specifically on the development of FMs in the UK, before identifying the contribution this thesis can make to our understanding of the emergence of 'AS' within the UK agro-food system.

2.2 The 'conventional' agro-food system

2.2.1 Introduction

The capital accumulation process within the context of the agro-food system is generally recognised as being different from non-food systems, for three main reasons: firstly, it is dependent upon an inflexible land base (Marsden, 1988); secondly, it is "heav[ily] dependen[t] upon *organic* properties throughout the linkages from production to consumption" (Fine 1994: 519); and thirdly, because the demand for food is relatively inelastic, particularly in Western economies (Marsden, 1997). The result of these constraints is that capital has sought to reduce the impact of 'nature' through the application of science and technology, and to maintain market growth through adding value to agricultural products outside the immediate production-consumption cycle (Whatmore, 1995). These processes have been described by Goodman *et al.* (1987: 2) as *appropriationism* ("in which elements once integral to the agricultural production process are extracted and transformed into industrial activities and then re-incorporated into agriculture as inputs"): and *substitutionism* ("in which agricultural products are first reduced to an industrial input and then replaced by fabricated or synthetic non-agricultural components in food manufacturing"). Despite agriculture's exceptionalism, those involved in the contemporary food system (farmers, processors, retailers and consumers) have not been immune to the changes taking place within capitalist accumulation and regulation regimes, associated with processes of globalisation (Clunies-Ross and Hildyard 1992; Marsden *et al.* 1994; Goodwin *et al.* 1995).

Two main sets of analytical approaches have been taken to try and understand the development of the agro-food system within the capitalist world economy. Firstly, there are those which trace particular agricultural products through their various stages from initial farm production, to storage, processing, and eventual distribution to the end consumer (through such concepts as, 'commodity chains', 'systems of provision' and 'filières') (Fine 1994; Whatmore 1995). Secondly, frameworks have been developed which focus on the way in which the agro-food system has been regulated over time in order to support a given structure of capital accumulation (and in particular, 'agro-food regimes'). To some extent these approaches are complementary in that they are looking at different aspects of the agro-food system. However, it is the concept of successive 'food regimes' that best explains the historical development of global food production, distribution and consumption, and facilitates the contextualisation of this thesis[9] (e.g. Friedmann and McMichael 1989; Le Heron 1993; Le Heron and Roche 1995).

The concept of 'food regimes' developed from the French school of 'regulation theory' in the 1980s. It identifies three main periods (or food regimes), each of which is separated by a crisis of capital accumulation, wherein the underlying 'mode of social regulation' governing that regime broke down (Atkins and Bowler, 2001). The first food regime[10] centred on imports of wheat and meat from settler states into European

[9] This is not to suggest that the concept of food regimes as an explanatory tool is universally accepted. Its detractors argue that it concentrates on too few countries, and that it fails to acknowledge variations between nations, as well as local level contingencies (Atkins and Bowler, 2001). The weaknesses of 'food regimes' as a concept will become clearer as the thesis progresses, but as an organisational tool within this context, they are considered useful.

[10] As the UK industrialised and its population grew at the beginning of the 19th century, so there was an increasing need for imported food. This led in 1846 to the abolition of the Corn Laws, which had originally been introduced in the 15th century as a means of protecting domestic growers. A nominal import duty remained until 1869, but was then abolished completely and international food trade grew. As such, the first food regime is identified as lasting from 1870 to 1914: finally being undermined by the

countries, which provided the staples for the European working classes. But gradually, as the settler states gained independence and nation states emerged, world trade began to supersede colonial trade. The second food regime[11] was based upon the US agro-industrial model, in which the emerging nation states wanted cheap imports, and the US needed markets for its surpluses, a model which was subsequently exported to Europe. Agro-food production industrialised, and agricultural output changed from being products of final use "into a complex web of inputs and outputs to increasingly complex and differentiated food products" (Friedmann and McMichael 1989: 112). This second food regime is associated with the 'Fordist' mode of capital accumulation and regulation[12], as processes of appropriation and substitution enabled large industrial corporations to produce standardised and homogenised food products (Whatmore, 1995).

Capitalist expansion during the 1950s and 1960s, followed by world food shortages in the 1970s, provided a market for the increases in output during this period[13]. But by the 1980s, the legacy of the oil price rises of 1974 and 1979, coupled with inherent inflexibilities of production within the wider economy, led to a world recession. Structural food surpluses and the costs of managing them, together with a growing recognition of the environmental problems associated with this system of food provision, meant that political and economic support for farmers to continue to produce commodities irrespective of demand, was becoming untenable. Neo-liberal economic policies, as espoused by Milton Friedman, began to replace Keynesian economic policies, and they questioned the validity of subsidising farmers, favouring open global economies and competition based on comparative advantage, even if this meant a reduction in social protection and public interest regulation (Goodman and Redclift 1989; Castells 1996; Bonanno 2000). However, despite the undoubted pressures on the second food regime, the form of a distinctive third food regime is as yet unclear.

global economic recession of the late 1920s and 1930s (Friedmann and McMichael 1989; Le Heron 1993; Atkins and Bowler 2001).

[11] The second food regime lasted from the late 1940s to the 1970s, and is associated with strong state protection. The terms productionist and Fordist (see footnote below) are both used to describe this regime (Friedmann and McMichael 1989; Le Heron 1993; Atkins and Bowler 2001).

[12] The term Fordist is associated with Henry Ford's mass production methods, where there was limited choice, but minimised production costs. Allied to this were Keynesian principles of regulation, which were based on social stability and national governmental support.

[13] The world food shortages of the 1970s delayed the underlying pressures on the second food regime as a mode of capitalist accumulation, which had started with the oil crisis of the early 1970s (Le Heron 1993; Atkins and Bowler 2001).

Inherent within the neo-liberal policies of the 1980s and 1990s, was the extensive deregulation of the agro-food sector, which was a key component in allowing for its globalisation. Since its inception in 1995, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has been the driving force in this regard, through its promulgation of 'free-trade' and pressures to reduce trade distorting state support for agricultural production. In the process, the power that nation-states can exert over their own communities has been diminished (Gouveia 1994; Atkins and Bowler 2001). Under the Keynesian principles of economic growth, the state sought to control both the economic and non-economic within its boundaries, and there was an attempt at regional balance. However, Friedman's neo-liberalist principles saw the functioning of a free market as a superior model, in which "market relations take primacy over other spheres of human activity" (Bonanno 2000: 315). Significantly, this vision of liberalism differs from the classical liberal tradition[14], in which "ethics governs the conditions within which market relations develop and the quest for human happiness takes primacy over economic freedom" (Bonanno 2000: 315). Essentially, the market within classical liberalism is subordinate to human wants and needs, whereas for Friedman "political freedom is subordinate to economic freedom", in that the market is seen to be "'an end in itself' and the most basic condition for the development of a free, democratic society" (Bonanno 2000: 315; Gouveia 1994).

The corollary of globalisation within the agro-food system is that the production and distribution of food is increasingly driven at a global level. This is by large transnational corporations (TNCs), which have become increasingly deterritorialised and transnational[15]. Their sole aim is profit maximisation, which they seek to ensure through controlling the whole of the food chain, from the sourcing of agricultural raw materials, to the marketing of processed goods (Heffernan and Constance, 1994). The agricultural component of food has diminished, as TNCs have sought to increase the non-agricultural elements of the food chain by converting bulk agricultural products into "mere inputs for the value added processed foods market" (Gouveia 1994: 131) through the use of science and technology (and increasingly *bio*technology). Food has become homogenised, standardised and anonymised, with many products that the consumer

[14] For example, that associated with Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill (Bonanno, 2000).

actually buys bearing little relation to the geographical place of production, or to the social and cultural processes that have been involved along the way (Whatmore 1995; Watts and Goodman 1997; Miele 1999; Renard 1999).

In positing the emergence of a possible third food regime, Le Heron (1993: 73) suggests that there are increasing "contradictions between productive forces [geared towards mass production] and consumption trends [towards more variety]". In response to these contradictions, Fordist processes of mass production have continued, and yet at the same time they have become more flexible to reflect the growing diversity of consumption demands. Differential preferences have been accommodated, whilst still retaining production efficiency in terms of unit costs[16] (Bonanno *et al.* 1994; Friedland 1997). For example, the more traditional exports of tea, coffee, and sugar, are increasingly being replaced by so-called 'high value foods' which include fruits, vegetables, and dairy products (Watts and Goodman, 1997). This process is particularly noticeable in New Zealand, where the country's image of 'green reliability' and sustainability is specifically aimed at 'green' consumers as a means of creating comparative advantage within a dynamic globalised economy (Le Heron and Roche, 1995).

2.2.2 Tensions within the 'conventional' agro-food system

However, whilst the foregoing example might be indicative of a third food regime, it is also clear that there are increasing tensions between 'deterritorialised' global actors, and the heterogeneity of localised systems (Watts and Goodman, 1997). At this point, the perspective of food regimes becomes problematical in that the local (and indeed the national) levels are not acknowledged as sites of contestation and contingency within its account[17]. Globalisation within the agro-food system has tended to be been seen as linear and inexorable, but increasingly authors are suggesting that it should in fact be viewed as a far more complex and socially contested process (e.g. Arce and Marsden

[15] For example, those involved in food processing such as Nestlé and Unilever, and more recently large corporate retailers like Tesco and Walmart (Tansey and Worsley, 1995).

[16] The term 'Sloanism' is used by Bonanno *et al.* (1994) to describe this process. The term Fordism relates to Henry Ford's mass production methods, where there was limited choice, but minimised production costs. Sloanism refers to the approach taken by Alfred Sloan at GM, which retained mass production methods, but factored-in sufficient flexibility to match the growing flexibility within consumption markets.

[17] Even Le Heron (1993), as a proponent of the concept of food regimes, acknowledges that their focus on explaining the international regulation of the agro-food system in terms of the 'US hegemony', has elided the significance of more contextualised debates.

1993; Heffernan and Constance 1994; Watts and Goodman 1997; Renard 1999), "in which many spaces of resistance, alterity, and possibility become analytically discernible and politically meaningful" (Whatmore and Thorne 1997: 289). This is leading to differential engagement with the agro-food system at both farm production and consumption levels. For example, it has allowed some consumers to have 'designer' organic vegetables that have been flown in from all over the world, whilst at the same time denying others access to affordable and fresh local food (Watts and Goodman, 1997). Similarly within farming, there is a concentration of large-scale industrial farming in 'hot spots' (such as East Anglia and the Paris Basin) which are extensively tied-in to large corporate interests and globalised processes, and account for a large percentage of the production output within the EU. Meanwhile, many farmers in the EU have been 'marginalised' within these processes and have increasingly sought to link their production to more cultural and environmental objectives within rural development (Whatmore 1995; Ilbery *et al.* 2000). Whatmore (1995: 47, emphasis added) suggests that:

> "Farmers and consumers 'marginal' to the industrial agro-food system occupy the interstices of this network. But rather than seeing these interstices as the 'black holes' of the global agro-food system, these tangential spaces represent sites of *alternative strategies* which build on traditional production practices centred on subsistence and 'informal' market networks, or are bound up with new social movements associated with non-agricultural or non-food issues".

2.3 The impetus for the development of 'alternative strategies'

2.3.1 Introduction

Alternative strategies within the UK agro-food system have attracted increasing attention in recent years as a means of ameliorating or circumventing some of the problems associated with the 'conventional' agro-food system. Inherent within these 'AS' is the intention to develop alternative food networks or supply chains that can allow primary producers to capture a higher proportion of the value added, and enable consumers to make more personally informed judgments as to the produce's quality. Critically, these supply chains are based upon composite constructions of quality which include, ethical, environmental[18], and social considerations in addition to economic concerns. These is also an intention to redefine the relationship between producers and consumers, which includes making transparent linkages to the origins of the food products involved (Marsden *et al.*, 2000). Table 2.1 sets out some stylised characteristics of 'AS' in comparison with the 'conventional' agro-food system, for the purposes of reader orientation (further discussion of the nature of 'AS' will take place later in the chapter). Sections 2.3.2 and 2.3.3 then describe the principal drivers for the emergence of 'AS' within the UK context, namely, the changing consumer perspective and the changing dynamics of rural areas.

[18] Rachel Carson's book, *Silent Spring* (1962), was the first publication to express concern about the environmental damage being caused by industrial farming practices. Although talking specifically about the ecological damage caused by the extensive use of pesticides in the USA, *Silent Spring* proved to be seminal in raising awareness more generally about the connections between the use of chemicals in food production, and environmental damage. Since then, many authors have written more broadly about the negative side-effects of industrial farming (e.g. Lowe *et al.* 1986; Blunden and Curry 1988; Goering *et al.* 1993; Clunies-Ross and Turner 1995; Stanners and Bourdeau 1995; Hird 1997). More recently, publications such as *The Food Miles Report* (Paxton, 1994), and subsequent reports such as Jones (2001) and Pirog *et al.* (2001), have brought the issue of the increasing transportation of food as a result of globalisation to wider public attention. The main thrust of these reports is that the current globalised system of food production at the least possible cost in those countries with 'comparative advantage', fails to internalise the wider environmental and social costs of this approach.

Table 2.1 The stylised characteristics of the 'conventional' agro-food system and 'alternative strategies'[19]

Characteristic	The 'conventional' agro-food system	'Alternative strategies'
Production objectives	The de-territorialised large-scale capitally-intensive mass production of raw commodities as inputs for centralised industrial processes. The emphasis is on the greatest quantity at the least cost, and products are sourced accordingly. The social and environmental costs of production are externalised where possible, with short-term profits taking precedence over long-term sustainability. There is a deliberate attempt to overcome the constraints of nature, through the application of science and technology.	The place specific relatively small-scale low-capital artisanal production of food products for final consumption. Processing may be involved, but at a regional or local level. The wider social and environmental costs of production are deliberately internalised, in an attempt to achieve sustainable long-term food production. The site specific vicissitudes of nature are seen as something to be worked with, and indigenous knowledge and traditional husbandry are valued.
Quality evaluation	Products are evaluated according to their rationalised industrial qualities, which includes their price and consistency of supply. This is at every stage of the food production process, from the farmer to the manufacturer, from the manufacturer to the retailer, and from the retailer to the consumer. The consumer evaluates quality on the basis of brand labelling, wherein they can be sure that the product will be identical every time they buy it. This labelling is unlikely to give details of the production processes.	Quality is equated with the transparency of provision, which is seen as allowing consumers to make a more informed choice about the produce they are buying. This may be on the basis of its production locality, production methods, trade practices, or place of sale. Labelling is likely to refer to the production process, and variety and regional/local differences are celebrated. Price and consistency of supply are important, but not dominant.
Marketing objectives and orientation	Products are standardised and generic, thereby allowing for 'action at a distance', and obviating the need for direct producer-consumer contact. There is no spatial connection between production and consumption, as anonymous aspatial reconstituted food products are sold to anonymous food consumers. The only point of contact is through brand labelling. Commercial profit is the sole motivation, and most of the value accrues to TNCs, rather than any specific locality of production.	Products are specialised and 'positively' differentiated from conventional produce, aiming for a more dedicated market. The marketing objectives are to allow 'marginalised' food producers to access consumers who want to know more about the production of their food, which often entails local and direct marketing channels. The intention is also to retain a relatively higher percentage of the final product value within the local economy. Commercial profit is important, but not at the expense of the social, environmental and economic context of production.
The linkages between production & consumption	There is a deliberate attempt to break the connection between the production and consumption of food, through convoluted and extended food chains.	There is a deliberate attempt to reconnect the production and consumption of food, through the creation of short food supply chains.

[19] The inspiration for Table 2.1 came from two unpublished presentations:
Buller, H. (2002) *Eat local, think global.* The Summerfield Lecture, University of Gloucestershire, 29th May. Murdoch, J. (2002) *What is the alternative food economy?* Paper presented to the Royal Geographical Society/Institute of British Geographers conference, 'The Alternative Food Economy: Myths, Realities and Potential', 6th March.
Also: Beharrell and Crockett 1992; Banks and Bristow 1999; Marsden *et al.* 2000.

2.3.2 The changing consumer perspective

2.3.2.1 Introduction

Although food is fundamental to human life, for much of the 20th century its provenance has largely been taken for granted by consumers in the UK (Whatmore 1995; Marsden 1997). The industrialisation and globalisation of the agro-food system has socially, culturally, and geographically disembedded food production from its consumption, meaning that consumers have come to rely on "common definitions of quality" (Murdoch and Miele 1999: 468; Nygard and Storstad 1998), or 'uniform standards'. These 'uniform standards' have been empowered through the homogenisation and standardisation of food production, which has allowed the scientific knowledge on which they are based to 'act at a distance' and to "supplant human judgement" at a local level (Busch 2000: 280; Clark and Murdoch 1997). However, the succession of crises within the UK agro-food system since the late 1980s (such as those involving listeria, salmonella, E.Coli, BSE[20], and Foot and Mouth) have acutely focussed consumer attention on the production and distribution of their food, and the way in which it is made up of a hugely complex network of interdependent elements (Marsden *et al.* 1994; Goodman 1999; Sassatelli and Scott 2001). In the process, consumer confidence in 'conventionally' produced food and the 'uniform standards' that underpin it, has been dented, leading Watts and Goodman (1997: 22) to argue that amongst certain consumers there is now a renewed emphasis on "notions of place, social embeddedness and trust, to counter the disabling, panoptic vision of structuralist globalisation and the hegemonic, triumphalist discourse of post-1989 neoliberalism".

A number of authors (e.g. Marsden 1998a, 1998b; Marsden *et al.* 1999; Miele 1999; Murdoch and Miele 1999; Murdoch *et al.* 2000) now consider that the contemporary agro-food system is undergoing a 'qualitative shift'. Within this process, mass agricultural production and consumption are acknowledged as continuing, but at the same time the food system is becoming reconfigured by different demand patterns, which include increasingly complex consumer constructions of food quality. This is creating a tension between production-oriented 'quantity' and 'homogenisation' that typify the 'conventional' agro-food system (based on efficiency and cost), and the

[20] BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalophy).

emergence of consumption-oriented 'AS' that are based more on 'quality', 'heterogeneity' and food having a clear provenance. This is resulting in a fragmentation within food provision, which is placing new demands on producers in terms of marketing and distribution, but also providing new opportunities for those excluded by globalised processes (Murdoch and Miele 1999; Miele 1999; Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000b). However, food quality is a highly complex and contested concept, the result of cultural, ethical and social value constructions concerning "health, nutrition, nature, authenticity, and ecology, on the one hand; and convenience, ease, and adaptability to new lifestyles, on the other" (Renard 2000: 489).

Within emerging 'AS', local artisanal production that incorporates the 'natural' is perceived as denoting quality, and the linking of production to a particular place or region is seen as enabling transparency and ensuring authenticity within the provision of food (Murdoch and Miele 1999; Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000b). Food with provenance can also provide a sense of collective and cultural identity for the consumer, which the distanced anonymity of globalised-industrialised food products fail to deliver (Nygard and Storstad, 1998). Bessière (1998: 24) suggests that the latter are "devoid of tradition and identity [and that] functionalised, standardised and recomposed 'mass' foodstuffs...merely fulfil biological needs in the manner that a vitamin supplement might satisfy a deficiency". There is, then, an increasing awareness and interest in regionally specific food produce and cuisine, as a means of symbolically appropriating its inherent cultural and environmental qualities during its consumption (Bessière, 1998).

It is becoming apparent, therefore, that certain consumers are making their food purchasing decisions on more than simply rational and utilitarian grounds. Food quality is being determined not only by the physical qualities of the final product itself (intrinsic qualities), but also by the conditions under which it was produced and distributed (extrinsic qualities) (Beharrell and Crockett 1992; Nygard and Storstad 1998; Renard 1999). Price is no longer always the overriding consideration[21], which means that whilst some purchasing decisions "may appear to be irrational from a purely economic point of view [they] may be quite rational in relation to these other factors" (Nygard and

[21] Although price is no longer the overriding consideration for certain consumers, it remains the most important consideration for many others (e.g. FSA (Food Standards Agency), 2001a).

Storstad 1998: 49; Jarosz 2000). But in order to determine the quality of the food they are buying, consumers must have sufficient knowledge in order to make an informed decision. Following the loss of confidence in 'uniform standards', there is a vacuum of knowledge that needs to be filled (Cook and Crang, 1996).

2.3.2.2 The reflexive consumer

The consuming public are asking who they can trust, and risk analysis within the agro-food system has become more difficult as globalisation and the end of the Keynesian welfare state has meant that risks can no longer be so effectively controlled by the institutions of nation states. However, this reduction in the institutional framework can also be viewed as emancipatory (Bonanno, 2000), and Almas (1999: 6), in referring to Beck (1992 [1986]), suggests that risk has become more individualised. Consumers are able to make their own choices about risk, although this then places a "reflexive burden…upon the shoulders of the individual".

A number of authors refer to the notion of a 'reflexive consumer' (e.g. Almas 1999; Bonanno 2000; DuPuis 2000; Sassatelli and Scott 2001), who is not a social activist, but is someone who seeks to make their own individualised risk assessment. They absorb their information from a wide variety of sources that may include: activist groups; the media; expert opinions; labelling; and information from personal friends and relatives (DuPuis, 2000). As the disembedded trust regime associated with 'uniform standards' (based on universalistic and institutional quality parameters) has come under increasing pressure, producers, retailers and consumers are seeking to establish new ways of creating confidence, such as through embedded trust relationships. However, Sassatelli and Scott (2001: 236) make the point that it:

> "Is not that these strategies have to 'correspond' straightforwardly to the 'reality' of production or consumption...Most production remains industrialised mass production and most consumption remains price-conscious mass consumption. Rather, these are trust-building measures which seek to clothe - often 'modern' - patterns of production and consumption in the aura of tradition".

This opens up definitions of quality to appropriation by those with most power within the agro-food system. Corporate retailers, for example, through extensive advertising will seek to enrol consumers within their network of food consumption, by convincing them of the quality of *their* produce. Labelling becomes critical, and increasing reference is made to the origin and mode of production, rather than simply the ingredients (Renard 1999; Sassatelli and Scott 2000; DuPuis 2000). Nevertheless, if consumers are convinced in this way, DuPuis (2000: 293) asks whether they are "simply a victim of false consciousness", rather than proactively making decisions for themselves. DuPuis suspects not necessarily, in that the reflexive consumer is evaluating claims every time they buy, and their actions can be understood as "a form of politics" (*ibid:* 285), or, as Goodman (1999) puts it, bio-politics. Indeed, DuPuis (2000: 289) suggests that "food is a particularly important focus for reflexive consumers, since food consumption is a negotiation about what a person will, and will not, let into his or her body".

Within structuralist accounts of the agro-food system, the consumer has been seen as largely passive and unpolitical, but increasingly they are being acknowledged as having the power to influence the supply of their food. Underpinning the politicisation of the consumer is access to knowledge about the produce they are buying. Yet, Goodman and DuPuis (2002) argue knowledge alone is not enough, and that in order to develop their political capacity the reflexive consumer must actually *demand* alternative products that respect the social and natural context of their production, such as organic and fair-trade produce (Bonnano, 2000). By making an active statement of their purchasing intent that incorporates an alternative discourse of connectivity, reflexive consumers are sending a signal to other actors within the agro-food system, and to the wider social environment in which their actions are conducted. Although consumer action in this way may not lead to a radical shift in the food system, it will have *an* impact on the nature of production-consumption linkages (Lockie and Kitto 2000; DuPuis 2000; Goodman and DuPuis 2002).

However, despite an acknowledgement that reflexive consumers can influence the agro-food system, and that they are demanding produce with greater traceability due to concerns about the 'conventional' system, the actions of consumers may not necessarily be political. In this context, "consumers [may] have an 'undeveloped' consciousness, which will continue to be undeveloped – i.e. unpolitical – until they challenge the commodity system" (DuPuis 2000: 288). It is important, therefore, to understand what determines why (and how) consumers engage with the produce of 'AS'. For example, DuPuis (2000) explores this in terms of organic milk production in the USA which, due to market demand, has attracted large-scale capital investment. She asks whether consumers are politically active in demanding specific organic products which adhere to underlying philosophies, or whether they are content to buy a 'McDonaldized imitation' (see Ritzer 1998: 177). In the latter case, organic food is essentially a niche marketing opportunity within 'post-Fordist' capitalism, in which the basic structures of food provisioning remain unchanged. By contrast, in the former, consumers may seek an active role in fundamentally changing the agro-food system through becoming political.

Similarly, Lockie *et al.* (2002: 37) in researching the development of organic food in Australia, suggest that consumer motivations for buying organic produce will be crucial in determining the future structure of its production methods. As such, they sought to analyse their motivations and found them to be highly complex, in that:

> "Consumers are not faced with a simple choice between right and wrong...Rather, they are faced with a dazzling array of competing discourses on food, nutrition, environment etc, together with an equally dazzling array of competing desires, preferences, anxieties and beliefs, as well as the rather practical issues of availability, convenience and cost".

The research carried out within this thesis makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of these issues, and the processes of reconfiguration within the agro-food system they entail. It does this through a critical examination of the relations between producers and consumers within a concretised exchange context, namely, Farmers' Markets.

2.3.3 The changing dynamics of rural areas

2.3.3.1 Introduction

Another key driver for the emergence of 'AS' is the changing dynamics of rural areas, as the role of agriculture and food products within their development is being redefined (Marsden, 1998b). The adoption of neo-liberal policies in the 1980s and 1990s, and the weakening of a national policy context with the sole intention of food production, has meant that rural areas are no longer dominated by production issues and are increasingly influenced by "new consumption and production dynamics" (Marsden 1998a: 109). These have created opportunities, but also increased competition for rural resources, and the "uniqueness and authenticity" (Lowe *et al.* 1993: 207) of rural areas has become important in determining development strategies. The countryside has become a site of consumption, as well as production, and there are many new stakeholders (Winter 1997; Clarke *et al.* 1997).

At an EU level, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has until recently focused almost exclusively on production (and its subsidisation) as the means of ensuring the survival of its farmers. Farming was effectively removed from the wider rural agenda, and non-farming rural interests were essentially excluded from the CAP. However, as agricultural interests have waned in importance in rural areas, both socially and economically, EU policy (following the Cork Conference in 1996 and subsequently the Agenda 2000 process[22]) has sought to create a new model that re-unites agricultural policy with rural development policy. "Central to this model is the concept of agricultural multifunctionality...[and] an explicit recognition of the multiple roles that farming plays in the countryside" (Buller 2001: 14). This necessitates an acknowledgement of local cultural and social specificities within rural policy, in that distinctive traditions and farming practices are seen as important in allowing rural economies to develop (Buller, 2001). Agenda 2000 signals a shift from a sectoral agricultural policy based on supporting production output, towards a more territorial policy based on "the support of rural communities and environmentally sustainable farming practices" (Banks and Bristow 1999: 320).

For much of the post-war period, the emphasis has been on exogenous development in order to facilitate economic growth in rural areas (Murdoch, 2000). However, as agriculture becomes more multifunctional and plays a larger part in rural diversification more generally, so there is a need to understand how local and regional food production

[22] Agenda 2000 is an action programme whose main objectives are to strengthen EU policies and to give the EU a new financial framework for the period 2000-2006, with a view to enlargement (Europa, 2002a). It was endorsed at the Berlin European Council meeting in 1999 where it was: "reaffirmed that the content of the reform will secure a multifunctional, sustainable and competitive agriculture throughout Europe, including in regions facing particular difficulties. It will also be able to maintain the landscape and the countryside, make a key contribution to the vitality of rural communities and respond to consumer concerns and demands regarding food quality and safety, environmental protection and maintaining animal welfare standards" (Europa 2002b: 2).

can endogenously "create positive 'defences' for rural regions against the prevailing trends of globalisation" (Marsden *et al.* 1999: 295). This necessitates an understanding of how the values associated with agricultural production in specific areas can be maximised for the wider benefit of the communities concerned (Marsden, 1998b), as well as ensuring that a higher percentage of the value added remains at that level.

2.3.3.2 Valorisation of the local

In the early 1950s, about 50% of the money spent on food in the UK was retained by the farmer and the wider rural community. However since then this percentage has dropped to between 10-20%, as food value has increasingly been captured by the input side (composed of machinery, agrochemical, feed and seed companies) and the output side (composed of those who transport, process and retail food) of the food chain. In addition there have been significant job losses in agriculture, as machinery and chemicals have replaced labour (Pretty, 1998). Increasing supermarket domination of the retail sector has also led to the closure of many small independent food shops, drawing further value away from local rural economies, in that local shops tend to spend a higher percentage of their profits locally (Paxton and Slark 1996; Hird 1997).

Production for mass food markets is likely to continue to prevail in certain areas, with those producers hooked into the globalised food system dominated by corporate retailers and processors. However, in other areas, producers will not be able to compete on these terms and will need to access alternative markets for their production output, that have arisen "in a period of 'careful consumption' and uncertainty in mass food markets" (Marsden 1998a: 111). Increasingly, the response of such areas has been to pursue economic activities that utilise locally embedded human and physical resources, or their 'cultural identity' (Ray 1998; Kneafsey *et al.* 2001). Local distinctiveness is seen as having a commercial value, and by fixing a product to a particular place, more of the economic benefit can be retained by that place. Rural areas are then able to regain economic control through the valorisation of their local resources, which can help mediate the impact of the global economy. Ray (1998: 3) describes this as "the cultural economy approach to rural development".

Inherent within the cultural economy is the need for cultural distinctiveness, which can then be attached to the produce of a particular area. In this respect, food is an important component of the cultural economy in that it can form both part of a territorial identity, but also enable its exportation from the territory whilst still retaining its cultural linkages to that territory (Ray, 1998). A cultural economy needs to ensure that it is underpinned by quality, and that this quality is understood by consumers. As discussed previously, the food market is becoming increasingly fragmented and quality is being seen as a means of differentiating products and services in a competitive marketplace. However, quality is variously constructed, composed of both intrinsic and extrinsic elements and open to contestation and appropriation (Ilbery and Kneafsey, 1999).

A critical component in positively differentiating food quality is food's association with a particular place of production, in that there is an increasingly widespread assumption "that 'locally produced' food is of higher quality than 'global' food" (Banks and Bristow 1999: 319). Traceability is therefore becoming part of quality, and consumers need to be able to trust the authenticity of the food's provenance (Ilbery and Kneafsey, 2000b). In some cases regionally specific food products may just serve local markets, but more usually they will feed into regional, national, or international economies, in order to extend their consumer base and economic potential. Local action must then be understood in relation to the extra-local, as the two become inextricably linked (Ray 1998; Ilbery and Kneafsey 1999). If products become too physically embedded in localised processes they are likely to remain as small-scale niche-market products, of relatively minor importance within the wider agro-food system and to the endogenous development of rural areas (Murdoch *et al.* 2000; Buller 2001). Although quality may be embedded at a locally specific level, producers need to "build alliances with consumers located in more distant places" (Kneafsey *et al.* 2001: 309).

Marsden *et al.* (2000) introduce the term Short Food Supply Chain (SFSC) to denote that there is some form of direct connection between producers and consumers. Within the 'conventional' food chain, standardised and generic food is produced for anonymous commodity markets. In contrast, within SFSCs the "uniqueness and distinctiveness of the place of production" (Marsden *et al.* 2000: 435) is specifically promoted, and the intention is to form direct linkages with consumers, ensuring regional authenticity through a transparency of provision. Distance is not the key factor, "but the fact that the product reaches the consumer embedded with information" (Marsden *et al.* 2000: 425), enabling them to make an informed judgment as to the value of that product. A number of SFSCs are identified, including: *face-to-face*, where "authenticity and trust are mediated through personal interaction" (*ibid.*: 425); *spatial proximity*, in which consumers are made aware of the produce's local origins; and *spatially extended*, wherein:

> "Value and meaning laden information about the place of production and those producing the food is translated to consumers who are outside of the region of production itself and who may have no personal experience of that region" (*ibid.*: 426).

There is also a need to ensure that the local producers retain the value added inherent within linking quality to regional production, rather than allowing other actors in the food chain to appropriate this value (Ilbery *et al.* 1999b; 2000). The *appellation d'origine contrôlée* (AOC) has attempted to do this in the context of protecting the provenance of certain French wines, by transforming it into 'intellectual property'. This effectively gives it a trademark which is then available to all producers within the area, providing they abide by the requisite regulations (Moran, 1993).

At an EU level, European Union Council Regulation (EEC No. 2081/92) has sought to rationalise all geographical indicators within the EU and to help protect regional food and drink products. Under this regulation, protection is given to products either because they possess qualities or characteristics that are 'essentially due to' a particular geographical environment (Protected Designation of Origin - PDO), or that are 'attributable to' one (Protected Geographical Indication - PGI). No specific reference is made to the intrinsic quality of the produce in the regulations, "but there is an assumption that quality can be directly attributable to, and guaranteed by the geographic location of production" (Ilbery *et al.* 2000: 36). However, there are huge variations in the uptake of PDO and PGI within the EU. France and Italy have by far the highest uptake, where they are seen as a means of preserving regional traditions. But in the UK, "the regional significance of both food production and consumption habits were pulverised during the Industrial Revolution into a kind of 'placeless foodscape'" (Ilbery *et al.* 2000: 34). Demands for PDO and PGI in the UK are therefore most likely to come from those businesses who see it as a good marketing opportunity, rather than those seeking to protect the identity of regional food products *per se*. Research also suggests that as yet there is minimal consumer awareness of PDO and PGI in the UK (Ilbery *et al.* 2000; Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000b).

Regionally identifiable food has also been seen as denoting quality to consumers, but "perceived authenticity was a major issue in the acceptability of a regional food as truly 'regional'" (Tregear *et al.* 1998: 389). Official designations had only a small part to play for most consumers in this research. Indeed, focus groups revealed that most had not heard of them, and if they had, awareness of their underlying criteria was 'nonexistent'. Consumer perceptions of authenticity were very subjective and included product-related factors such as packaging, description and appearance, but also the consumption context. For example, buying produce loose or in wax paper from a specialist outlet was seen as a more 'authentic' experience than buying it pre-packaged from a supermarket. This led the authors to conclude that the 'authenticity' of regional speciality products is open to appropriation through clever marketing.

The research presented in this thesis, in examining the characteristics of producer-consumer relations at FMs, provides a valuable insight into how these new food supply chains which valorise the local function in practice. Its particular focus is on face-to-face interaction, but the in-depth nature of its analysis can allow for wider inferences to be drawn.

2.4 'Alternative strategies' within the UK agro- food system

2.4.1 Introduction

Section 2.3 has described what is understood to distinguish 'AS' from the 'conventional' agro-food system, as well as setting out the principal drivers for the emergence of 'AS' within the UK agro-food system. Section 2.4 now discusses the underlying rationales of three 'AS', which have been chosen to illustrate a number of the issues introduced within the preceding section, and to provide a context for the choice of FMs as the loci for empirical research within this thesis[23]. In particular, they indicate how 'AS' can reconfigure the exchange relationship between producers and consumers, as a counter-point to those relationships based solely on commercial imperatives. Firstly, local exchange and trading schemes (LETS) are discussed. Although food only accounts for a relatively small proportion of their turnover, LETS are considered to aptly illustrate the tempering of the profit motive for the benefit of local community development. Secondly, the fair-trade network demonstrates how the physical structures of the 'conventional' agro-food network can be utilised, while incorporating alternative relationships between the producers and consumers concerned. Thirdly, organic food combines health, environmental, and animal welfare issues within a framework that seeks to ensure the fundamental sustainability of the agro-food system. Importantly, all three examples also display inherent tensions between their own 'alternative strategies' and their possible (re) absorption within mainstream exchange processes.

2.4.2 Local exchange and trading schemes

LETS have grown rapidly since their introduction from Canada in 1985, and they involve local currencies rather than pounds Sterling. LETS currencies are a means of exchange, rather than a store of value, and the needs of individuals replace the motivation of monetary accumulation. Indeed, accumulation is discouraged and may even be charged interest (Williams 1996; Lee 1996). LETS represent a community level response to the uneven development inherent within globalisation, wherein those areas that have what globalisation wants, prosper, but others are left marginalised and in decline. LETS do not necessitate isolation from the formal economy, but they do entail disengaging from global systems in order to facilitate the re-localisation of economic and social relations, and hence community development (Pacione, 1997).

Although there are a number of reasons for setting up LETS, the primary motivation is usually the creation and maintenance of social networks with like-minded people, in order to empower the local community and give people a sense of belonging and identity (Thorne 1996; Lee 1996; O'Doherty *et al.* 1999). Thorne (1996: 1364) suggests

[23] Other 'alternative strategies' might include: box schemes; Community Supported Agriculture (CSA); mail order; the Internet; city farms; community gardens; WI markets; pick-your-own; farm shops; consumer co-operatives; and food festivals.

that LETS seek to (re)embed exchange processes in localised social relationships, in which "the 're' describes purposive action which aims to enhance the social well-being of those transacting...by tempering a motive of 'gain and profit'". As within the market economy, the value of a LETS currency depends on confidence within the system. Trust within the formal market economy is delivered through institutional structures, whereas in LETS it is within the close relationships between participants, which allows for contextualised and interpersonal negotiations between buyers and sellers (Pacione, 1997). "Face-to-face trading...[removes] the fetishism of commodities" (Lee 1996: 1384), as people can relate to the scale they are working in, and there is a sense of direct involvement and connection with the processes involved.

It is clear that trade in LETS represents only a tiny proportion of GNP[24], but realistically they should not be evaluated in these terms, as they have less to do with monetary generation, and more to do with the generation of social identity and the redefinition of community. They are not aimed at economic self-sufficiency, but rather towards "strengthening an energetic, local or regional civic society" (O'Doherty *et al.* 1999: 1651), that is better able to utilise their local resources to help themselves develop (Pacione 1997; O'Doherty 1999). Nevertheless, there are signs of pressures to include retail businesses within LETS in order to increase their vibrancy, but this then risks "replicating patterns of dependency already present in the Sterling economy" (Thorne 1996: 1373).

2.4.3 Fair-trade

The Fair-trade movement (or network) was set up in 1964 by Oxfam, together with a number of other organisations, dedicated to the idea of creating fairer trading relationships between small and medium-sized food producers in 'Southern' countries, and the end consumers in 'Northern' countries[25] (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997). The enormous concentration of world food trade in the hands of a few corporations (for example, three corporations control 80% of the banana trade), has meant that they are

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[24] Total turnover of LETS in the UK in mid 1994 was estimated at an equivalent of £1.5 million (Thorne, 1996).

[25] The terms 'Southern' and 'Northern' are used for simplicity in this context, whereby 'Northern' is taken to include the developed economies of the World, such as Western Europe, North America, and Australasia; and 'Southern' refers to relatively undeveloped economies, such as those in South America and Africa.

able to dictate the terms of trade, and often it is only a very small percentage of the final price paid by the consumers in 'Northern' countries that goes to the farmers and field workers in 'Southern' countries. For example, only 2% of the final price paid for bananas goes to the actual fieldworker and 5% to the farmer (Pretty, 1998).

The produce of fair-trade is generally sold through conventional mass distribution channels, and yet the bases on which the trading relationship is enacted are different. There is a resolution "to re-embed commodity circuits" (Raynolds 2000: 298) through revealing the social and ecological conditions of production, and in the process "challeng[e] the dominance of conventional price relations in guiding production and trade conditions" (*ibid.*: 298). Comprehensive labelling enables this, as consumer perceptions of quality are then in part determined by the extrinsic production qualities of the product (Renard 1999; Raynolds 2000).

Whatmore and Thorne (1997) use the term 'mode of ordering of connectivity' to denote the way in which actors within a given network, relate to that network. Within the 'conventional' food network, the emphasis is on cost minimisation and the self-interest of individuals. Within the fair-trade network, there is an explicit intention to socially reconnect those that grow the produce, with those that consume the produce. The emphasis is on 'fairness', as 'Northern' consumers are effectively being asked to pay for the ethics of a more equitable trading relationship with 'Southern' producers, that incorporates the latter's social well-being (Renard 1999; Raynolds 2000)[26].

Demand for fair-trade produce in the UK has grown from less than £17 million worth of goods in 1998 to nearly £45 million in 2001, and the range of produce available has been extended. Bananas were first traded in January 2000 and by the end of 2002 Sainsbury's were selling one million Fair-trade Mark bananas every week, and have subsequently introduced their 'own brand' Fair-trade coffee, tea, chocolate and bananas (Fairtrade, 2003). This tendency towards supermarket 'own brand' produce is leading to tensions within the fair-trade movement. On the one hand, there is an appreciation that this enables an increase in the sales of fairly traded produce, but on the other hand, there

[26] Fair trade initiatives are now worth US$400 million per annum worldwide, of which coffee is the most established, accounting for 3% of the European coffee market. By way of comparison, the world market for organic produce is US$10 billion (Raynolds, 2000).

are concerns that the values of alternative trade are being diluted by the ideology of the market, which it was originally envisaged as sidestepping (Renard, 2003).

2.4.4 Organic food

The UK organic market in the period 2000-2001 was worth £802 million, an increase of 33% on the previous 12 month period[27], and it now accounts for 1% of the total value of food and drink sales in the UK. Demand outstrips domestic supply and 70% of all organic food sold in the UK is imported. During this period there has also been an increase in the percentage that is sold through supermarkets, and their share of the market has risen from 74% to 80%, with a commensurate decline in the sales through independent retailers and farm shops. Direct sales have increased during the same period, but at a much slower rate than the overall growth in organic sales (Soil Association, 2002).

As identified above, food scares have had a profound effect on agriculture and food production in the UK, most particularly BSE, where nature dramatically "boomeranged back" (Murdoch 2000: 412) despite industry's attempts at appropriation and substitution. The use of biotechnology within food production is also a cause of concern for many consumers, not least because it further mystifies and distances the production of food. The growth in the demand for organic food has been attributed principally to mounting concerns about the safety of modern methods of food production, and a growing interest in moral and animal welfare issues, which includes an acknowledgement of the relationship between society and nature (Ilbery *et al.* 1999a; Miele 1999). Goodman (1999: 32) suggests that "in organic agriculture the fetishised abstraction of food is intentionally unveiled, bringing the complex filaments of food provisioning explicitly into focus...in contrast to...industrial agro-food networks".

Organic farming is heralded as being more than just a set of farming practices that incorporate the environment within the production of food. It is also seen as a social movement, that is intent on rebuilding rural communities and overcoming the production-consumption divide. It is envisaged that food should be produced with the intention of selling it directly to the end consumer, thus facilitating a more intimate

[27] By way of comparison, sales in 1987 were £40 million (Ilbery *et al.*, 1999a).

relationship with its production and enabling trust in the processes involved (Tovey 1997; Buck *et al.* 1997). Inherent within organic farming, then, are "strong philosophical and ideological overtones" (Beharrell and Crockett 1992: 6), and "values [that] are contradictory to many of the dominant values of capitalist society" (Tovey 1997: 33).

Yet, as the market for organic food grows, so too do the commercial imperatives surrounding its production and these are putting pressures on its ideological roots. Individual producers need to make money to stay in business; rural areas marginalised within globalised processes are seeing organic food production as a means of adding value, and are intent on maximising the economic impact by accessing non-local markets; and mainstream agribusinesses are seeking to add value through accessing a lucrative niche market, and to achieve product differentiation (Tovey 1997; Buck *et al.* 1997; Banks and Bristow 1999). Organic farming started off with a separate and distinctive identity that could be related to "alternative, left wing and environmentalists movements" (Kaltoft 1999: 40), however the boundaries between conventional and organic farming are now becoming less distinct, as organic farming becomes increasingly institutionalised (Kaltoft 1999; Goodman 2000).

This tendency has been particularly noted in the USA, where the USDA[28] sees organic regulation as market enhancement, rather than addressing socially and ecologically sustainable food systems (Goodman and Hayes, 2000). Organic is defined solely by reference to a list of 'allowable inputs', which has permitted agribusinesses to use the label 'organic' for marketing purposes simply by using 'allowable inputs', but industrialising the remaining processes (Buck *et al.* 1997; Goodman 2000). Buck *et al.* (1997) refer to this as 'conventionalisation', which is leading to the bifurcation of organic farming between small-scale artisanal producers at one extreme, and large-scale industrial producers at the other. The term 'organic' for the latter, "has a neo-Fordist or Sloanist tint, characterised by the mass production of organic commodities for both mass and niche markets where 'organic' is just another form of product differentiation" (Buck *et al.* 1997: 7). Essentially, agribusinesses are appropriating the value added by the organic label "without adhering to the movements underlying social and environmental values" (Raynolds 2000: 306).

[28] USDA (United States Department of Agriculture).

Marketing poses another conundrum for organic producers, as the statistics in the opening paragraph of this section illustrate. 'Organic' produce is increasingly being sold through supermarkets, and yet there is a "structural incompatibility between the tenets of organic agriculture and supermarket ideology" (Latacz-Lohmann and Foster 1997: 278). Organic agriculture was originally set up with the intention of co-locating production and consumption, with quality understood in terms of taste and nutrition. Supermarkets, on the other hand, are deeply embedded in globalised chains and the conventions of the industrial market, that require guaranteed supplies of large quantities of food, with quality being assessed in terms of appearance, convenience, and price (Latacz-Lohmann and Foster 1997; Morgan and Murdoch 2000). This has led to a tension between the pragmatists, who accept that supermarkets dominate the retail market and should be used to build up organic sales, and the purists, who say that selling their produce through supermarkets will dilute the underlying ethos of organic farming (Morgan and Murdoch, 1998).

Within the 'conventionalisation' of organic food production much of the output will be for international markets, and the supply patterns and energy used are likely to replicate conventional food sourcing. At the point of sale in supermarkets, produce is only differentiated on the basis of its label and in many cases consumers will be less concerned about the provenance of the food, merely that it is organic (Buck *et al.* 1997; Goodman 2000). The produce quality is then being assessed on the basis of uniform standards (albeit organic standards)[29], and "other bonds of trust between producers and consumers...based on *shared* ethical, socio-ecological and political values and place-based direct relations [are] trivialised" (Goodman 2000: 217, emphasis in the original). Those 'purist' producers who choose not to sell through the supermarket system, have the option of selling through alternative food systems which are locally oriented and rely on decentralised delivery systems, for example FMs, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), and box schemes (Goodman 2000; Morgan and Murdoch 2000).

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[29] In the USA, organic is simply defined by reference to lists of allowable inputs, which means that organic food sold through supermarkets will not necessarily be based on the social and ecological foundations that were originally part of the ethos of organic food production (Goodman, 2000). In the UK, organic standards are more inclusive, but by selling through a supermarket, the element of 'local food for local consumption' is almost certainly lost (Soil Association, 2001).

2.5 Farmers' Markets as an 'alternative strategy'

2.5.1 Introduction

One particular 'AS' that has captured the imagination of social scientists, policy makers, producers and consumers since their inception in the UK, is Farmers' Markets (FMs). As outlined in Chapter One, they have been chosen as the vehicle within this thesis to access 'information rich' data on 'AS', because they appear to represent a manifestation of the *Zeitgeist* reaction to the problems associated with the 'conventional' agro-food system. For example, they enable producers to regain control over the marketing of their produce and to retain the full retail price; consumers to regain control over the assessment of the quality of the produce they are buying; and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and policy makers see them as a way of contributing towards sustainability in the agro-food system. Section 2.5 now provides an overview of the existing literature on FMs in order to contextualise the empirical data collected for this study. Section 2.5.2 outlines the development of FMs, and the tensions between maintaining their perceived integrity and ensuring the availability of a variety of produce. Sections 2.5.3 and 2.5.4 then set out the existing research that has been conducted on the producers and consumers who go to FMs, as the more detailed investigation of these actors provides the focus for this study.

With the widespread and growing interest in FMs there have been a broad range of studies undertaken on them. However, much of the data have been informally collected and not fully described, carried out at individual markets for the purposes of pilot, or ongoing market evaluations (e.g. Frome FM 1998a, 1998b; Bur *et al.* 1999; Hampshire CC 1999a, 1999b; La Trobe 1999; Stirling CC 1999; Somerset Food Links 2000; Chichester DC 2000). More recently, there have been a number of more rigorous analyses of FMs (see Laughton 1999; Latacz-Lohmann and Laughton 2000; F3 2000; Hoskins 2000; NFU 2000; FOE 2000; Holloway and Kneafsey 2000; LUC *et al.* 2001; SFAC 2002; NFU 2002), which permit a better understanding of how they operate on a variety of levels. Most notable in empirical terms is LUC *et al.* (2001), who comprehensively reviewed the existing data at that time, together with a survey of 18

FMs in the South-East of England[30]. However, whilst useful in contextual terms, these analyses are still largely advocacy based, intent on establishing 'best practice' and promulgating the benefits of well run FMs. There is also a considerable body of research on FMs in the USA (where FMs have been operating for 20 years longer than in the UK), some of which can usefully be applied in a UK context[31] (see Sommer *et al.* 1981; Sommer 1989; McGrath *et al.* 1993; Peck *et al.* 1993; USDA 1996; Govindasamy *et al.* 1997; 1998a; 1998b; 1998c; Lev and Stephenson 1998; Fisher 1999; Hinrichs 2000).

It is important to acknowledge these studies in that they can provide context for this thesis, but they largely fail to undertake a critical analysis of FMs as an 'AS' within the UK agro-food system. Underlying the emergence of 'AS' is a reconfiguration of the relationship between the production and consumption of food, which in particular requires an investigation into the changing relationships between producers and consumers. As suggested in Chapter One, it is the producers and their produce, together with the consumers who embody FMs, which is why an examination of the relations between them is considered to be apposite to increasing our understanding of the emergence of 'AS'. This thesis, therefore, examines critically the characteristics of the relations between producers and consumers through an in-depth analysis of rigorously described qualitative data. This enables a more profound understanding of the role and durability of FMs as an 'AS', and allows for inferences to be drawn about the emergence of 'AS' more generally within the UK agro-food system.

2.5.2 The development of Farmers' Markets in the UK

The original model for FMs in the UK came from the USA, where, in the late 1970s growing concerns about nutrition, as well as an increasingly heterogeneous population demanding more specialised produce (that could not be supplied by the mainstream food industry), offered smaller farmers the chance to capitalise on niche markets by circumventing traditional outlets and selling directly to the consumer. The Farmer-to-Consumer Direct Marketing Act of 1976 (a Federal Law which exempted farmers who

[30] However, there is a dearth of UK national-level data on FMs, apart from the NFU survey of FM co-ordinators in May 2000 which sought to establish the level of income generated for farmers from FMs.
[31] Although some useful parallels can be drawn from this research, it is important to recognise that there are differences in the political, social, economic and climatic conditions between the USA and UK.

market direct from certain size, packaging and labelling laws), accelerated this trend as the numbers of FMs in the USA burgeoned from less than 100 in the late 1970s to more than 3100 by the year 2000 (Sommer *et al.* 1980; Festing 1994; Govindasamy *et al.* 1998c; USDA 2002). The emphasis at these FMs is on providing a lively atmosphere, where local producers can sell their own fresh, high quality goods directly to the consumer (Sommer 1989; LUC *et al.* 2001). However, the term farmers' market has been widely and confusingly applied in the USA, to the extent that it is sometimes used for wholesale markets, or those with very few actual producers. This has led many market operators to differentiate their markets as 'certified farmers' markets', which guarantees to consumers that the market has a certification scheme in place that restricts producers to selling their own produce. There are no middlemen involved and all the produce must come from within a variously defined local area (Festing 1998; Brown 2002). It is this latter model of FM that has been adopted and subsequently adapted in the UK, although initially there were no certification schemes in the UK context (Festing 1998; Tutt and Morris 1998).

The first FM in the UK came about as a consequence of the Bath and North East Somerset (BNES) Council's search for a project that could encourage the production and consumption of local food, which had been identified as a way of addressing some of the social, economic, and environmental concerns in their area. The Council's Local Agenda 21 (LA21)[32] officer had read an article about FMs in the USA and asked the author to come and talk to the Council about their applicability in a UK context. The net result was a series of three highly successful pilot FMs in Bath (starting in September 1997), set up by the BNES Council with the aim of creating a vibrant self sustaining market based on the principles of sustainable development (Tutt and Morris 1998; Laughton 1999). Since then, FMs have had a very extensive and positive media profile (e.g. Hurst 1998; Lee 1998; Keating 1998; Rees and Ingham 1998; Adams 1999; Abergavenny Chronicle 2000; Coleman 2000; Janes 2002; Fernald 2002), which has contributed to a growing interest in them from policy makers, local authorities, producers and consumers as a way of re-establishing the links between the production and consumption of food. By September 2002 there were over 450 FMs in the UK (NAFM 2002a; NFU 2002).

In essence, FMs in the UK are predicated on two principal tenets: firstly, that the produce is of a localised origin (usually within 20-50 miles of the FM); and secondly, that it is sold by the producer themselves, a member of their family, or an employee directly involved in the production process. The underlying purpose of these tenets is to reconnect the production and consumption of food by re-embedding them within both local and social relationships. On this basis, proponents of FMs identify a wide range of benefits which can be broadly grouped under the headings of 'producer benefits', 'consumer benefits' and 'wider economic, environmental and social benefits' (see Table 2.2). As such, the National Association of Farmers' Markets (NAFM) define a FM as:

> "One in which farmers, growers or producers from a defined local area are present in person to sell their own produce, direct to the public. All products sold should have been grown, reared, caught, brewed, pickled, baked, smoked or processed by the stallholder" (NAFM 1999a: 2).

In most cases, local authorities (LAs) (whether Unitary, County, District or Town Councils) have had a key role to play in the establishment of FMs, often with LA21 officer input, in that local food production and marketing is seen as an effective contributor to the aims inherent within LA21 (Tutt and Morris 1998; LUC *et al.* 2001). Other actors that have also been involved in setting up FMs, either in partnership with LAs or on their own account, include producers, consumers, private companies, and local environmental/community groups. Normally FMs have been set up with the intention of achieving a range of the benefits listed in Table 2.2, although sometimes emphasis has been placed on one particular element, depending on who has been driving the agenda (Tutt and Morris 1998; Frome 1998a; Bur *et al.* 1999; Bristol CC 1999; James and Russell 1999; Laughton 1999; F3 2000; Hoskins 2000; Shearman 2000; LUC *et al.* 2001).

[32] Agenda 21 was the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the 'Earth Summit') blueprint for achieving sustainable development in the 21st century, much of which was seen as being most appropriately implemented at a local level – hence LA21 (Fisher, 1997).

Table 2.2 The proposed benefits of Farmers' Markets

Producer benefits.

- Direct consumer feedback facilitates product innovation, and enables producers to understand and capitalise on market niches before mass manufacturers are able to.
- Producers are able to explain to the public what they are doing.
- Improved returns through selling directly to the consumer and cutting out the middleman.
- The opportunity to promote sales through other outlets, such as small shops, mail order, the Internet and home delivery.
- There is less wastage of fruit and vegetables that do not meet specific supermarket selection criteria.
- They provide another marketing outlet for small producers who are often effectively excluded from the supermarket buying system because their production is too small-scale.
- Social contact and job satisfaction from the interaction with consumers and other producers.

Consumer benefits.

- An increase in the availability of unusual and fresh local produce.
- First hand instruction on product use and preparation.
- Complete traceability of products purchased.
- The opportunity to discuss wants, needs and concerns directly with the producers.
- The social and entertainment value of going to the market.

Wider economic, environmental and social benefits.

- The local economy is boosted by creating employment and improving trade for adjacent retailers.
- By keeping production close to consumption, money is retained within the local economy.
- They contribute to the revitalisation of town centres, by drawing people into town centres.
- Local production for local consumption reduces 'food miles' and packaging is kept to a minimum.
- Long distance food transport leads to specialisation and intensification, whereas FMs encourage crop diversification to meet local consumer demand; and they encourage small-scale production, which is less likely to use intensive methods.
- They enable an increase in the mutual understanding and trust between producers and consumers, and between urban and rural communities.
- They provide a social meeting place for both producers and consumers, thus helping to engender community spirit.
- They help to raise awareness about the links between society, the environment and the economy.
- They provide a forum where partnership initiatives can tackle such issues as food poverty, and poor diets.

Sources: Sommer 1989; Tutt and Morris 1998; Festing 1998; Govindasamy *et al.* 1998b, 1998c; James and Russell 1999; FRCA 1999; Bur *et al.* 1999; F3 2000; Hoskins 2000; Soil Association 2000; NFU 2000; FOE 2000; LUC *et al.* 2001.

Table 2.3 The National Association of Farmers' Markets Criteria[33]

1. *Locally produced.* Only produce from the defined local area shall be eligible. 2. *Own produce.* All produce sold must be grown, reared, caught, brewed, pickled, baked, smoked or processed by the stallholder. 3. *Principal producer.* The stall must be attended by the principal producer or a representative directly involved in the production process. 4. *Policy and information.* Information should be available to customers at each market about the rules of the market and the production methods of the producers. The market should also publicise the availability of this information. 5. *Other rules.* Markets may establish other criteria in addition to the above provided they do not conflict with them.
Source: NAFM (2000b).

Initially in the UK individual FMs were set up in the absence of unifying regulations or guidelines as to what they should be based upon, although reference was often made to the original Bath FM as a guide (Bristol CC 1999; Tutt and Morris 1998; LUC *et al.* 2001), and the underlying tenets identified above were broadly upheld. However, as FMs grew in popularity and proliferated, they were set up by actors who were not so intimately associated with the rationale of FMs as originally conceived, and there were growing concerns that the identity of FMs was in danger of becoming confused (as it had in the USA). As such, in March 1999 (at which time there were 16 FMs) the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA) and MAFF (Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food) organised a national seminar on the future of FMs[34]. This led to the setting up of a National Association of Farmers' Markets (NAFM) as a registered company[35], with the intention of supporting both new and existing FMs and ensuring that customers could rely on what a FM stood for (NAFM 1999b; Hoskins 2000; LUC *et al.* 2001). The NAFM subsequently produced a set of criteria (see Table 2.3), which those markets wishing to join the association must affirm. In reality, by the end of 2000, only about 100 out of 250 FMs had joined NAFM, although most FMs had used the criteria as a baseline in drawing up their individual regulations (Festing 1996; F3 2000; Devon Food Links 2000; Hoskins 2000).

[33] Appendix A contains a copy of these criteria, together with the NAFM guidance notes on their interpretation.

[34] This meeting was attended by: the Bath Environment Centre (later to become Envolve – an environmental NGO based in Bath); Countryside Agency (CA); Farm Retail Association (FRA); National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA); National Farmers' Union (NFU); Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE); and the Soil Association (SA) (NAFM, 1999b).

[35] The NAFM was sponsored by the NFU (National Farmers' Union), FRA (Farm Retail Association), Soil Association and Envolve (an environmental NGO based in Bath).

However, despite the suggestion that most FMs were set up on the basis of NAFM criteria, there were mounting concerns amongst FM organisers that in many cases these were not being adhered to in practice. This was either due to slack management, or because most markets had no inspection procedures in place to verify their producers' claims (e.g. traded goods were being sold). Many saw this as perilous for the future of FMs in that their unique identity was threatened, leading to a loss of credibility and consumer confidence. Consequently, at the first NAFM conference in January 2001, the vast majority of delegates expressed that the most pressing issue for the NAFM to address was the design of a certification scheme to safeguard the integrity and authenticity of FMs. At the second annual conference in March 2002, a certification scheme was duly presented to members, to be implemented over the next 9 months (NFU 2000; Janes 2002; NAFM 2002b; 2002c). This stipulated that in order for a FM to become certified to NAFM standards, it must (NAFM 2002c: 5):

1. Have rules that conform to NAFM criteria (see Table 2.3 above) and no additional rules contradicting them.
2. Have a definition of the word 'local' as part of the rules (a radius of 30 miles from the FM is usual, with a maximum of 50 miles).
3. Not accept producers from outside the area defined as 'local' unless there is a rule giving preference to the most local producer (producers from outside the 50 mile limit cannot be termed 'local', but to ensure variety at the market may be allowed, providing the majority of producers come from within the 'local' area).
4. Have nobody trading at the market who is selling goods or produce they have bought in.
5. Have a satisfactory link with Environmental Health and Trading Standards officers in the area.
6. Satisfy at least 50% of the other 'good practice' criteria listed in the certification handbook. For example, this includes guidelines on: the percentage of local ingredients in value-added processed foods; cooperative stalls; and stallholder verification.

Critically, the certification scheme includes a system of inspections (of both the FMs themselves and their individual producers) that are designed to ensure that FMs are conforming to the requirements laid down, with the stated core objective of the scheme being "to protect and promote Farmers' Markets as venues for local farmers and growers to sell directly, with all the associated benefits this brings to local economies, society and the environment" (NAFM 2002c: 5). Those FMs who are not members of the NAFM (or of a number of affiliated members, such as the Scottish Association of FMs, or the Welsh Association of FMs) are not bound by the above scheme, but there are growing pressures on FMs to ensure that they do have a system in place that protects the integrity of FMs, and enables them to continue to deliver their wide range of benefits. For example, the report of the Scottish Food Advisory Committee[36] (SFAC) on FMs in Scotland highlighted the need for a systematic inspection of FMs, and the necessity of benchmarking local FMs against best practice elsewhere in the UK (SFAC; 2001, 2002). This pressure is set to increase once the NAFM scheme is operational, in that only certified members will be acknowledged as FMs by a wide range of organisations (e.g. NFU, SA, FRA), and promoted as such (NAFM, 2002c).

However, the certification scheme is not without its critics who suggest that it overly restricts the commercial viability and overall relevance of FMs, as consumers are unable to satisfy all their food shopping requirements at FMs. It is also regarded as inevitably imposing management and time constraints on producers at a time when they are already struggling to survive (Purvis, 2002). Essentially, it is a debate about integrity versus variety, which is further complicated by research that suggests in many instances there is low consumer awareness of the criteria governing FMs (Hoskins 2000; LUC *et al.* 2001; Purvis 2002; Janes 2002).

2.5.3 The consumers at Farmers' Markets

A review of consumer surveys at FMs shows that there is a broad degree of conformity about the nature of consumers who come to FMs, which allows for generalisations to be made (e.g. Bristol CC 1998; Festing 1998; Chubb 1998; Tutt and Morris 1998; Bur *et al.* 1999; La Trobe 1999; James and Russell 1999; Wilson 1999; FOE 2000; F3 2000; Hoskins 2000; LUC *et al.* 2001; SFAC 2001; F3 2002). Typically, FM consumers are female (60-70%), live within ten miles of the market (70-80%), and are over 40 years

[36] The SFAC is an independent body set up to advise the Food Standards Agency and Scottish Ministers on food related issues affecting Scotland (FSA, 2001b).

old (60%). They also tend to be in full time employment or retired, with about 70% coming from social classes A, B, or C1[37]. The average spend per person is between £5-£10, although about 20% spend more than £20, and most would prefer to shop at FMs on a weekly basis if they were available.

Despite occasional differences in the rankings, consumer motivations for attending the markets show a remarkable consistency. The primary incentive is almost invariably the ability to purchase good quality fresh local produce, wherein its localness is seen as important in ensuring its freshness. Direct contact with the producer is often mentioned as adding to the value of the produce purchased, and FMs are generally felt to represent value for money, even though quality is usually seen to be more important than price[38]. The festive atmosphere of the markets and the sociability of the experience are also highlighted by many respondents as making shopping at FMs something special. The most popular markets tend to be those that are less frequent, in that they take on the character of an 'event' rather than just being another place to buy food. About 30% of respondents mention the availability of organic produce, although in some surveys nearly 80% favour local over organic produce (Bur *et al.*, 1999). Supporting local farmers and the local economy is also frequently expressed, as is the opportunity to taste the food at the markets. Furthermore, a survey conducted for the SFAC showed that 60% of consumers had a positive image of health and safety issues at FMs, compared to 25% at supermarkets (SFAC, 2001).

This assessment of FM consumers is broadly endorsed by research in the USA, where Govindasamy *et al.* (1998b: v) suggest that the "consumers who are most likely to patronise FMs tend to be female, Caucasian, from higher income groups, at least 51 years old and well educated". The average spend is about US$16, and quality, freshness and direct contact with the producers are again the primary motivations, as well as a recognition that FMs can help to support local agriculture, and boost local economies. Consumer engagement with FMs is then for a number of 'intertwined' factors that encompass more than just the purchase of food (Govindasamy *et al.* 1998b; Lev and Stephenson 1998).

[37] Professional, or management class (LUC *et al.* 2001).

[38] A report for the South West Local Food Partnership suggests that when comparing like with like, produce from FMs can be up to 30-40% cheaper than from supermarkets, particularly with fresh

McGrath *et al.* (1993), in their ethnographic study of FMs in the USA, found that consumer purchases at FMs often appear to be impulsive, in response to the 'sensory stimulation' of the market environment. They tend not to buy from a shopping list, but rather on the basis of 'what looks good' or is in season. Indeed, seasonality is often seen as a benefit of shopping at FMs and contributing to the authenticity of the experience.

2.5.4 The producers at Farmers' Markets

Although initially most studies into producers were conducted as part of the ongoing management of individual FMs, there have subsequently been a number of more in-depth analyses (e.g. Tutt and Morris 1998; Chubb 1998; Bur *et al.* 1999; La Trobe 1999; Laughton 1999; NFU 2000; Hoskins 2000; Latacz-Lohmann and Laughton 2000; LUC *at al.* 2001), from which it is possible to build a profile of the producers at FMs and their reasons for attending. Laughton (1999) established that there are two types of farmer that benefit from FMs. Firstly, farmers who are already adding value to their produce and for whom FMs provide another (high profile) marketing outlet. Secondly, farmers who are producing food which would not be competitive on the world market. Chubb (1998) also includes smaller producers who are attempting to market their produce for the first time.

Producer motivations for attending FMs can be categorised as follows (Chubb 1998; Laughton 1999; NFU 2000; Latacz-Lohmann and Laughton 2000; LUC *et al.* 2001):

1. *For business reasons.* These include: to achieve better prices and margins for their produce by cutting out the middleman; to diversify their range of outlets; to promote their own products directly to consumers; to receive direct feedback from consumers; as a testbed for new enterprises, or product lines; to gain new business contacts; and to promote other outlets.
2. *For non-business reasons.* These include: the social contact with consumers; an enjoyable day out; job satisfaction; and a sense of camaraderie with other producers.

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vegetables. Baked goods and cheeses were generally more expensive, although the point was made that it was often difficult to find directly comparable products (F3, 2002).

For most producers, FMs are a minority outlet within a wider marketing strategy (that may include farm shops, local shops, pubs, restaurants, agricultural shows, mail order, the Internet, and wholesalers), with the percentage of a producer's turnover sold through FMs varying enormously. Although there is some inconsistency in the research data on this point, it seems reasonable to posit that for about 5% of producers, FMs account for 100% of their sales; 25% sell more than 50% through FMs; 50% between 5-50%; and in 20% of cases, less than 5% of their total sales (Laughton 1999; Latacz-Lohmann and Laughton 2000; LUC *et al.* 2001). FMs tend to be used by producers with smaller than average holdings (LUC *et al.* 2001; NFU 2000), and in general, the higher the percentage of produce sold through FMs, the smaller the holding. Research carried out by LUC *et al.* (2001) found that 72% of producers were on holdings of under 40 ha, although in this case, there were also two examples of holdings over 400 ha.

Producer sales figures per market again vary considerably, both geographically (e.g. FMs in the South-East of England achieve higher producer turnovers than those in Wales), and sectorally (e.g. meat stalls normally achieve higher FM sales than vegetable stalls) (F3 2000; NAFM 2001; LUC *et al.* 2001). Sales figures per stall of between £250-£500 at each FM held are common, and in some cases may be as high as £3000. An overall mean of £500 is suggested by NAFM (2001) in the South-East of England, but is likely to be somewhat lower elsewhere. It is also apparent that cutting out the middleman and marketing direct to the consumer is adding considerably to the overall workload of FM producers. Long hours are often cited by producers as the main negative of selling through FMs, and that in terms of earnings per hour FMs do not compare well with other outlets used by producers (Festing 1998; Laughton 1999). This leads Laughton (1999) to suggest that profitability alone is unlikely to be a sufficient incentive for producers to attend FMs.

However, despite Laughton's reservations, the NFU have published two reports highlighting the contribution FMs can make to farmers' incomes. The first, (NFU, 2000) estimated that in the year 2000 FMs generated £65 million worth of sales in the UK which would rise to £100 million by the spring of 2001. In reality it is unlikely that this latter figure was reached due to the foot and mouth outbreak (NAFM, 2001), but by September 2002 when their second report was published (NFU, 2002) the turnover was estimated to have risen to over £166 million[39]. This report also stressed how FMs had become a valuable source of income during a difficult period for farming, and the importance of ensuring that they can remain viable in the long-term. It is critical, therefore, to have an intellection of what factors may contribute to their viability, which this thesis approaches through an in-depth, qualitative, and rigorous examination of the relationship between producers and consumers at FMs.

2.6 Summary and research issues identified

This chapter has demonstrated how 'AS' have emerged as a reaction to the disembedding tendencies of the 'conventional' agro-food system. It has also shown how these 'AS' seek to reconnect production and consumption processes in various ways, and in particular producers and consumers. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the motivations and exchange logics of those involved are complex, and the integrity and longevity of 'AS' open to contestation. Research into the agro-food system has been generally from a macro-level production perspective, with local level contingencies and the consumer perspective tending to be ignored (or at least seen to be passive and unpolitical). Yet, the emergence of 'AS' has in large part been driven by changing perceptions and conventions of quality, which in turn depend upon reconfigured relationships between producers and consumers. As such, the relevance of researching the consumer perspective is increasingly acknowledged within the literature as a means of determining how 'AS' within the agro-food system can contribute to sustainable rural development (e.g. Lockie and Kitto 2000; Marsden *et al.* 2000; Jarosz 2000; DuPuis 2000; Goodman and DuPuis 2002). However, Goodman and DuPuis (2002: 9) urge that the research focus does not turn too far to the consumption end, in that the processes of production and consumption should be recognised as being "mutually constitutive". In this sense, the connections between producers and consumers are central to understanding the modes of ordering, role, and durability of 'AS' within the UK agro-food system.

As described above, FMs were considered a most suitable portal through which to do this in that they embody many of the emergent issues within 'AS' in the UK agro-food

[39] In comparison, in the year 2000, agriculture's total contribution to the national economy was £6.6 billion, and the total household expenditure on food and drinks in the UK was £88.6 billion (DEFRA, 2002b). Although the turnover at FMs is relatively small in relation to the overall food industry in the UK, it is clearly significant that it has more than doubled over the last two years.

system. FMs have come about in the UK as a response (or 'alternative strategy') to a wide range of pressures within the 'conventional' agro-food system[40]. FMs aim to re-locate production within specific localities and specific personal relationships, which allows for its complete traceability and gives food a sense of identity. However, whilst accepting that FMs are based on "proximity, familiarity and mutual appreciation", Hinrichs (2000: 298) asserts that they are still essentially based on a commodity relationship and that it is important to temper "sentimental assumptions about face-to-face ties" (*ibid.*: 300), in order to better understand the role of 'alternative strategies' (such as FMs) within the agro-food system[41].

Although there have been a broad range of studies on FMs, most have lacked academic rigour in their methodologies. Even amongst those that have applied a greater degree of rigour, the perspective and emphasis has tended towards an advocacy of FMs, rather than a critical examination of the underlying relationships on which they are based. This thesis, therefore, in building on the existing research on FMs, aims to examine critically the characteristics of producer-consumer relations at FMs. It does this through an in-depth analysis of qualitative data, and Chapter Three now explains the constituents of the theoretical framework utilised within this thesis in order to address the objectives of this research process. The principal objectives are reproduced here for the convenience of the reader[42]:

1. To provide detailed empirical evidence of the extent to which producer-consumer relations are being reconfigured within the context of a particular 'alternative strategy' within the UK agro-food system.
2. To elicit the potential role and durability of FMs within the UK agro-food system, through the eyes of the producers and consumers who attend them.
3. To develop a theoretical framework that can enable an intellection of the wider significance of 'alternative strategies' within the UK agro-food system.

[40] For example: consumer concerns and demands about the origins and safety of the food they eat (which include heightened ethical, ecological and community sensibilities, as well as health, lifestyle, and identity issues); the exclusion of many smaller producers from globalised systems and the increasingly multifunctional use of rural space; pressures on institutions to promote more locally sustainable economies and more environmentally sustainable food production; and the growing significance of local differentiation (culturally, socially and environmentally) (Marsden and Arce 1995; Marsden 1997; Busch and Juska 1997; Long 1997; Marsden *et al.* 1996; 1999; Hughes 1999; Miele 1999; Morris and Evans 1999; McKenna *et al.* 2001).

[41] The relevance of Hinrichs (2000) to this thesis will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Three.

[42] See Chapter One, Section 1.3 for details of the sub-objectives associated with these principal objectives.

Chapter 3

THE THEORISATION OF 'ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES' WITHIN THE AGRO-FOOD SYSTEM

3.1 Introduction

Social scientific research is essentially devoid of meaning until it is situated within a theoretical framework. Without theory, research may observe, but not explain. Theory enables research findings to be put into a larger context, and to facilitate the explanation of observed patterns within society (May, 1997). Chapter Three, therefore, now explains the theoretical framework within which this thesis is set which includes changing the scale of analysis from the macro to the micro, but also incorporating the consumer perspective within its framework of analysis. Sections 3.2 and 3.3 highlight how the neoclassical concept of the market is being questioned as academics increasingly acknowledge the embeddedness of economic transactions. Section 3.5 then signifies how notions of 'regard' can provide a complementary approach to notions of 'embeddedness' where there is face-to-face contact between the producer and consumer within agro-food systems. Finally, Section 3.6 delineates the use of Conventions Theory (CT) as a theoretical framework within which to analyse 'AS' (and FMs in particular), before concluding with a conceptual model of how this might be envisaged.

Since the early 1970s, economic geography has been dominated by political economy ideas[43]. The emphasis has been on meta-narratives, with recourse to neoclassical economics and regulation theory, and an underlying 'market'[44] logic that is seen to determine industrial production (Hughes, 1999). This approach has been used extensively by social scientists to explain the globalisation of the agro-food system, and has involved looking at the demands of capital and production technology in overcoming the biological constraints inherent within food production and demand

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[43] The political economic approach studies the relationship between politics and the economy (Busch and Juska, 1997).

[44] The 'market' will be discussed in more detail under Section 3.3.

inelasticity[45] (Busch and Juska, 1997). The focus has been at the macro-level which has enabled an holistic sense of overarching change (for example, by identifying 'food regimes'[46], and of how the Keynesian welfare state and technological development created Fordist production methods). However, in the process it has "effectively suppresse[d] the significance of contextualised human agency" (Arce and Marsden 1993: 296; Marsden *et al.* 1994; Jessop 1995).

Globalised agro-food systems are typified by 'action at a distance' wherein transnational corporations (TNCs) have sought to standardise production and consumption, and to minimise its spatial specificity. Macro-level studies of these systems have highlighted production issues, with only minimum attention given to 'nature' (except in so far as it can be overcome by technology) and to the consumption end of the food chain. Local-level social and political responses to changes within the food system have tended to be viewed as the inevitable result of external influences, with minimal recognition of the potential heterogeneity of localised dynamics. Certainly, global economic processes and policies influence the actions of local-level actors, but the relationship between production and consumption is changing in developed countries, meaning that the local level can no longer be considered the passive recipient of these external processes. From the 1990s, the macro-level approach to understanding changes within the agro-food system has been increasingly questioned for failing to incorporate the growing complexity of the issues concerning food production and consumption, as well as the increasingly diverse pressures on rural space.

Central to this growing complexity within the agro-food system is the construction and mediation of value, and the need to understand how conventions of practice emerge in particular economic, social, and political contexts (Marsden and Arce 1995; Marsden *et al.* 1997). Marsden (1996: 251) suggests that a macro-level approach has "tended to hide rather than disclose social differentiation in the value construction of food" and that there is a need for research to focus at the local level. However, due to the increasing fragmentation within food production and consumption it is also important to understand the way in which "local production and consumption spaces [are] linked

[45] Such as through processes of *appropriationism* and *substitutionism* (Goodman *et al.* 1987: 2). See Section 2.1.1.
[46] The notion of 'food regimes' refers to the way in which the agro-food system is organised within "particular eras of capitalism" (McKenna *et al.* 2001: 158). See also Section 2.2 above.

regionally and internationally" (*ibid.*: 251). A study of actors in context at a localised level allows for a deeper understanding of contingency within food systems, and the way in which values can become socially and culturally embedded "in symbolically charged rural places" (Marsden *et al.* 1996: 362; Jessop 1995).

The succession of food scares in the UK from the late 1980s have also had a profound effect on the agro-food system in dramatically opening its components to inspection. BSE especially "has reconfigured food chains in ways quite beyond the control of even the most 'powerful' macro-actors" (Murdoch 2000: 411), and shown that nature cannot be seen simply as a stubborn residue within capitalist processes. As explained above, concomitant concerns about the safety of food produced within the 'conventional' agro-food system have resulted in an increased demand for produce with a specific provenance. It has also led to the perception that food production which is specifically tied to nature (or natural processes) is of a higher quality than amorphous industrially produced food. Goodman (1999; 2001) argues that there has a been a consequent rise in the bio-politics of food which centres around the place of nature within food production. For example, he suggests that:

> "The bio-politics of food, as expressed in the organic farming movement, is an oppositional politics of praxis that contests the industrial orderings of eco-social relations based on instrumentalist utilitarian rationality. Such an alternative world view directly subverts the modernist dichotomy of nature/society" (Goodman 1999: 32).

As shown within Chapter Two (Section 2.4), 'AS' within the agro-food system are variously incorporating social and natural entities which is resulting in a plurality of discourses of connectivity. Political-economic approaches have enabled an explanation of the processes involved in the globalisation of thc agro-food system, but are less well suited to an exploration of these emerging complexities. As a result, many authors (e.g. Goodman 1999; 2001; Murdoch 1994a; 1994b; 1995; 2000; Marsden 1996; 1997; Busch and Juska 1997; Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000b; Murdoch *et al.* 2000; Lockie and Kitto 2000) posit that there is a need for a new theoretical framework within which to analyse these changing dynamics within the modern agro-food system and their resultant impact on rural development. In many cases, the notion of 'networks' (and in this context, food networks) is proposed as providing a more nuanced focus for research. Indeed, Murdoch (1995: 731) suggests that networks can be seen as "the dominant organisational form of the post-Fordist era", in that they allow for the exploration of heterogeneity and complexity within the agro-food system[47]. However, before considering the value of a network approach to the examination of 'AS', it is necessary to critically assess the neoclassical conception of the 'market' in that it has underpinned political-economic approaches to understanding economic transactions (Busch and Juska, 1997).

3.2 The market

> "While the market denotes the abstract mechanisms whereby supply and demand confront each other and adjust themselves in search of a compromise, the market place is far closer to ordinary experience and refers to the place in which exchange occurs...If economic theory knows so little about the market place, is it not simply because in striving to abstract and generalise it has ended up becoming detached from its object? Thus, the weakness of market theory may well be explained by its lack of interest in the market place" (Callon 1998a: 1).

The 'market' is the central component of neoclassical economics[48] and essentially it is a coordination device for the resolution of conflict between buyers and sellers, the outcome of which depends upon the individual agent's economic calculation (Callon, 1998a). Methodologically, it is based upon the abstraction of the economy from the rest

[47] In some cases, the term 'network' is utilised within specific intellectual traditions, such as actor network theory, or as a means of understanding the formation of policy, issue, social, and knowledge networks. Nevertheless, in other cases the term is used more loosely to describe a particular methodological perspective or approach that can help to clarify the way in which complex social, economic, technical, and natural elements interact (Selman 2000; Murdoch 2000). It is important, therefore, to make clear how it is being used within the context of this thesis. Holloway and Kneafsey (2000) advocate an exploration of how particular FMs form as networks of food provision through a process of network *analysis*, which they suggest can be accomplished by using actor network theory. However, as discussed within Chapters One and Two and the introduction to Chapter Three above, the focus of this thesis is on critically examining the characteristics of producer-consumer relations within emerging 'AS', through the portal of FMs. The thesis is not, therefore, intent on analysing FMs as a network *per se*, but on utilising a network *approach* as a means of developing a micro-level and nuanced research perspective on the relationships involved. This approach is embodied within an adapted CT framework in this study, which is discussed within Sections 3.3 to 3.6 following.

[48] Economics is concerned with how limited resources are allocated to satisfy human wants and needs, and the 'classical' period of economics is associated with Adam Smith's *Wealth of nations* (1776) and John Stuart Mill's *Principles of political economy* (1848). 'Neoclassical' economics dates from the 1870s, and in particular the work of William Stanley Jevons, Karl Menger, and Leon Walras. It is underpinned by the idea that there are large numbers of producers and consumers who are unable to significantly influence the operation of the market. The market is seen to be self-regulating, with a tendency towards equilibrium, and firms aim for maximum efficiency. Neo-liberalist philosophies in the 1980s prompted a resurgence of interest in the neoclassical 'free market' (Smith, 1994), and it is the neoclassical conception of the market that is referred to within this thesis.

of society, an autonomous and self-regulating arena in which agents enter and leave the market as strangers. Individuals are deemed to act in a rational manner to maximise their own utilities, and the self-regulating market is seen as able to produce economic equilibrium through the price mechanism. Whilst economists are aware that economies are influenced by politics, culture and society, they see them as exogenous factors to be ignored in building an ideal economic framework (Block 1990; Friedland and Robertson 1990; Callon 1998a). However, this dominant view has been challenged by, amongst others, Thrift and Olds (1996) who suggest that in reality it is very difficult to separate the economic from the social, the political, or the cultural, and that definitions of 'the economic' need to recognise the importance of these other domains within economic exchange processes.

Between the 1890s and 1960s the academic disciplines of sociology and economics were largely separated and the neoclassical economic view of the market as an impersonal exchange location prevailed (Granovetter, 1990). However, since the 1970s, the premises of neoclassical economics have been called into question as those factors treated as exogenous to the exchange process have been increasingly acknowledged, and the trans-disciplinary approach of economic sociology has grown in importance (Block 1990; Thorne 1996). "Economic sociology stresses that markets are socially structured institutions, infused with cultural norms and meaning...Rather than the self-interested movements of atomised, 'rational' economic actors, as assumed by neoclassical economics" (Hinrichs 2000: 296). In part at least, this changing research focus is due to the 'cultural turn' within the social sciences, wherein the cultural arenas of identity and representation have been increasingly recognised within the consumption perspective of market studies (Lie 1997; Coe 2000).

The notion of 'social embeddedness'[49] underpins these ideas and has its origins in the work of the economic historian Karl Polanyi (1886-1968), which has prompted many authors (e.g. Block 1990; Friedland and Robertson 1990; Thorne 1996; Lie 1997; Offer 1997; Callon 1998a; Oinas 1999; Jessop 1999; Hinrichs 2000) to re-visit his work of the

[49] Chapter Two highlighted how the 'conventional' agro-food system has disembedded food production from its consumption. How, as a result, 'AS' have emerged that seek to re-embed production, either associationally or physically, in various ways. These include making more transparent the nature of production and distribution practices, but also facilitating social relationships within the agro-food system. The notion of 'social embeddedness' refers to the latter. Other elements of embeddedness will be considered towards the end of Section 3.3.

1940s and 1950s, and in particular *The Great Transformation* (1957 [1944]). In this context, embeddedness refers to the way in which "economic activity is always embedded in a larger social and cultural framework" (Block 1990: 38), and there is a recognition of the importance of social relationships built on trust, reciprocity and friendship, to facilitating and enhancing the economic exchange of goods (Block 1990; Callon 1998a; Hinrichs 2000). Lie (1997) calls for more empirical work on concrete market exchanges, in order to better understand the nature of the actual processes and calculations involved.

As discussed within Chapter Two, the 'conventional' agro-food system is driven by transnational corporations (TNCs) who aim to control the whole food chain. Consumers are given only the minimum of information necessary, which tends to be limited to price, convenience and quality (defined in basic safety and cosmetic terms). Processed and convenience foods are emphasised over fresh unprocessed foods, and consumers are increasingly disconnected from the production of their food. This politically emasculates consumers, whereby the conditions under which their food has been produced and distributed have become obfuscated, making it difficult for them to make informed purchasing decisions (Tovey 1997; Lacy 2000). Indeed, Lacy (2000: 19) argues that:

> "Food and our food system, characterised by intense commodification and by an accelerating distancing of producer and consumer from each other and from the earth, represent the general failure of late capitalism and postmodernism. Our food comes increasingly from all points on the globe...[and] as a consequence, people are separated not only from their food, but also from knowledge about how and by whom their food is produced, processed, and transported" (Lacy 2000: 19).

Within this system there is an emphasis on rationality, with its basis of "efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control by non-human technologies" (Ritzer 1998: 174). But Ritzer (1993; 1998), in positing his 'McDonaldization' thesis[50], asks who this system benefits. He suggests that it is certainly the TNCs who control it, but not society and the environment, although he concedes that it has brought a huge array of

[50] The McDonaldization thesis is "that the fast-food restaurant, especially the pioneering and still dominant chain of McDonald's restaurants, is the contemporary paradigm of the rationalisation process" (Ritzer 1998: xii). In turn this is based on Weber's prediction that "society and the world are growing progressively rationalised and characterised by the predominance of efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control by non-human technologies" (Ritzer 1998: 174).

homogenised produce to many consumers that might not otherwise have had access to them. Yet at the same time it is dehumanising, in that its impersonal and monolithic approach denies basic humanity and tends towards Weber's 'iron cage of rationality'. However, he also suggests that in a post-modern society there are signs of 'non-rationalities' emerging. It is argued within this thesis that the 'AS' within the agro-food system are emblematic of these non-rationalities.

Underlying these 'AS' is the associational, or physical embedding (or re-embedding) of food production and consumption in various ways, as a reaction to the disembedding tendencies of the 'conventional' agro-food system. However, it is apparent that the manifestation of 'AS' is multifaceted, complicated by the manifold motivations of those involved in their implementation. These are the result of both ethical and economic impulses, which interrelate in convoluted ways, meaning that binary distinctions between 'AS' and the 'conventional' agro-food system are unhelpful in that the two are often inextricably entwined. There is a need, therefore, to clarify how embeddedness is diversely utilised within the agro-food system, in order to better understand its significance in modifying economic transactions and contributing to the development of 'AS'.

3.3 Embeddedness within economic transactions

Polanyi (1957) was writing about the social devastation caused by the emergence of the market (or capitalist[51]) economy during the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century, when every aspect of transactions, including land, labour and money became commoditised[52]. He argued that whilst all societies need some form of an economy[53], and that exchange and trade have always been relevant, this was only in a manner subordinate to society and that "gain and profit made on exchange [had] never before

[51] Busch (2000: 275) suggests that "markets only become capitalist when those who buy and sell in the market do so in order to acquire money (capital) as opposed to goods".
[52] Commodities are empirically defined here as "objects produced for sale on the market" (Polanyi 1957: 72), but Polanyi (1957) argues that land, labour and money are clearly not commodities, in that they have *not* (emphasis in the original) been produced specifically for sale on the market. He describes this as 'the commodity fiction', and yet it is this that allows the market to dominate.
[53] Polanyi *et al.* (1957: 243) distinguish between 'formal' and 'substantive' meanings of the term 'economic'. The 'formal' meaning refers to logical choices that need to be made between different uses of scarce resources. The 'substantive' meaning refers to the factual necessity of human society meeting its material needs from the natural environment. They assert that it is only in the latter case that all societies must have economies, even though the two meanings have in practice often been conflated.

played an important part in human economy" (*ibid.*: 43). Prior to the market economy, the economic system was there to facilitate the functioning of society and was embedded within social relationships. With the emergence of the market economy, the economy became disembedded from the social, as it became a self-regulating mechanism, structured according to its own laws which included the expectation that individuals would seek to maximise their monetary gains and that price alone would determine "the production and distribution of goods" (Polanyi 1957: 68). In the process, Polanyi (1957: 57) maintained that society became "an adjunct to the market [and that] instead of [the] economy being embedded in social relations, social relations [become] embedded in the economic system".

However, Polanyi (1957) and Polanyi *et al.* (1957) questioned the tenets underlying the neoclassical market economy and stressed the relevance of the social to exchange processes. In particular, they asserted that despite the intention of the market economy to be self-regulating, it needs certain institutional structures to provide the necessary unity and stability in order to function, and that these institutions are both economic, and non-economic (e.g. religion and the government). Therefore, an understanding of these processes necessarily entails more than a purely economic perspective, through an approach they described as "institutional analysis" (Polanyi *et al.:* 242). In other words, Polanyi (1957) and Polanyi *et al.* (1957) are denying that it is possible to have a totally separate market sphere, beyond the influence of social dynamics (Jessop, 1999).

Polanyi (1957: 150) also posited the idea of a 'double movement', where, on the one hand there was the emergence of a self-regulating market economy, and on the other, a countermovement aimed at the protection of society and the environment, which were seen as in danger of becoming annihilated within the market logic[54]. This counter-movement developed in the latter half of the 19th century and included the introduction of regulations designed to safeguard the public interest[55] against the excesses of market forces. In drawing on the work of Polanyi, Jessop (1999: 10) describes the market

[54] This annihilation was seen as being the result of the commodification of land and labour (Polanyi 1957; Jessop 1999).

[55] For example, the extension of the Mines Act, which made it illegal to employ boys under 12 who were unable to read or write; and a Chimney-Sweeper's Act, which was aimed at preventing the death of children in chimneys that were too narrow (Polanyi 1957: 144). Those in favour of the market economy saw this as a concerted attempt to undermine the efficient working of the market economy, but Polanyi (1957) maintains that it was a spontaneous and undirected societal response to the threat of the market economy to society and the environment.

economy as "a successful hegemonic project", and suggests that the current neo-liberal form of globalisation can in some ways be equated with the emergence of the market economy in the 19th century. Similarly, he argues that the notion of a countermovement, as posited in *The Great Transformation*, provides an insight into how society might react to this process, not necessarily against market forces *per se*, but in terms of resisting "capital's unhampered logic"[56] (*ibid.*: 12).

In a seminal paper, Granovetter (1985: 495) expanded on the notion of embeddedness introduced by Polanyi, arguing that "the anonymous market of neoclassical models is virtually nonexistent in economic life" and that in reality most transactions have an element of social embeddedness. However, he cautions against both under- and over-socialised accounts of human interaction within the economy. In the former, such as within neoclassical economics, the market consists of a large number of anonymous atomised participants each with perfect information, and there is minimal social contact. In the latter, the relationships between individuals have become internalised within societal structures and ongoing social relations become irrelevant. In this sense, the actor effectively becomes atomised again, although for different reasons from the under-socialised account. Instead, Granovetter (1985), in steering a path between the extremes of over- and under-socialisation, suggests that actors do not behave outside a social context, nor do they adhere to some pre-written script. In reality, according to Granovetter, relationships between actors are part of an ongoing process.

Granovetter (1985; 1990; 1992), in postulating his embeddedness approach, maintains that social relationships can substantially alter the nature of transactions between individuals, and that an embeddedness approach can facilitate an understanding of how the workings of a capitalist economy are influenced by being embedded within social relations. In his description of an under-socialised account, social interaction between individuals is unimportant, and institutions are seen as suppressing malfeasance and ensuring trust. Within the over-socialised account, appeal is made to a 'generalised morality' within society. In contrast, Granovetter's:

[56] There are clear linkages here to Ritzer (1993 and 1998) and the idea of non-rationalities emerging within a post-modern society. Similarly, as posited within Section 2.4, 'AS' can in part be read as a reaction to the exclusive focus on profits within the 'conventional' agro-food system.

> "Embeddedness argument stresses instead the role of concrete personal relations and structures (or 'networks') of such relations in generating trust and discouraging malfeasance. The widespread preference for transacting with individuals of known reputation implies that few are actually content to rely on either generalised morality or institutional arrangements to guard against trouble...Better than the statement that someone is known to be reliable is information from a trusted informant that he has dealt with that individual and found him so. Even better is information from one's own past dealings with that person" (Granovetter 1985: 490).

The notion of embeddedness, as defined by Granovetter, is different then from that of Polanyi. The latter suggests the need for an institutional framework (which is likely to include non-economic elements) within which economic transactions take place, whereas Granovetter is concerned with networks of ongoing social relations which take account of previous interactions and are highly contingent upon the motivations of the individuals concerned. There is a need, therefore, to analyse these networks within particular micro-level contexts (Granovetter 1990; 1992; Callon 1998a).

The neoclassical account sees the market as an impersonal arena in which participants behave entirely rationally in the pursuit of maximum personal gain, but there is a growing literature that recognises a plurality of motivations at a personal level, that incorporate social and cultural dimensions (Friedland and Robertson 1990; DiMaggio 1990; Thorne 1996; Lie 1997). For example, Lie (1997: 353) suggests that "the neoclassical market concept elides different types of market exchange", whereas an embeddedness approach can help elucidate the way in which economies, culture and social relations, are enmeshed in complex assemblages. Network analysis is central to Granovetter's approach, and it is this notion of embeddedness that has been extensively adopted by authors in a range of disciplines (such as economic sociology, economics, and economic and human geography), to rethink the relationship between the economy and society. It can allow for alternative understandings of economic exchange processes that may not make sense when viewed from a rational neoclassical perspective (Friedland and Robertson 1990; Thorne 1996; Tigges *et al.* 1998; Curry 1999; Oinas 1999; Mtika 2000).

However, it is important to recognise that the notion of 'social embeddedness', as outlined above, is not without criticism. For example, Krippner (2001), whilst acknowledging Granovetter as popularising the concept, cautions that in reworking

Polanyi's original concept from an earlier era he has altered its fundamental meaning. Polanyi emphasised that societal motivations are incorporated into institutions to fulfil those motivations, rather than the other way around. For example, Polanyi's 'double movement' saw "economic liberals...mould[ing] social institutions to the shape of commodities" in order to enable the functioning of the market and in response, "society sought to protect itself from the degradations imposed by the market" (*ibid.*: 781) through the use of institutional regulations. In other words, both the market and its responses were socially constructed. In comparison, the network of social relations Granovetter proposes sees the "market as a residue of social activity that is not itself social" (*ibid.*: 795), and in so doing perpetuates the separation of the market from society rather than seeing the market as the result of social construction. Krippner (2001) argues that at a theoretical level, this continuing separation of the market from society restricts our wider understanding of the market. However, this thesis is not principally concerned with the theoretical conceptualisation of the market, and notwithstanding Krippner's reservations, the notion of 'social embeddedness' is considered to be a pivotal descriptive and analytical tool within this thesis, that substantially contributes to an examination of the social relationships within emerging 'AS' in the agro-food system.

Hinrichs (2000) uses a social embeddedness approach to analyse whether agricultural outlets, based on face-to-face links between producers and consumers (specifically Farmers' Markets and Community Supported Agriculture), provide an alternative exchange context to the globalised agro-food system due to the increased social connections made possible. She argues, that:

> "For many, the notion of social embeddedness has become a convenient shorthand for social ties, assumed to modify and enhance human economic interactions [and that] embeddedness, in this sense of social connection, reciprocity and trust, is often seen as the hallmark (and comparative advantage) of direct agricultural markets" (Hinrichs 2000: 296).

However, she cautions that the significance of social embeddedness needs to be critically assessed in that social connections do not necessarily preclude the importance of price. As such, she draws on the work of Block (1990)[57], who introduces the notions

[57] Although Block (1990) is usually being referred to and quoted in the context of Hinrichs (2000), the original work has also been accessed, and is referenced where appropriate.

of marketness and instrumentalism, as "a sort of conceptual shadow to social embeddedness" (Hinrichs 2000: 297). Block (1990) suggests that all economic transactions take place along a continuum of marketness, where at one extreme price is everything, whilst at the other, price is still relevant, but there are other factors as well. Block (1990) then supplements the marketness continuum with a second continuum of instrumentalism which denotes individual motivations. 'High instrumentalism' is when economic goals are prioritised, whereas 'low instrumentalism' is where economic goals are altered by social relations, such as friendship, family, and morality. "If marketness expresses the relevance of price in the transaction, instrumentalism captures the nature of individual motivation" (Hinrichs 2000: 297), and all markets can be understood as a mix of social embeddedness, marketness and instrumentalism (*ibid.*).

Compared to conventional outlets, Hinrichs (2000) concludes that FMs do represent a market with embedded social ties. However, she argues that this embeddedness needs to be qualified by the notions of marketness and instrumentalism. For example, although producers clearly enjoy the markets as a social event, their primary motivation for attending is the price premium available which allows them to stay in business. Likewise from the consumers' perspective, while fresh high quality produce coupled with concerns for local farmers may be their primary motivations for attending, price is still relevant. Similarly, the intention of building social ties at FMs can be for instrumental purposes. For example, producers may do so in order to sell more of their produce, and consumers may do so in order to build up trust in the produce they are buying. In either case, embedded social ties can be seen as serving highly instrumental ends and Hinrichs (2000: 299) suggests that "sometimes what producers are selling to consumers at FMs is, in part, the aura of personal relations and social connection. Embeddedness itself then becomes some of the 'value-added' in the FM experience". Consequently, Hinrichs concludes that although FMs do enable closer social ties, they are still essentially based upon commodity exchange.

In discussing the relevance of social embeddedness to an examination of LETS, (Thorne, 1996) recognises that essentially all economic exchange is embedded within social relations, but that power is often unevenly distributed, such as within the global economy. In this case, although globalised processes may incorporate social embeddedness it is often distantiated and beyond the control of individuals at a local level. She therefore introduces the term 're-embedding'[58] to describe the purposive action by which individuals or communities seek to create accessible structures that can allow them to regain some control within exchange processes, which may include incorporating wider motivations than simply commercial profit. "Whereas 'embeddedness' is a descriptive and analytical tool, 're-embedding' is a way of talking about resistances to the unevenness and disempowerment of an embedded global economy" (*ibid.*: 1362). In other words, the process of re-embedding signals the politicisation of those actors who set up 'AS' such as LETS and FMs. However, individual consumers who participate within these 'AS' may continue to "have an 'undeveloped' consciousness" (Goodman and DuPuis 2002: 7), unless they seek to actively engage with the processes of re-embedding.

So far in Section 3.3 the relevance of 'embeddedness' has been explained in terms of social embeddedness, and purposive re-embedding. However, within agro-food studies, it is also starting to be used in terms of the natural component of food production, as well as the place and nature of production. As suggested under Chapter Two (Section 2.2.2), whilst the contemporary agro-food system appears globalised and aspatial, it is in reality inextricably embedded within local and regional contexts to some extent, not least due to the resilience of nature. Chapter Two (Section 2.3.2) then highlighted how food scares (such as the BSE crisis) have heightened consumer awareness of the food chain, and that quality is increasingly being tied to nature whereby it is assumed that "the higher the natural content of food the less susceptible it will be to malign human interference" (Murdoch *et al.* 2000: 108). Similarly, food provenance has grown in importance, as food with an identifiable locality (or locally specific place) of production, is somehow assumed to be of a higher quality than anonymous produce. As a result of these tendencies, Murdoch *et al.* (2000: 116) suggest that "the notion of embeddedness can, therefore, be extended to include natural, as well as social, relations", as 'quality' food production is increasingly embedded (or re-embedded) in local contexts and 'natural' processes. However, if the output of these 'AS' remains too physically embedded it is likely to remain small-scale. In order to extend its economic impact, it must somehow combine embeddedness and disembeddedness in complex ways (Murdoch *et al.*, 2000). Within this context, distance becomes of secondary importance,

[58] This term was first introduced in this thesis under Section 2.4.2, when discussing LETS as an 'AS'.

but the product must reach the end consumer "embedded with information" (Marsden *et al.* 2000: 425).

3.4 Applying the notion of embeddedness to alternative strategies

Clearly, notions of embeddedness have been variously extended and incorporated into agro-food studies and Section 3.3 has sought to identify the relationships involved. However, the self-apparent complexity of these notions, and their usage, demands further clarification. Table 3.1 offers a six cell matrix of how the variable utilisation of embeddedness within the agro-food system might be more simply understood, namely in terms of: creating alterity; valorising 'local' assets; or in appropriating its underlying commercial benefits. The columns are not intended to be mutually exclusive, nor to describe a particular 'AS', rather they aim to facilitate the conceptualisation of embeddedness within this context.

Table 3.1 The utilisation of 'embeddedness' within the agro-food system

	Embeddedness	
Alterity	**Valorisation**	**Appropriation**
The *manner* in which certain actors within the food chain are intent on creating a system of food production and distribution that is not based exclusively on the commodity relationship and profit maximisation.	The *manner* in which the 'value' of the natural, social and local embeddedness of production can enable comparative commercial advantage in the market exchange process.	The *manner* in which those actors operating at the globalised level extract commercial value from systems that were originally set up to circumvent their domination of food production and consumption.
The *purpose* is to incorporate social, environmental, equity and health issues into the production and consumption of food (as well as the economic), in order to more broadly address the issue of sustainable food production.	The *purpose* is to enable those areas marginalised by globalisation to remain economically viable by making use of their endogenous resources.	The *purpose* is to enable the maximisation of commercial profit by accessing emerging niche markets through incorporating the embeddedness of production processes, and in some cases subsequently globalising it.

In the case of *alterity*[59], there is a deliberate attempt to disengage from the 'conventional' food system, and in particular from the "narrow commodity and market relations on which it is based" (Kloppenburg *et al.* 1996: 38). For example: the organic food system strives to embed production within 'natural processes'; the fair-trade system endeavours to embed production within 'equitable social relations' (Raynolds 2000: 297); LETS seek to embed exchange processes within 'social relationships' (Thorne, 1996); and FMs aim to embed production within specific localities and to permit direct contact between the producer and consumer. The intention of these approaches is to remove "the fetishism of commodities" (Lee 1996: 1384), and to insist on the reconnection of food production with its consumption. Economic profitability is still of importance, but not to the exclusion of everything else. In terms of economic market share, such movements are always likely to remain relatively small, but their true significance is in "challeng[ing] the development ideologies at the heart of capitalist society" (Tovey 1997: 23), by re-embedding production within natural and social processes that are ignored within the 'conventional' food system.

Concurrent with these ethical motivations to create alterity within the agro-food system, are commercial pressures to maximise the economic potential of the opportunities afforded by embedding production processes in specific ways. An example of this, is the economic *valorisation* of local distinctiveness as a response to marginalisation within the globalised food system. The produce of this valorisation may be marketed locally, but in order to broaden its economic impact it must somehow extend its reach beyond the local level. In this context, Murdoch *et al.* (2000) stress that the embeddedness of production should not be seen as significant in itself, except in so far as enabling comparative commercial advantage. The development of SFSC[60] that ensure the end consumer remains connected to the production process then becomes critical. Also important is the retention of the valuc-added within this process for the locality of production, such as through registering its 'cultural distinctiveness' under a PDO or PGI scheme[61].

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[59] Alterity is a noun meaning 'otherness'. It implies more than simply 'distinctive' or 'different', in that it incorporates an intention to produce change.
[60] Short Food Supply Chains (SFSC).
[61] PDO (Protected Designation of Origin). PGI (Protected Geographical Indication).

There is also the potential for the *appropriation* of the economic benefits associated with the embeddedness of production and consumption practices by dominant actors within the 'conventional' agro-food system. This is in response to the actual, or perceived, demands of their consumers for distinctive or somehow positively differentiated produce. This tendency is particularly apparent with organic food where, as discussed under Section 2.4.4, its production is becoming increasingly 'conventionalised' (Buck *et al.*, 1997). In other words, although an 'AS' may emerge as a response to the disembedded 'conventional' agro-food system, once they become economically significant enough they are incorporated into the latter's structures and must once again compete on those terms.

Section 3.3 showed how notions of embeddedness can enable a better understanding of the exchange processes within the modern agro-food system (and in particular within 'AS'), by acknowledging the effect of *social* relationships on the neoclassical conception of the market. Section 3.4 has sought to conceptualise the utilisation of embeddedness within the agro-food system. Section 3.5 now explains how the notion of 'regard' can extend this understanding further, by recognising the role of *personal* relationships within the exchange process.

3.5 The economy of regard

> "Increasingly, research is highlighting the importance of social networks of personal contact for the transmission of business information and knowledge, and for the generation of trust in economic relationships. The notion of the market as an impersonal neutral arena for pure commodity exchange is therefore being challenged...Even the notion of commodity exchange as a defining characteristic of Western market economies has been questioned by some who see that a great deal of what passes as commodity exchange bears close resemblance to gift exchange. While commodity exchange is about profit and consumption and presumes independence between the parties to a transaction, gift exchange is about the creation and maintenance of personal relationships" (Curry 1999: 287).

Notions of 'embeddedness' can allow for the inclusion of social and natural elements within networks of production, and in this instance, the agro-food system. They can, therefore, help to understand how trust is formed within the exchange process and the importance of transparency and connection as a means of modifying the relationship between the participants involved. In her analysis of FMs, Hinrichs (2000) concluded that although there was a social element present at FMs, they were still based on a commodity relationship. A commodity relationship is undoubtedly present at FMs, but it is argued that it is only part of what happens at FMs. It is also not what distinguishes and defines FMs. In particular, it fails to acknowledge those elements that are intrinsic to personal contact, but beyond the sheer mechanics of the exchange process itself. This is evidenced, for example, in such comments as 'the sociability of the experience', or 'job satisfaction' (see Chapter Two, Section 2.5).

In a seminal paper on 'regard', Offer (1997) postulates that where there are personal relations, and in particular face-to-face interaction, there must be more to the exchange process than purely the economic. In accordance with the opening quote by Curry (1999), Offer (1997) suggests that despite the growth of the market economy as described by Polanyi and others, non-market exchange has persisted, and that "goods and services continue to be transferred without the benefit of markets or prices, to be exchanged as *gifts* (*ibid.*: 450, emphasis in the original)...[whereby] gift exchange has two elements: the gains from trade, and the satisfactions of regard" (*ibid.*: 452). As described above, within the neoclassical market exchange personal interaction is immaterial, although increasingly the social embeddedness of transactions is acknowledged. Nevertheless, traded goods are all that is exchanged. Within the gift exchange, there is also the benefit of personal interaction and a relationship that derives satisfaction through such responses as: reputation, friendship, sociability, respect, attention, and intimacy – or in other words, the exchange of 'regard' (*ibid.*).

Although difficult to measure, because there are no easy indicators, 'regard' does have a value, and as such, those who recognise and appreciate this value have a strong incentive to continue in the relationship. In more practical terms, the ongoing face-to-face contact also builds up mutual trust and credibility, which in turn "economises on the transaction costs of monitoring, compliance, and enforcement" (*ibid.*: 454) within exchange processes. However, 'regard' must be communicated, with language the most obvious medium, such as in saying 'hello' and 'thank you', although non-verbal communication in the form of a smile or a wave, can equally demonstrate 'regard'. Where goods are standardised, prices alone are generally sufficient to enable exchange to take place. But when goods are more specialised, or have multiple and complex dimensions of quality, so there is a preference for personalising the exchange process. Large-scale business has recognised the importance of this distinction, and sought to simulate personal relationships through branding, and targeting promotions towards specific consumer groups. Yet, 'regard' exists in the absence of money, and in fact is in danger of being devalued where there is the suggestion that commercial motivations underpin it. Where this happens, Offer (1997: 454) describes this as "pseudo-regard", and consumers feel that they are not being treated as an individual. 'Regard', therefore, needs to be personalised if it is to be seen as authentic by consumers, in that "a gift without regard would be a bribe" (*ibid.*: 454).

Despite the apparent positives associated with 'regard' in exchange processes, there are also 'obligations' in the form of having to reciprocate the 'regard' that has been given. This requires a two-way intimacy, which may not be what is wanted by one, or both, of the participants concerned. In this case, the "excessive intimacy can be stressful", compared to "the anonymity of the market [which] confers an immunity from such bonds" (*ibid.*: 455).

Drawing on the work of Offer (1997), Lee (2000) also uses the notion of 'regard' in order to try and understand the motivations of participants in exchange processes, that would appear to be unviable when evaluated on conventional economic criteria. He proposes that although Offer (1997) talks about personal relationships as resulting in 'regard', this notion could be extended to impersonal relationships. Specifically he examines small-scale horticultural nurseries, where the dissemination and sharing of knowledge about a common interest is seen as creating use values "through a form of mutually recognised reciprocity" (Lee 2000: 139). This includes "enjoyment and fulfilment in the transmission and extension of knowledge as well as in the products to which the knowledge is attached" (*ibid.*: 140). Lee (2000) suggests that this can help explain why a business that appears to be un-commercial when evaluated against a capitalist economic rationale, can be considered successful by its participants. In this case, different conventions of value are being implemented, which satisfy the participants (despite their apparent lack of economic coherence), and as such "it is possible to identify spaces of production *within* the market but *outside* the norms of capitalist evaluation" (*ibid.*: 138, emphasis in the original). This is seen by Lee as a reversal of Offer's 'economy of regard' (which was concerned with how reciprocity influenced the economic), and so he postulates 'regard of economy', which entails questioning the dominance of capitalism as the sole evaluator of exchange success.

More recently, Sage (2003) has utilised the notion of regard to help assess the durability of an alternative 'good food' network in south-west Ireland that is based upon a set of shared ethical values incorporating animal welfare, sustainable production methods and a sense of locality. Sage argues that in the face of the possible subsumption of this network within the mainstream food industry, "it may yet prove decisive that the relations of regard founded on mutual appreciation of the socially embedded character of much of its food can bring together producers and consumers within the region to sustain a distinctive and flourishing alternative to culinary uniformity and tastelessness" (*ibid.*: 59).

Specifically in the context of this thesis, the following quote from Lyson *et al.* (1995: 112) encapsulates the necessity of having a different optic within which to view the significance of FMs, and how this should extend beyond a simple economic evaluation:

> "The dominant neoclassical economic paradigm is unable to accommodate economic relations that are embedded in local communities. From a neo-classical standpoint, FMs may not make good economic sense. From a community perspective, however, they can nurture local economic development, maintain diversity and quality in products, and provide opportunities for producers and consumers to come together to solidify bonds of local identity and solidarity".

It is argued, therefore, that an examination of the empirical data of this thesis through the notions of 'embeddedness' and 'regard' can enable a deep and insightful understanding of the reconfiguration of the relations between producers and consumers at FMs. However, an intellection of the wider significance of 'AS' within the UK agro-food system requires the incorporation of these data within a broader theoretical framework. Section 3.6, therefore, now delineates the theoretical framework within which this thesis is set, namely, Conventions Theory (CT). It provides the context for choosing CT, and in particular CT's ability to encompass the embeddedness of economic transactions within a network approach which recognises complex quality constructions. It concludes with a model of how 'AS' might be conceptualised within

CT. Chapter Seven subsequently explains how this thesis adapts CT as a result of the research undertaken.

3.6 Conventions Theory

3.6.1 Introduction

> "A recognition of the rootedness of economic activity in heterogeneous worlds of justifiable action provides an important wedge with which to resist the universalising market ideology which dominates current policy proposals for agro-food...CT establishes an important bridge to other currents of analysis in the social sciences, most notably the actor-network and the embeddedness approaches of the new economic sociology" (Wilkinson 1997a: 336).

As discussed within Section 3.1, macro-level political-economic accounts have sought to explain the way in which processes of globalisation have shaped food production and consumption, focussing principally on the production end of the food chain. Inherent within these accounts has been a recognition of the importance of standardised production and consumption, which allows food quality to be judged against 'uniform standards', and aspatial TNCs to 'act at a distance'. However, as explained in Chapter Two (Section 2.3), a loss of consumer confidence in 'uniform standards', coupled with changing dynamics in rural areas, has led to increasing fragmentation within the UK agro-food system. As such, many authors now suggest that the contemporary food system is undergoing a 'qualitative shift', wherein variable and contested definitions of 'quality' have become central to the development of 'AS'. Quality within these emerging 'AS' is often linked with 'natural' production processes that incorporate local and social embeddedness.

Nevertheless, despite these 'AS', there is also widespread agreement that standardised mass produced foods are likely to continue to dominate within the food chain, leading Murdoch and Miele (1999: 469) to suggest that food is becoming delineated along two principal dimensions: "standardised, industrialised global food networks [and] localised, specialised production processes". While the former have been extensively researched through macro-level approaches, the latter have received scant attention, which Marsden *et al.* (2000: 426) identify as a "significant research gap in recent literature". They argue that it is becoming increasingly important to be able to establish "how struggles around new definitions of quality can empower local producers" (*ibid.*: 437), and in the process, create additional value for rural areas. As indicated under Section 3.1, this necessitates examining the contingency of value constructions, or perceptions of quality[62], within particular contexts, and in this case, FMs. There is also the need to understand how produce that is imbued with certain quality parameters that tie it to particular social or geographical contexts, can extend beyond those boundaries and engage with wider markets such as through the implementation of SFSC[63].

Section 3.1 introduced that many authors now consider a network approach can provide the necessary tools with which to understand the growing complexity of the modern UK agro-food system. In particular, Actor Network Theory (ANT) has been widely proposed, in that it allows for a symmetrical perspective that can help to overcome dualisms, such as those between nature and society, and the global and local levels[64]. However, there are concerns that it does not allow for theoretical explanation, and that it "provides few tools for the analysis of quality" (Murdoch *et al.* 2000: 107). As identified above, quality constructions within 'AS' can be complex, consisting of both rational and non-rational logics, and be underpinned by various notions of embeddedness and regard. The theoretical framework used for their analysis within this thesis must, therefore, be able to incorporate the broad range of conventions (based on perceptions of quality or value) that determine particular production-consumption practices, rather than assuming a universal logic of profit maximisation. Murdoch *et al.* (2000: 120) argue that although "ANT shows us how economic processes are embedded in nature...conventions theory allows us to distinguish different types of embeddedness". As such, *Conventions Theory* (CT) has been adopted as the theoretical framework for this thesis.

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[62] It is apparent that there is a tendency sometimes for the terms 'value' and 'quality' to be used almost synonymously within the literature on discussions of food. For example, expressions such as 'definitions of food quality' and 'value constructions of food', may well be talking about the same thing. The understanding in this thesis is that 'value' will always refer to the extrinsic qualities of food: whereas 'quality' may refer to either the extrinsic, or intrinsic qualities of food. For example, the intrinsic quality of food may be its freshness, or taste: whereas the extrinsic quality of food may include that it has been locally produced, or fairly traded. It is considered that in most cases it will be clear from the context what is meant, but where there is any ambiguity, reference will be made to a footnote.
[63] SFSC (Short Food Supply Chains).

3.6.2 Conventions Theory, embeddedness and 'alternative strategies'

Closely allied to ANT (and sharing methodological similarities), CT originated in France, where it is seen as a contribution to 'non-standard' economic thinking[65]. It developed as a means of analysing "the rules, norms and conventions which underwrote the wage relation" (Wilkinson 1997a: 309), in the presence of 'incomplete contracts' within the commodity of 'labour'. It has since been extended into a more "generalised organisational theory of economic activity" (*ibid.*: 309), as the 'incomplete contracts' within the commodity of 'labour' have been more generally recognised within all commodities, necessitating "rules, norms and conventions for their production and exchange" (*ibid.*: 309). As such, Murdoch *et al.* (2000: 113) suggest that CT now more broadly enables an examination of the "underlying systems of negotiation that configure modern economies".

CT is "a product-centred theory of production organisation" (Salais and Storper 1992: 170), which takes a symmetrical approach to the inclusion of both social and natural elements within processes of production. It seeks to understand how economic activity is co-ordinated and stabilised through conventions into particular networks, and that these conventions are as important in defining product quality and determining production practices, as market demands and technological advances. Conventions in this context are described as "practices, routines, agreements, and their associated informal or institutional forms which bind acts together through mutual expectations" (Salais and Storper 1992: 171). Critically, the focus within CT is on 'quality', rather than price and quantity, and in particular the social construction of quality. This provides an important link with the notions of 'embeddedness' and 'regard', as resultant conventions may be based on 'heterogeneous logics', that might appear *illogical* when assessed by 'standard' economic thinking (Salais and Storper 1992; Wilkinson 1997a; 1997b).

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[64] Appendix B contains a brief review of ANT in order to provide additional context for the use of CT. However, it was decided not to include this information within the main body of the text because ANT has not actually been used within this thesis.

[65] As opposed to 'standard' economic thinking, or neoclassical economics (Wilkinson, 1997a).

Conventions can provide clarification within exchange processes, where there is uncertainty about the quality of the product to be exchanged. The loss of faith in the 'uniform standards' of standardised food production is indicative of uncertainty, and the notion of an 'incomplete contract', "wherein the goods in question are not fully defined prior to their exchange" (Wilkinson 1997a: 321). Indeed, Busch (2000: 276) suggests that all exchange requires some form of convention in order to function, and that "even in a commercial contract, agreement among individuals is not possible without a constitutive convention". In the case of 'AS', actors at a more localised level are seeking to take a more active part in the creation of conventions of exchange that incorporate production transparency, rather than relying on 'incomplete' globalised standards.

CT is concerned with the characteristics of people and objects in the marketplace, and the way in which they negotiate exchange outcomes, rather than relying solely on the price mechanism as within neoclassical models (Busch, 2000). Conventions represent the collective result of individual preferences, which are seen as providing greater gains than individuals could achieve in isolation. However, although based on commonly held values (or definitions of quality), they are open to continuous scrutiny and negotiation, which necessitates following actors within particular situations to see how they mobilise networks around particular definitions of quality. Within this process, networks are interpreted from within their formation, rather than explained from without, and no prior distinction is made between non-human and human actors (Wilkinson 1997a). For example, the conventions of exchange within emerging 'AS' are being negotiated around notions of embeddedness and heterogeneity, that incorporate 'cultural capital'. Within the 'conventional' agro-food system, negotiations are based around homogeneity, efficiency and cost (see Chapter Two, Section 2.3). The degree of negotiation possible within a network depends upon the degree to which it is 'black boxed'[66] and open to resistance and change. Murdoch and Miele (1999: 471) suggest that simplistically conventions can take two 'ideal institutional forms':

> "On the one hand, there are sets of standardised, codified rules and norms that impose conventions across a range of diverse contexts; on the other

[66] There is a tendency when networks are functioning properly for the actions of the network to appear as a simple entity, that hides the complexity of the network behind it (e.g. a television, the human body, or the 'conventional' agro-food system) (Law, 1992). In Actor Network Theory terms, these networks are said to be 'black boxed'. See Appendix B for further details.

> hand, conventions may emerge from local, personalised, idiosyncratic sets of relations".

However, as argued above, the reality is more convoluted than that. This is recognised by Murdoch and Miele (1999) and Murdoch *et al.* (2000), who both reference the work of Boltanski and Thevenot (1991)[67] in identifying five categories of conventions around which collective definitions of 'qualities' may be combined:

> "*Commercial* conventions, which include evaluations by price and the commercial quality of goods; *domestic* conventions, which are largely based on trust and involve goods which can draw upon attachments to place and traditional modes of production; *industrial* conventions, in which goods are evaluated according to standards of efficiency and reliability; *public* conventions, such as the recognition consumers give to trademarks, brands, and packaging; and *civic* conventions, which refer to the worth of certain goods in terms of their general social benefits" (Murdoch *et al.* 2000: 114)[68].

CT can provide a theoretical framework within which to understand how different combinations of standards and qualities are 'brokered' by actors within various contexts, to create apparently stable networks based on particular conventions (in this case through an analysis of the producers and consumers at FMs). It can thus help to explain how compromises are reached, and why certain production systems are founded on one convention rather than another. Also, by framing its enquiry on variable constructions of quality through an examination of network formation, the social and natural components of production and consumption can be considered, rather than seeing them as externalities, as in neoclassical economic accounts. This then allows for "the discussion of embeddedness as it affects food production", and is incorporated into the food chain at various levels (Murdoch *et al.* 2000: 122; Murdoch and Miele 1999).

However, despite the heterogeneous logics, and the potential for diversity within the construction of conventions, Salais and Storper (1992: 171) caution that "any approach to production must pass a test of economic coherence [and that] it must still work in a

[67] The original is in French and inaccessible to the author. No translation is currently available to the author's knowledge.

[68] In discussing the ability of CT to incorporate nature within its framework of quality evaluation, Murdoch *et al.* (2000: 115) suggest the possibility of adding an *ecological* convention. This is seen as specifically acknowledging the importance of nature to the way in which produce 'quality' is determined within the modern, fragmented agro-food system, over and above its more general relevance within the domestic and civic conventions. Nature as very much part of the 'value' of a product, rather than an encumbrance to be overcome, as within macro-level accounts of globalisation.

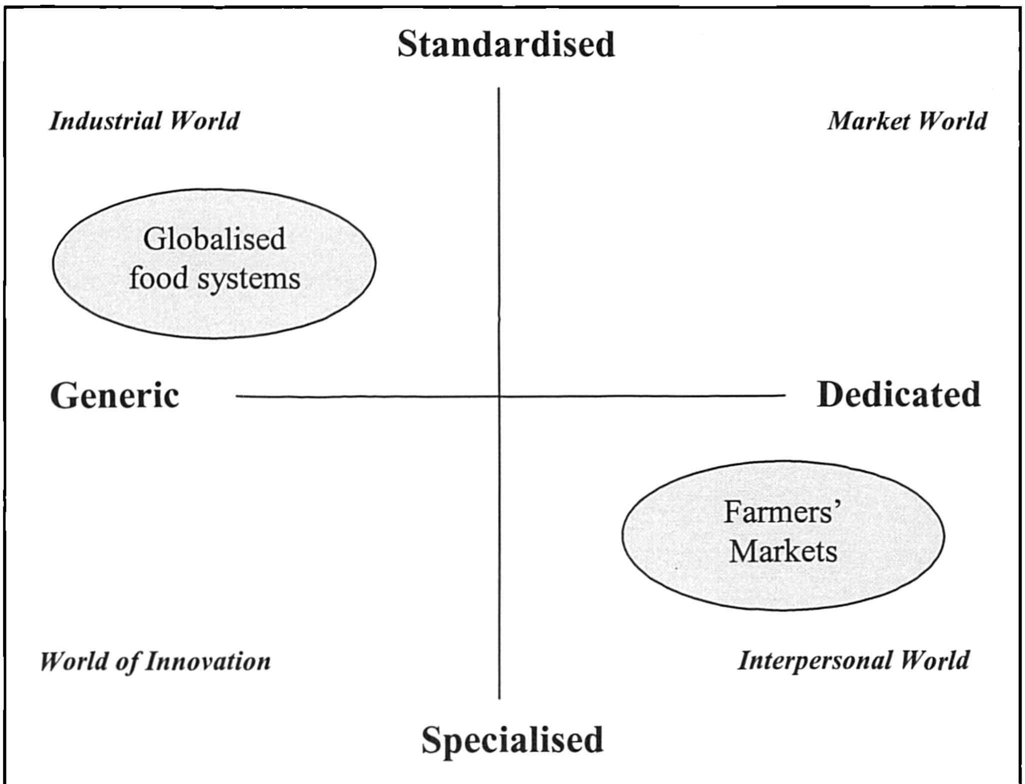
world dominated by market exchanges". As such, they (along with Storper, 1997) suggest that there are a limited number of models of production, which they have defined in terms of four ideal 'worlds of production'. Each of these provides an 'action framework', within which bundles of conventions are bound together to form a coherent whole, and each functions under fundamentally different principles. They are described as 'ideal' in that they are seen to represent "basic product characteristics that can be decomposed no further" (Storper 1997: 107), and they are derived from two principal production dimensions. Firstly, whether production is *standardised* or *specialised*; and secondly, whether it is *generic* or *dedicated.* A standardised product is 'widely attainable' and competition is based on price. With a specialised product, production is of a more specialist nature, and although price still remains of consequence, competition on quality becomes important. Along the second dimension, a generic product can be sold anonymously into the market because its inherent qualities are well known, either through a respected brand name, or due to the standardised nature of its production. In contrast, a dedicated product has a more specific demand profile and client orientation (Storper, 1997).

There are, then, four 'ideal' types of production system based on these two dimensions: standardised-generic, standardised-dedicated, specialised-generic, and specialised-dedicated, each of which "implies different combinations of assets and rationalities of behaviour on the part of producers and users" (Salais and Storper 1992: 177). In turn, these 'ideal' types can be described respectively as: the *Industrial World*, the *Market World*, the *World of Innovation,* and the *Interpersonal World* (see Figure 3.1).

The Industrial World is based on conventions concerning price competition and efficiency, and can be equated with standardisation and the globalised agro-food system described earlier. Produce from this 'world' can be sold in the absence of direct contact between buyer and seller, due to its generic nature. The Interpersonal World involves producers of dedicated products who, either cannot, or choose not to increase their scale. Production is based on traditional skills and locally specific knowledge, and domestic and civic conventions are likely to dominate, as well as ecological concerns (Salais and Storper 1992; Salais 1997; Murdoch and Miele 1999; Busch 2000). Clearly this 'world' incorporates 'AS' such as FMs, a point which is endorsed by Salais and Storper (1992: 176), who suggest that where there are local markets for local products:

> "The product cannot be sold independently of tight (social and spatial) linkages between producer and client. Only such tight linkage allows the qualities of the product to be known, for it is at base the identity of the producer, established within some type of community, which provides the information about the quality of the product".

Figure 3.1 The two 'product dimensions', and four 'worlds of production'



Adapted from: Salais and Storper (1992: 172); Storper 1997; Murdoch and Miele (1999: 472); Murdoch *et al.* (2000: 120).

The Market World involves producers responding to market signals for dedicated products, and in order to increase their commercial potential these products are mass produced. In terms of the agro-food system, this 'world' is likely to be the result of production moving from either the Industrial or Interpersonal worlds, and the conventions underpinning it will be a composite of the two. In the context of 'AS', the motivations of the actors involved, and the resultant conventions, can be related to Table 3.1 and the notions of 'alterity', 'valorisation' and 'appropriation', in order to understand how the embedded nature of production is operationalised.

The World of Innovation is concerned with the development of generic products, through the implementation of highly specialised knowledge. The market for these products may not yet be in existence, but it is within this 'world' that innovations for the Industrial World are initiated (Salais and Storper 1992; Salais 1997; Murdoch and Miele 1999). The usefulness of this world of production (WoP) to an analysis of the modern agro-food system, and in particular the evaluation of 'AS' within this thesis, is less apparent than with the other three 'worlds', although potentially the development of biotechnologies could be examined within this framework[69].

The political-economy approach to an analysis of the agro-food system has focussed on the Industrial World, typified by standardised-generic production, and within this framework the neoclassical logic of profit maximisation has prevailed. Less attention has been paid to the other 'worlds', and yet it is apparent that the increasing importance of the embeddedness of production in ensuring 'quality' within 'AS', necessitates an approach that can recognise the polymorphic and dynamic nature of the modern market for agro-food products (Wilkinson 1997a; Murdoch *et al.* 2000).

The 'frameworks of action' within each of these 'worlds' function on the basis that their constituent actors "have mutual expectations that coordinate their actions" (Storper 1997: 125). However, in reality, firms (or individual producers) may trade within more than one WoP, or change the emphasis of their production strategy to such an extent that they move into another 'world'. In this case, the conventions on which the quality of their produce is assessed will change. For example, in moving from the Interpersonal World to the Market World, price will become more important and the produce must be able to engender trust and confidence in the absence of face-to-face contact (Salais and Storper, 1992). This point is usefully illustrated by research carried out by Murdoch and Miele (1999) on food production-consumption processes in central Italy, which demonstrated how producers can move between different WoP in response to changing and increasingly complex demand patterns[70]. However, Murdoch *et al.* (2000: 119) in referring to quality food production that is locally embedded, caution that:

> "If the product comes too weighed down by domestic and ecological criteria then it is unlikely that it will travel far; it will more likely be confined to a

[69] Murdoch *et al.* (2000: 121) suggest that biotechnology may fit within the world of specialised–generic production, although they qualify this by explaining that it entails the use of 'specialised capabilities' in order to develop mass-markets for generic products. In other words, the two perspectives are not necessarily incompatible, in that the initial development of biotechnologies might be considered within the World of Innovation, whilst their implementation, within the Industrial World.

[70] Appendix C has further details of this research.

> narrow range of localised consumers. If, however, a product is completely disembedded from a local ecological system and the natural quality that this yields, then, although it might travel far, it risks carrying a set of industrial qualities that can all too easily fall out of favour with health conscious and ecologically concerned consumers…In short, quality foods must carry local natures into the mouths of today's concerned consumers".

This section has set out how CT can provide a theoretical framework apposite to an analysis of 'AS', through facilitating the incorporation of complex perceptions of quality. The following section addresses the use of CT to the specific analysis of FMs.

3.6.3 Conventions Theory and the analysis of Farmers' Markets

As explained in Chapters One and Two, the main aim of this thesis is to examine critically the characteristics of producer-consumer relations within emerging 'AS' in the UK agro-food system, through the micro-level analysis of actors engaging in actual relationships. Chapter Two (Section 2.5) justified the choice of the producers and consumers at FMs as the focus for this research, on the grounds that FMs embody many of the issues relating to 'AS' within the UK agro-food system. Principally this entails the variable utilisation of embeddedness, and debate over the construction of their underlying conventions. Of central importance to these processes are notions of food quality, which at FMs is promoted on the basis that the produce is local, and sold directly by someone involved in its production. As such, the production-consumption interface is highly embedded within local, social and natural processes. These are clearly attributes that fall within the domestic convention. Similarly, many of the proposed benefits of FMs shown within Table 2.2 (Chapter Two) (such as improving community spirit and encouraging social contact), fall logically within the civic convention. However, FMs are promoted as providing producers with the opportunity to extend their marketing outlets, which may then no longer be localised, or fall within the domestic convention. FMs are also limited in the volume of produce they can handle, which means that most participating producers and consumers will need to engage with a number of different retail outlets to fulfil their needs, which may, or may not, be based on the same conventions.

The debate surrounding the relevance of the NAFM certification scheme (see Chapter Two, Section 2.5), also exhibits the negotiation of FMs as a network. The contention here concerns the authenticity of FMs (as suggested by the NAFM criteria in Table 2.3, Chapter Two), verses their commercial viability (which entails relaxing the rules by which producers must abide if they want to sell their produce at FMs). The former (authenticity) is intent on remaining firmly within the domestic and civic conventions of the Interpersonal World. The latter (commercial viability) is more inclined towards the Market World, and quality constructions that tend towards commercial, and perhaps even industrial, conventions.

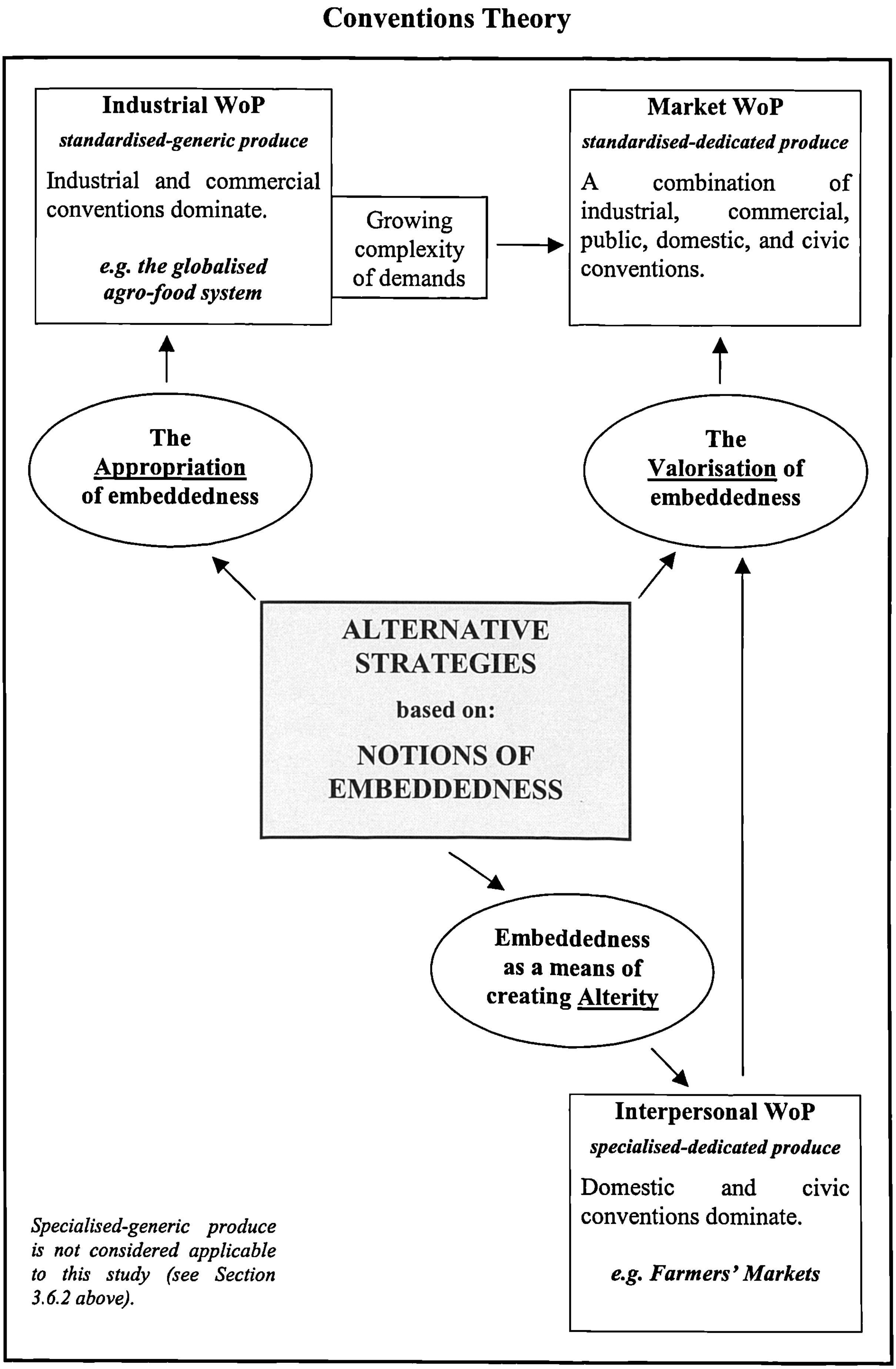
It is argued, therefore, that an analysis of how the producers and consumers at FMs relate to the produce at FMs, and to each other, will provide detailed empirical evidence of how conventions are being brokered in the context of network construction, and in particular, the way in which the various notions of embeddedness are included within these conventions. This will facilitate an understanding of what determines the successful functioning of FMs as a coherent network of food provision, and allow inferences to be drawn about the significance of embeddedness within 'AS' more generally, and consequently within the emerging 'alternative geographies of food' (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997).

This chapter has demonstrated how embeddedness forms the core of 'AS', and Figure 3.2 now provides a conceptual model that demonstrates how the variable assimilation of embeddedness[71] can impact on the development of 'AS' within the UK agro-food system. Set within the overall framework of CT, the model has 'AS' based on notions of embeddedness at its centre. Radiating from this central position are the three principal ways in which embeddedness is utilised within the agro-food system, as identified in Table 3.1. Section 3.3 described the effect of each of these three possibilities, and Figure 3.2 now indicates how they influence the configuration of the agro-food system. For example, where notions of embeddedness are appropriated by actors within the 'conventional' food system, quality evaluation will shift towards the Industrial WoP and the industrial and commercial conventions. Where actors seek to utilise embeddedness to valorise the assets of a locality, then the principal effect is likely to be an increase in the scale of their marketing orientation. In this case, quality evaluation will shift towards the Market WoP, and away from direct interaction. 'AS'

[71] Murdoch *et al.* (2000: 116) suggest that "CT potentially delivers some fairly precise analytical tools which [can] be utilised to determine different degrees of embeddedness".

that seek to utilise embeddedness as a means of creating alterity are likely to be within the Interpersonal WoP, although attempts to increase their economic scope may lead to a shift towards the Market WoP through the valorisation of their embeddedness. However, as described above, each of these WoP is open to negotiation and there is flexibility within their underlying conventions. There is, therefore, a dynamic relationship between the various components within this model, which in essence is what this thesis aims to explicate through its examination of producer-consumer relations at FMs.

Figure 3.2 A model showing the theoretical conceptualisation of 'AS' within the UK agro-food system



3.7 Summary

Until the early 1990s, research into the agro-food system had focused principally at the macro-level, with an emphasis on understanding how capital overcame the constraints of nature. However, a succession of food scares in the UK from the late 1980s, coupled with increasingly multifunctional demands on rural space, have necessitated a re-evaluation of the agro-food system. This re-evaluation has included an acknowledgement of the growing complexity of demands, both in terms of the quality of the food produced, but also in terms of the potential of food to contribute towards rural development. Inherent within this, has been a move towards 'careful consumption' amongst consumers (Marsden, 1998a), and the differentiation of food on the basis of its quality, which has increasingly been linked to the place and nature of production. Nature has also shown that it cannot simply be subsumed within capitalist processes, as it 'boomeranged back' (Murdoch, 2000), most graphically in the BSE crisis. Within macro-level accounts there has been a production-centred bias, with an emphasis on the standardisation of production and consumption, and the neoclassical logic of profit maximisation. However, within emerging accounts, there is a recognition that 'AS' based on various notions of natural and social embeddedness, can exhibit a heterogeneity of exchange motivations and quality constructions.

While the continuation of globalised agro-food systems is generally accepted, an understanding of 'AS' is becoming increasingly relevant to the future development of food production-consumption systems within the UK, and to the development of rural areas. Their examination requires a change of theoretical focus, from the macro-level production-centred accounts described above, to a micro-level examination of how the production-consumption interface is being reconfigured. This thesis uses FMs as the vehicle with which to do this, and in particular the relationship between producers and consumers. However, it is also essential to be able to relate these local-level findings to the wider UK agro-food system, in order to better understand their significance. It has been argued that CT provides an ideal theoretical framework with which to do this, in that it can facilitate the conceptualisation of the relationships involved, and incorporate the variable utilisation of 'embeddedness' within 'AS'.

Chapter 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PRESENTATION OF DATA FROM THE FARMERS' MARKET MANAGER SURVEY

4.1 Introduction

Chapters One, Two, and Three have set out the wider academic and policy context within which this thesis is set, and established the need for a more nuanced research focus that can encompass the growing fragmentation and complexity of the UK agro-food system. The research aim and objectives enumerated under Chapter One (Section 1.3) reflect this need, and the bulk of Chapter Four now explains the methodology and research methods adopted in order to achieve them. The second part of the chapter (from Section 4.7) then presents data from a survey of FM managers (see Section 4.2), which is subsequently used to triangulate the main body of this thesis's data, which are reported in Chapter Five (producers) and Chapter Six (consumers).

Central to this thesis is an analysis of the interaction between producers and consumers at FMs. This is in order to elucidate their motivations for engaging in this context, but also to interpret the way in which meaning, and more specifically quality, is ascribed and negotiated. The emphasis is on a micro-level perspective which concentrates on 'typical' situations from which generalisations can be inferred. In the process, the intention is to elicit the characteristics of producer-consumer relations at FMs and to establish a framework in which 'AS' within the UK agro-food system can be better understood. As such, this thesis uses a qualitative methodology in order to achieve its aim and objectives, and Table 4.1 now sets out its characteristics relevant to this end.

Table 4.1 The characteristics of a qualitative methodology

1. It assumes that the social world is always a human creation, and that reality results from interaction.
2. It attempts to interpret and capture human meanings and action in context.
3. It enables an understanding of complex, context-specific social phenomena.
4. It aims to understand, rather than to measure people.
5. There are a small number of respondents, and sampling is not on the basis of probability, but on 'typical' units.
6. Generalisation is valued, but in terms of a 'typical' case study.

Source: (Sarantakos 1998; Punch 1998).

This research was centred on a series of FM case studies involving producers and consumers who attend FMs. The selection of these case studies needed to be justified, and will be explained in detail under Section 4.3. However, before that, Section 4.2 describes the systematic and representative UK-wide survey of FMs that was undertaken in order to provide a context for the subsequent case study selection. This survey involved interviewing the managers of these markets, in that they were considered to be in the best position to supply the contextual information required[72].

4.2 The farmers' market manager survey

At the time of the survey (October 2000) there had already been a considerable body of research carried out on FMs, but caution was needed in its application. Firstly, much of the research on FMs in the UK had been carried out on pilot markets, and published in the form of limited distribution reports (see Chapter Two, Section 2.5). Secondly, apart from the NFU (2000) report (which looked at the economic impact of FMs), there had been no national-level research on FMs within the UK. Three aspects were considered within this survey in order to help justify the selection of the case study markets, but also to provide a national-level perspective on FMs that could contribute to the subsequent triangulation of the case study data:

1. Background information on FMs in the UK.
2. The management of FMs.

[72] In that they are involved in the ongoing management of FMs, and are therefore likely to be aware of the policy issues associated with their FM(s).

3. The perceived long-term role of FMs.

The data from the FM managers were collected using a questionnaire survey, which can be administered by face-to-face interviewing, telephone interviewing, or by post (Newell 1993; Sarantakos 1998). However, due to the numbers involved (134 managers – see below) and the dispersed nature of the respondents, face-to-face interviewing was deemed impractical in this instance. A postal survey was also considered, but the indications from anecdotal discussions with people involved within the FM network (at various meetings and conferences attended during the period leading up to this stage of research), were that many FM managers were likely to be suffering from 'research fatigue', following extensive local level surveys on their market. As such, there was a danger of low response rates, which would diminish the value of the survey findings. Hence, a telephone interview was deemed the most appropriate form of data collection.

The interview questionnaire utilised a mixture of pre-coded closed questions and open ended questions. Pre-coded questions were used where possible, and in particular where the questions were requesting basic information, such as the year in which the market was first held. They are easier to code and subsequently analyse, as well as allowing for a greater standardisation of the questionnaire format. However, they are unlikely to cover all the possible answers, and they restrict the respondent's freedom of expression, particularly when administered over the telephone, which necessarily restricts the number of options that can be offered (Newell 1993; Sarantakos 1998). Therefore, approximately 20% of the questionnaire involved open ended questions, which allowed the respondents more freedom of expression. Section A focussed on obtaining background information on individual markets. Section B asked for information on the setting up and management of the markets. The final section sought to elicit what factors were considered important to the success of the market and to its future viability, as well as what was considered to be the long-term role of the market. A copy of the interview questionnaire can be found in Appendix D.

The sampling frame was taken as the National Association of Farmers' Markets (NAFM) web site (NAFM, 2000a) as at the 11th October 2000, which listed 311 markets and therefore provided a UK-wide snapshot of FMs at that time. In order to expedite the survey process with the resources available, a sample was then chosen. May (1997) stresses that a sample's characteristics must be comparable to those of the population as a whole. In this case, statistical generalisation (which would necessitate probability sampling, in which each person in the population has an equal chance of being part of the sample) was considered to be of less importance than the need to cover all areas of the country, in order to justify the subsequent choice of 'typical' FMs for the case studies. Consequently, the 311 markets were listed alphabetically by county (or large city such as Bristol, Birmingham or London; Wales, or Scotland), and every other market chosen, with a minimum of one market from each of these areas. In some cases, the managers were responsible for more than one market, resulting in a final sample of 134 managers, covering 168 markets (see Figure 4.1, but please note there was also one market in Northern Ireland).

A pilot survey of 10 managers was undertaken in December 2000 in order to ascertain how the questionnaire would function in practice. As a result, minor adjustments were made to a number of the questions in order to prevent any misunderstandings. The results of this pilot survey were considered to be sufficiently valid to include within the main survey findings. Following these adjustments, the remaining interviews were conducted during December 2000 and January 2001. Ideally, each of the respondents would have been sent a letter outlining the purpose of the study before subsequently phoning them for an interview, however the NAFM website did not include address details of the managers. As such, respondents were telephoned without any prior knowledge of the research process, and in most instances were prepared to participate in the interview at that stage. Where this was not convenient, a suitable time was arranged and the interview conducted subsequently. The survey resulted in 94% of interviews being successfully completed (covering 159 markets including the pilot surveys), justifying the use of a telephone interview process. Due to the predominantly structured nature of the questionnaires, the interviews were not tape recorded. Replies to the more open questions were generally paraphrased, but written down verbatim where appropriate. This decision was taken because it was felt that interview transcriptions would have been time consuming, and yet would have yielded little extra data in this context.

Figure 4.1 The location of markets included within the Farmers' Market manager survey

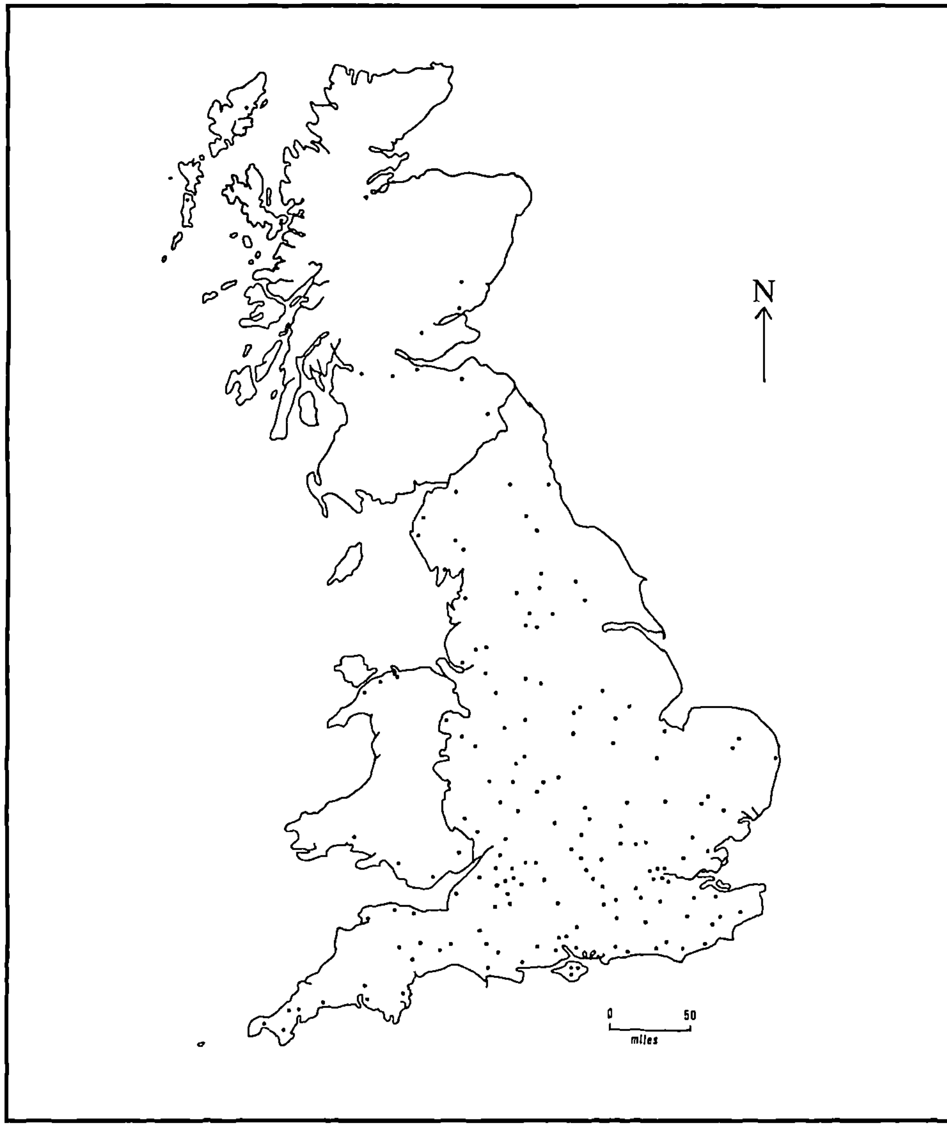
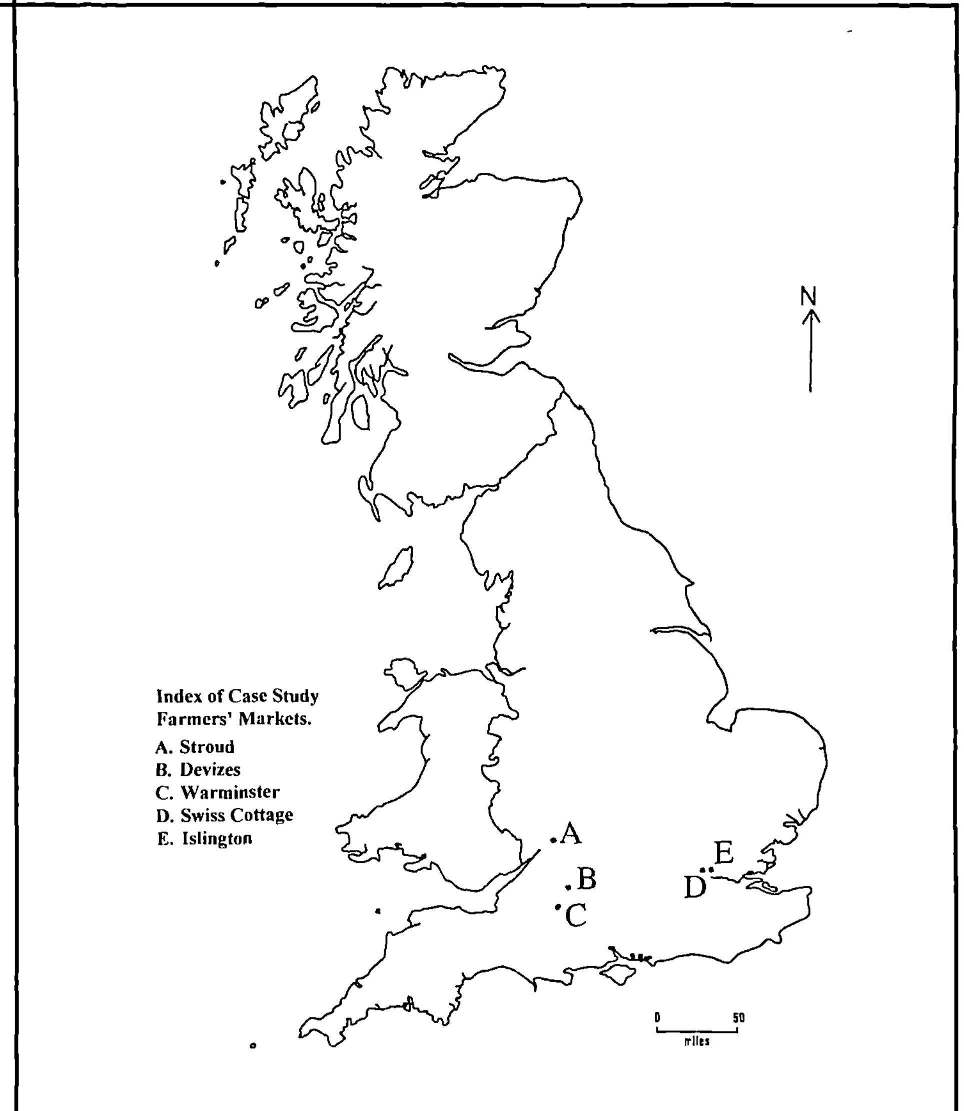


Figure 4.2 The location of the case study Farmers' Markets



The resultant data were of a both quantitative and qualitative nature, collected through a questionnaire survey that was multi-method in its design. The justification for taking this approach was that it provided a context for the case studies and an initial insight into what underpins FMs. Therefore, although this research is set within a qualitative methodology, it was appropriate to use both qualitative and quantitative methods within the research structure, in order to address the research questions. Crucially, the methods used should follow from the questions asked (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998; Punch 1998).

The data collected from the FM manager survey, that are relevant to the selection of the individual case studies, are reported within Appendix E. They have been included within an appendix, rather than in the main body of the text, because they are not directly applicable to the principal aim of this thesis and could, therefore, interrupt the overall flow of the argument. Nevertheless, should the reader be interested in these background data, they are available for reference. As outlined in Section 4.1, the data from this survey that *are* directly applicable to the main aim of the thesis, and which can help to triangulate the case study data, are then presented within Section 4.7.

4.3 The farmers' market case studies

The FM manager survey provided a broad outline of the operation of FMs within the UK, and a context for the selection of individual case studies. It was decided to adopt a case study approach for the core of this research, in that it enables a focus on particular situations and can provide an in-depth account of how relationships are experienced (Denscombe, 1998). Whilst the study of just a few cases would seem to be a poor basis for wider generalisations, they are studied in depth and Stake (1995: 7) suggests that "certain responses will come up again and again", thus potentially allowing for some generalisations to be drawn. The selection of case studies for this research involved a three stage process: firstly, the selection of case study areas; secondly, the selection of case study markets within those areas; and thirdly, the selection of individual producers and consumers within those markets, to act as the final case studies for in-depth analysis.

4.3.1 Selection of the case study areas

Due to the in-depth nature of the case study approach it was necessary to select a small number of cases from a large number of possibilities (311 FMs). This was not on the basis of probability (as it would be within a quantitative methodology), but on the basis of 'typical' or representative units (Stake 1995; Sarantakos 1998). The aim was primarily to understand individual cases, rather than to choose cases with the specific aim of understanding other cases (Stake, 1995). However, as Denscombe (1998: 33) points out, whatever the choice, it "needs to be justified".

The selection of the case study areas for this research was not made with the view to conducting a comparative study[73], but to provide a cross-section of markets that would be typical of FMs within the UK. An analysis of producer-consumer relations at FMs forms the essence of this research, and the actual structure and locality of individual FMs was not considered critical to this end, except in so far as they fulfilled the following criteria:

1. they provided a balance across the size of towns in which they are held, and the market radii from within which stallholders must come;
2. a number of management objectives were included across the case studies;
3. they covered a range of market frequencies, and producer and consumer numbers attending;
4. the markets should be well established, rather than new or pilot markets; and
5. the number of case studies and their geographical locations were logistically achievable with the resources available.

[73] In reporting the resultant data in Chapters Five and Six, where it is pertinent to make a comparison between FMs, this is done.

After much consideration, and subsequent to an analysis of the FM managers survey, the following case study areas, or locations, were chosen:

1. **London**, and in particular those markets run by London Farmers' Markets Limited (LFM). These markets were chosen because: they were representative of FMs in large towns, and the market radii is relatively large; they are managed by a private company with the principal aims of lowering the gap between rural and urban communities, and bringing fresh seasonal produce directly from the producer to the consumer; they are held weekly, and have relatively large numbers of both producers and consumers attending.

2. **Wiltshire**, and in particular those markets run by Wiltshire Farmers' Markets (WFM). These markets were chosen because: they are in a predominantly agricultural area and are held in relatively small towns; they were set up by a local authority and are now run by producers, principally to support local farmers but also to attract people into the host towns; they are held monthly, and attract relatively small numbers of both producers and consumers.

3. **Stroud**. This market was chosen because it is organised by the community inspired 'Made in Stroud' co-operative, with financial assistance from local councils, but also from the local environmental charity, 'Stroud Valleys Project'. It therefore seemed to represent a community perspective, elements of which were evident at many of the markets. It was also set up with the aim of supporting local farmers, and aiding town centre regeneration. The markets are held twice monthly, and they are relatively large in terms of both the numbers of producers and consumers attending.

4.3.2 Selection of the individual case study markets within the three areas

Having decided upon the case study areas, it was then necessary to select a number of case study markets within which to situate the final selection of producers and consumers. In the case of the markets managed by LFM there were ten markets to choose from, eight in Wiltshire run by WFM, and in Stroud there was only one market.

Therefore a succession of trips were made to London and Wiltshire in order to decide which markets should be chosen, and three principal elements were considered:

1. the markets should be typical of those in the case study area;
2. there should be a balance between the days of the week on which the markets are held; and
3. there should be a sufficient number of consumers to enable focus groups (discussed under Section 4.4 below) to take place.

Where more than one market matched the above criteria the selection was on the basis of practicality, and the availability of a suitable place in which to hold a focus group. As Denscombe (1998: 34) suggests:

> "Faced with alternatives which are equally suitable, it is reasonable to select the one(s) which involve the least travel, the least expense and the least difficulty".

4.3.2.1 London

Table 4.2 Markets managed by London Farmers' Markets

Market name	Market frequency	Market day
Blackheath	Weekly	Sunday
Islington	***Weekly***	***Sunday***
Notting Hill	Weekly	Saturday
Palmers Green	Weekly	Sunday
Peckham	Weekly	Sunday
Swiss Cottage	***Weekly***	***Wednesday***
Twickenham	Weekly	Saturday
Uxbridge	Weekly	Sunday
Wandsworth	Weekly	Saturday
Wimbledon Park	Weekly	Saturday

Neither Uxbridge nor Wandsworth were considered, in that both had only recently started up. Blackheath was struggling, with a very low number of consumers, as well as being untypical with its 'village like' location. Peckham also was struggling in terms of consumer throughput. Wimbledon Park, although adequate in terms of consumer numbers, was in an exclusively residential area away from the centre of London, and not felt to be typical. Palmers Green and Twickenham both had sufficient numbers of consumers, and both were typical of FMs in London. However, in order to balance the markets across all the case studies, Twickenham as a Saturday market was not chosen because both Stroud and Devizes are Saturday markets. Similarly, Palmers Green as a Sunday market was not chosen because Islington, also a Sunday market, was considered more appropriate. Both Notting Hill and Islington had high consumer numbers, and were also felt to be typical of FMs in the centre of a large town or city. However, Notting Hill had no appropriate location in which to hold a focus group, whereas Islington did. Swiss Cottage was chosen as the second market in London for two reasons. Firstly, it was of a similar size in terms of both producer and consumer numbers to Twickenham and Palmers Green, and was therefore representative of markets in London. Secondly, it was held during the middle of the week, which increased the overall coverage of days of the week on which FMs are held within the study.

4.3.2.2 Wiltshire

Table 4.3 Markets managed by Wiltshire Farmers' Markets

Market name	Market frequency	Market day
Bradford-on-Avon	Monthly	Thursday
Chippenham	Monthly	Tuesday
Devizes	***Monthly***	***Saturday***
Melksham	Monthly	Friday
Trowbridge	Monthly	Friday
Warminster	***Monthly***	***Friday***
Westbury	Monthly	Friday
Wootton Bassett	Monthly	Saturday

It became clear that the markets in Wiltshire fell into three main categories. Firstly, Melksham, Trowbridge and Westbury were all struggling with an insufficient throughput of consumers. Secondly, the markets at Bradford-on-Avon, Chippenham and Warminster all felt reasonably vibrant with an adequate numbers of consumers. Any one of the latter three would have been suitable as a case study market, but Warminster was chosen because there was a room available for conducting a focus group in the public library, adjacent to the market. Thirdly, the two Saturday markets at Wootton Bassett and Devizes were noticeably the busiest, with a relatively high throughput of consumers. Devizes was chosen, partly on the basis of having a more suitable room available for holding a focus group, and partly because the time of the month in which it is held was more convenient within the wider research timetable.

4.3.2.3 Stroud

Stroud was included as a case study on its own, rather than the wider county of Gloucestershire, in that it was considered to aptly typify the environmental and/or community perspective (as mentioned under Section 4.3.1). The FM had a sufficient throughput of consumers to form a focus group, and there was a community room adjacent to the market, which was an ideal venue for conducting the focus groups. Furthermore, in being held twice monthly, it also increased the range of market frequencies across the case studies chosen.

4.3.2.4 Summary

Table 4.4 The case study markets

Case study area	Market name	Market frequency	Market day	Stallholder radii (miles)	Consumer nos./market held	Stall nos./market held
London	Islington	Weekly	Sunday	101-200	2000-4000	20-30
	Swiss Cottage	Weekly	Wednesday	101-200	1000-2000	10-20
Wiltshire	Devizes	Monthly	Saturday	31-40	501-1000	10-20
	Warminster	Monthly	Friday	31-40	251-500	10-20
Stroud	Stroud	Twice monthly	Saturday	20-30	2000-4000	31-40

Table 4.4 sets out the case study markets chosen for this research project (see also Figure 4.2)[74]. They were all established FMs, covering a range of market frequencies, market days, and stallholder radii, as well as consumer and producer numbers per market held. They also provided a balance between different host town sizes and management objectives, and were considered to be typical of the FMs identified within the FM manager survey. In addition, they had a sufficient throughput of consumer numbers to enable the formation of focus groups, and were logistically achievable within the research budget. Therefore, as Denscombe (1998) demanded, their choice has been justified within the context of this research.

[74] Figure 4.3 also provides photographic representations of some of the markets concerned.

Figure 4.3 Representations of farmers' markets

Photo 1. Devizes Farmers' Market

Photo 2. Explaining produce at Islington Farmers' Market

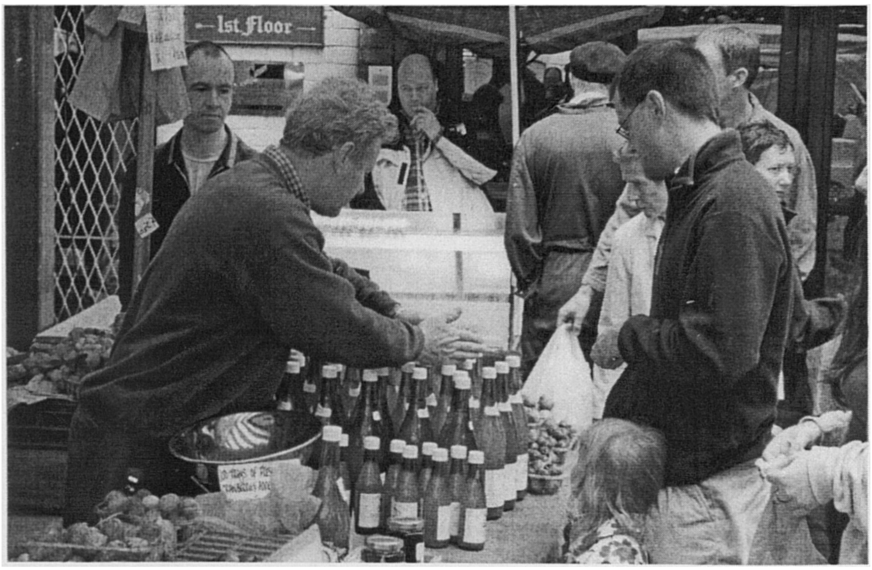


Photo 3. Cookery demonstration at Stroud Farmers' Market

4.4 Methods of data collection within the FM case studies

Section 4.3 set out the appositeness of a case study approach to this research, and how the individual case study FMs were selected. The focus within these case studies was on the individual producers and consumers who attended those markets, and Section 4.4 now describes the data collection methods used.

4.4.1 Producers

As outlined in Chapter One (Section 1.3), there were three principal research objectives associated with the producers in the case studies undertaken:

1. To investigate their motivations for attending FMs.
2. To explore the way in which they promote the quality of the produce they sell at FMs.
3. To examine the way in which they interact with consumers at FMs in order to facilitate the exchange process between them, and the relevance of management decisions to this interaction.

Producers were chosen from the case study areas, rather than from the individual case study markets, in that many of them sold at a number of different markets within the same area. For example, eight of the Devizes producers also attended the Warminster market: while nine of the Swiss Cottage producers also had stalls at the Islington market. Consideration was then given to how many producers should be interviewed. It was felt that about 40 interviews would provide sufficient data in view of the in-depth nature of the interviews, as well as being achievable with the resources available. As within Section 4.3.1, the sample of producers chosen needed to be representative, or 'typical', of the producers at the markets (Stake 1995; Sarantakos 1998). Consequently, it was decided to include at least one producer from each of the main categories of produce at the markets (meat, vegetables, dairy products, processed foods, eggs, fruit juice). They were also selected to provide a balance between organic and non-organic, different types of meat, different types of cheese, and so on. Where there was a choice between apparently similar producers, a decision was arbitrarily taken by choosing the producer who had been identified first within the schedule of possible producer interviewees. In addition, there were a number of producers who were included from categories not common to all the markets, and yet of value in contributing to the overall data set (for example, fish, game, bread). On this basis, 13 producers were chosen from each of the case study areas.

Initially, the intention had been to conduct face-to-face interviews with each of the producers in the sample at their farms, or place of food production. However, the foot and mouth epidemic during 2001 meant that this would be impossible in many cases, and irresponsible in general. In addition, the producers at the London FMs are drawn from a 100 mile radius of the M25, making it very expensive in terms of both time and money to visit each of the producers concerned. Interviews at the FMs themselves was also considered, but producers are often very busy and unlikely to be willing to talk in any depth, or at least without extensive interruptions. It was decided, therefore, to interview each of the producers by telephone, with each interview expected to last about 40 minutes.

Interviews involve the researcher engaging respondents in conversation, with the aim of understanding their opinions, experiences, and attitudes about the research issue. Interviews are differentiated by the degree of structure imposed on their format. Structured interviews allow for little flexibility in asking the questions, and the resultant data are largely quantifiable. Unstructured interviews are very open, with a list of topics to be talked around, rather than specific questions to be answered, resulting in highly qualitative data. Semi-structured interviews, as their name suggests, are a midpoint between the two which allow for a degree of conformity between interviews, and yet retain sufficient flexibility to yield qualitative data. The same principal questions are asked each time, but the question sequencing is not so rigid as with structured interviews, and probing is possible which allows for a greater depth of understanding. The three approaches can be seen as yielding data on a quantitative-qualitative continuum (May 1997; Fielding 1993), and Fielding (1993: 140) suggests that the degree of structure actually imposed on the interview format "ultimately depends on the analytic task to which the data will be applied". Within the FM manager survey this meant that the interviews were largely structured, with many closed questions. Whereas within the case studies, the interviews were semi-structured in order to provide more qualitative data. They were conducted around seven themes, followed by prompts where necessary, to elicit deeper, more qualitative answers. Table 4.5 enumerates the seven themes, and a copy of the interview schedule can be found in Appendix F.

Table 4.5 The producer interview schedule themes

1. Background information on the producer and their business.
2. The sale of processed foods.
3. Their reasons for selling their produce at FMs.
4. The part FMs have to play in their overall food marketing strategy.
5. The basis on which they promote the quality of their produce at FMs.
6. How they would describe their relationship with their consumers at FMs, and with the FMs themselves.
7. Their reflections on, and general attitude towards, FMs.

In late July and early August 2001 the researcher introduced himself to the producers at each of the markets, and handed them a letter of introduction (see Appendix G). The letter outlined the aims of the research and asked whether they would consider being interviewed by telephone at a time to suit them. The response was very positive, with all producers contacted saying they would be prepared to take part. In order to test the research method, pilot telephone interviews were conducted with three producers from a FM local to the researcher's home in Monmouthshire. These proved to be very satisfactory, and the case study interviews were subsequently conducted throughout August and September 2001. The interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed verbatim, in that although some of the questions were fairly closed, the main thrust of the interviews was qualitative in nature, with the intention of obtaining the feelings and opinions of the individuals concerned. It was, therefore, deemed essential to have a full transcript available in order to help identify the emergence of themes, issues and personal stories (Burgess, 1996). Recording the conversation also allowed the interviewer to concentrate on the interview process, rather than hastily making notes. Three respondents expressed some concern about the call being recorded, but were satisfied by the promise that any quotes used within the final text would be anonymous.

In proved impossible to contact two of the producers, resulting in a final sample of 37 producers (12 from Wiltshire, 13 from Stroud, and 12 from London). Replacing the two non-respondents was considered, but the data collected from the remaining 37 proved to be very rich. The pilot interviews also yielded useful additional data, and will be referenced as applicable. Table 4.6 contains details of the 37 case study producers, as well as the three pilot producers (Appendix H contains further producer details).

Table 4.6 Case study producer details[75]

Producers	Produce Varieties	Producers	Produce Varieties
Wiltshire		**London**	
Producer 1	Vegetables	Producer 48	Cheese (goat); quiches
Producer 2	Eggs (free-range); meat (chicken)	Producer 58	Vegetables; herbs
Producer 3	Fish (fresh trout)	Producer 61	Game & poultry (turkey)
Producer 4	Meat (pork) – rare breed	Producer 66	Fish (crab; lobster; shrimp)
Producer 5	Meat (beef & lamb)	Producer 67	Vegetables; fruit & fruit juice
Producer 6	Fish (fresh; smoked; pate; soups)	Producer 69	Meat (lamb)
Producer 9	Smoked fish, meat & game	Producer 71	Cider; brandy
Producer 11	Apple juice and cider	Producer 72	Vegetables (tomatoes)
Producer 41	Meat (pork & beef); pies	Producer 74	Vegetables
Producer 42	Cheese (cow & sheep)	Producer 75	Bread; cakes
Producer 45	Meat (pork & beef); sausages	Producer 77	Eggs
Producer 80	Vegetables	Producer 78	Meat (beef, pork & lamb)
Stroud		**Pilot**	
Producer 13	Game products	Producer pilot 1	Vegetables; meat (pork)
Producer 14	Cheese (goat)	Producer pilot 2	Meat (lamb); eggs; sheepskin
Producer 15	Cheese (cow)	Producer pilot 3	Dairy (yoghurt)
Producer 17	Meat (pork & bacon)		
Producer 20	Honey		
Producer 22	Eggs (free range)		
Producer 26	Meat (beef)		
Producer 29	Preserves & stews		
Producer 30	Apple juice & Perry		
Producer 31	Vegetables		
Producer 32	Vegetables		
Producer 35	Soft fruit		
Producer 36	Vegetables (LETS surplus)		

4.4.2 Consumers

4.4.2.1 Introduction

As with the producers, there were three principal research objectives associated with the consumers in the case studies undertaken:

1. To investigate their motivations for attending FMs.
2. To explore the way in which they assess the quality of the produce they buy at FMs.

[75] The producer numbers (1, 2, 48 etc.) relate to the order in which they were observed during the initial field visits to the FMs. 80 producers in all were observed on these visits, from which an eventual sample of 37 were interviewed (plus three pilot producers).

3. To examine the way in which they interact with producers at FMs in order to facilitate the exchange process between them, and the relevance of management decisions to this interaction.

In the first instance, in-depth semi-structured interviews with consumers at the markets themselves were considered, but rejected on the grounds that most people would not have the time to provide the length of interview required. Short introductory interviews at the markets, followed by subsequent in-depth interviews at customers' homes were also considered, but it was felt that some consumers might feel uncomfortable with this. As a result, it was decided to use short introductory interviews at the markets in order to recruit respondents for subsequent focus groups (or group interviews), in that they were seen to present a less threatening environment to consumers, and should produce the sort of in-depth responses required. Focus groups (FGs) are sometimes proposed as a method because they are perceived to be cheap and quick, even though in reality the selection of participants and the subsequent analysis of the data can be very expensive in terms of time (Morgan and Krueger, 1993). Their choice in this instance was because they were felt to be the most appropriate method available to yield good quality data, and address the research objectives.

Burgess *et al.* (1988a) stress the need to distinguish between those groups that meet only once (where interpersonal relationships are less important than the discussion), and groups which may last for weeks or months, where the discussion is intimately tied up with the interpersonal relationships within the group. Much of the work with the latter has revolved around psychotherapy, whereas the former have been largely developed within a market research context, and more recently adopted by social scientists (Holbrook and Jackson, 1996). It is the once-only group interviews (or focus groups) that are used within this research, where the intention is not to analyse the group as such, but to obtain a range of opinions about a topic (Burgess *et al.* 1998b; Sarantakos 1998).

FGs are proposed as being able to investigate complex behaviour and motivations. Frey and Fontana (1993: 25), for example, argue that FGs can allow for a greater level of understanding than individual interviews, in that they "can stimulate recall and opinion collaboration", as participants bounce ideas back and forth within the group. Similarly, Goss and Leinbach (1996: 121) suggest that "the synergistic effects of focus group discussions...[provide] interpretations that could not be made simply by aggregating individual reports", and can provide very rich data. FGs can also help to diminish the voice of the researcher, by allowing respondents more chance to generate their own ideas, and allowing them to feel more involved in the research process. As such, "participants enjoy a richer experience" (*ibid.*: 118) as they exchange opinions and experiences about a common interest (in this case FMs). Certainly the FG respondents within this research unanimously expressed that they had enjoyed the experience.

Basically a FG is a forum in which to hear the views of its participants about a topic decided upon by the researcher, and its composition is therefore critical to obtaining the data the researcher requires. It used to be felt that participants within FGs should not know each other, in that strangers' responses are less likely to be affected by peer pressure. However, it is now generally accepted that it depends on the topic to be discussed, and that sometimes it is an advantage for people to know each other, or at least to have some 'common ground' (Burgess *et al.*, 1998a). Participants can then "relate to each other's comments on actual incidents in their shared daily lives" (Holbrook and Jackson 1996: 137), which is especially relevant where the topic of discussion involves a particular locality or community. It is also crucial to "match...the researchers' topics of interest and the participants' ability to discuss those topics" (Morgan and Krueger: 13). Krueger and Casey (2000: 4) suggest that "participants [should be] selected because they have certain characteristics in common that relate to the topic of the focus group". The intention is to create a permissive, non-threatening environment in which participants will feel able to express their opinions.

The number of participants within a FG is also important, and can range from 4-12 people, with an ideal of 6-8. The group needs to be small enough to be controllable and for everyone to have their say, and yet large enough to provide a diversity of opinions and perceptions (Sarantakos 1998; Krueger and Casey 2000). Consensus is not the aim, rather an understanding of the feelings and thought processes of the participants. Similarly, the number of FGs to be held is important, and Krueger and Casey (2000: 30) suggest that "the traditional design for a focus group study is to conduct focus groups until you have reached the point of theoretical saturation – the point where you are not gaining new insights". This is usually after between 3-6 FGs, although in reality resources will also influence how many can be held (Knodel, 1993).

By their very nature focus groups involve a *focussed* discussion around a chosen topic, led by the researcher as moderator. The role of the moderator is critical, and can range from being minimally directive to much more active and directive, depending upon the purpose of the FG. Where the FG is largely exploratory, moderator input will be relatively less and the discussion relatively unstructured to allow for a greater flexibility of responses (Frey and Fontana 1993; Burgess *et al.* 1988b). However, in this case there were a number of areas that the researcher wanted to cover within the FG, and five themes were prepared beforehand around which the discussion was focussed, together with prompts to draw out different aspects. Table 4.7 sets out the five themes of the FG, and a copy of the interview schedule can be found within Appendix I.

Table 4.7 The consumer focus group interview schedule themes

1. Introduction and background to why they attend FMs.
2. The basis on which they assess the quality of food at FMs.
3. The importance of buying food at a FM, rather than any other outlet.
4. The part FMs have to play in their overall food purchasing decisions.
5. How they would compare buying food at a FM to buying food from other food outlets.

There also needs to be a recognition that although FGs enable the generation of data through interaction within a group setting, group dynamics can potentially have negative effects on the outcome. For example, power relations within the group can lead to individuals being "stifled rather than stimulated by the group" (Frey and Fontana, 1993). An attempt was made to counter these pressures in the moderator's introduction to the FG, which stressed that everyone's opinions were important, that there were no right and wrong answers, and that the moderator might well interrupt those people who were saying a lot, in order to give others, less talkative, a chance to have their say. Care was also taken by the moderator not to give verbal, or non-verbal cues to participants, which might imply either approval or disapproval of what they were saying (Krueger, 1993).

The idea of a FG, then, is to collect qualitative data from a group of relatively homogenous participants, who are likely to be 'information rich' about the topic of discussion. The task was then to identify those consumers that would fulfil these criteria. On the basis of the discussion above, it was decided that it should be consumers who actually attended FMs (rather than a mixture of those that went to FMs and those that did not, for example), in that they would all have something in common (they all go to FMs), and were all likely to have an opinion about FMs (and hence be 'information rich').

As explained in Section 4.4.1, the producers were chosen from the case study *areas*, however the consumers were identified from the case study *markets*. The rationale for this was that it is at the level of individual markets that the consumers meet the producers, whereas the producers usually meet the consumers at a range of markets. In order to balance the numbers between the case study areas, two FGs were conducted at Stroud and one at each of the other four markets, making a total of six FGs. Following on from the comments above this was considered sufficient to reach 'theoretical saturation', as well as being manageable with the resources available. Should 'theoretical saturation' not be attained, further FGs could subsequently be arranged at each of the markets (resources permitting)[76].

4.4.2.2 The filter interview for the consumer focus groups

In order to recruit participants for the FGs, it was decided to conduct short semi-structured interviews on one market day at each of the four case study markets in London and Wiltshire, and on two consecutive market days in Stroud. The purpose of these interviews was: firstly, to recruit consumers for subsequent FG interviews; and secondly, to collect some initial data on consumers in terms of how they relate to the FMs, and in particular their relationship with the producers. The interview schedule contained a mixture of open-ended and closed questions, and was intended to take between five and ten minutes to complete. Appendix J contains a copy of the schedule.

The relative brevity of the interviews proved to be important, in that most consumers were concerned about how long the interview would take. Each of these introductory interview days was intended to recruit sufficient consumers to make a subsequent FG viable, which as discussed above, was ideally felt to be between 6-8 people. At the

[76] In practice this did not prove to be necessary.

markets of Swiss Cottage, Devizes and Warminster, every fifth consumer that walked past the researcher was approached for an interview (except when conducting another interview). At the Islington and Stroud markets, where there were higher numbers involved, it was every tenth consumer. In the case of Warminster, and to a lesser extent Devizes and Swiss Cottage, the area in which the market is held is also a thoroughfare, which meant that some people approached were not FM consumers. Where this was the case, they were not counted in determining which consumers should be approached for an interview. The randomness of this approach sought to remove bias from the selection process, thus allowing for inferences to be drawn about the larger population of FM consumers. However, as Krueger and Casey (2000: 83) point out:

> "The intent of focus groups is not to infer but to understand, not to generalise but to determine the range, and not to make statements about the population but to provide insights about how people in the groups perceive a situation".

Not every consumer approached agreed to be interviewed, and on average 20 interviews were conducted at each market. After each interview, the respondent was handed a letter of introduction (see Appendix K), which outlined the aims of the research and asked whether they would be prepared to take part in a FG. It also made clear that their views were of importance, in that as Holbrook and Jackson (1996) point out, it can be difficult to get people to participate in FGs due to the time involved. Of the 120 interviews undertaken, 69 interviewees expressed some interest, although 20 of those said that in reality they did not have the time. This left 49 'probables', split fairly evenly over the six prospective FGs.

Initially it had been intended to hold the FGs on the same day as the market, but it very quickly became clear that this would not be possible due to consumers' prior commitments. Therefore, their telephone numbers were taken, and each of the respondents subsequently telephoned to establish when would be the most mutually convenient date to hold a FG. Of the 49 'probables', 41 finally agreed to come to a FG, although two of these failed to turn up on the night, leaving a total of 39 consumers at the six FGs, divided as follows: Devizes (6); Warminster (6); Islington (7); Swiss Cottage (6); and Stroud (6 and 8). Therefore each of the FGs had an 'ideal' number of participants.

A profile of the consumer participants is given in Table 4.8[77], and while they are clearly not representative of the wider population of consumers in the UK, they are considered to be representative of FM consumers (see Section 2.5, Chapter Two). Over 60% were women, 65% were over 45 years old, over 70% were from social classes A, B, or C1[78], and all were either in employment (full or part-time), part of a household in which someone was employed, or retired. The table also shows that although most of the respondents had regularly attended FMs for more than 12 months, the sample included a number of people who were relatively new to FMs, as well as some who were infrequent attendees. This was seen as further broadening the scope for understanding consumers' engagement with FMs and the producers at FMs, rather than focusing exclusively on consumers who had been frequently attending FMs for some time.

[77] This table also includes details of the pilot FG (discussed under Section 4.4.2.3) participants.
[78] I.e. professional, or management class (LUC *et al.* 2001).

Table 4.8 Focus group consumer details

Pseudonyms	Gen-der	Age	Employment status (p/t – part time) (f/t – full time)	H'hold income (£000s)	Time going to FMs (months)	Attendance frequency
Pilot						
Sarah	F	25-45	Employed p/t	20-40	3-6	Infrequent
Paul	M	25-45	Employed f/t	20-40	3-6	Infrequent
Jane	F	45-65	Employed f/t	20-40	> 12	Frequent
Simon	M	45-65	Employed f/t	20-40	> 12	Infrequent
Angela	F	45-65	Employed p/t	20-40	6-12	Infrequent
Anne	F	45-65	Employed p/t	10-20	> 12	Frequent
Clare	F	25-45	Employed f/t	10-20	> 12	Frequent
Devizes						
Sonia	F	46-65	Employed f/t	20-40	6-12	Infrequent
Joanna	F	46-65	Employed p/t	10-20	> 12	Frequent
James	M	46-65	Employed f/t	20-40	> 12	Infrequent
Margaret	F	46-65	Employed f/t	>40	> 12	Infrequent
Rachel	F	46-65	Employed f/t	20-40	> 12	Infrequent
Peter	M	46-65	Retired	20-40	> 12	Infrequent
Islington						
John	M	25-45	Employed f/t	>40	3-6	Infrequent
Steve	M	46-65	Employed f/t	10-20	3-6	Frequent
Ben	M	25-45	Employed f/t	10-20	3-6	Frequent
Helen	F	46-65	Employed f/t	10-20	> 12	Frequent
Dawn	F	25-45	Employed f/t	>40	> 12	Frequent
Alan	M	25-45	Employed f/t	>40	< 3	2nd time
Jenny	F	> 65	Retired	20-40	> 12	Frequent
Stroud 1						
Rosa	F	> 65	Retired	10-20	> 12	Frequent
Robert	M	25-45	Employed f/t	>40	6-12	Frequent
Roger	M	25-45	Employed f/t	20-40	> 12	Frequent
Liz	F	46-65	Employed f/t	20-40	> 12	Frequent
Penny	F	46-65	Employed f/t	10-20	> 12	Frequent
Frances	F	46-65	Retired	10-20	> 12	Frequent
Stroud 2						
Diana	F	> 65	Retired	20-40	> 12	Frequent
Richard	M	25-45	Employed f/t	20-40	> 12	Infrequent
Marjorie	F	25-45	Employed f/t	20-40	> 12	Infrequent
Paula	F	25-45	Employed f/t	20-40	> 12	Frequent
Duncan	M	46-65	Employed f/t	10-20	> 12	Frequent
Susan	F	25-45	Employed f/t	20-40	< 3	1st time
Peggy	F	25-45	Employed f/t	20-40	< 3	1st time
Linda	F	46-65	Employed f/t	20-40	> 12	Frequent
Swiss Cottage						
Elizabeth	F	25-45	Housewife	>40	< 3	2nd time
Catherine	F	46-65	Employed p/t	10-20	> 12	Frequent
Gill	F	>65	Retired	20-40	> 12	Frequent
Christine	F	25-45	Employed f/t	>40	< 3	Frequent
Michael	M	> 65	Retired	>40	> 12	Frequent
Colin	M	25-45	Employed f/t	20-40	> 12	Frequent
Warminster						
Lizzie	F	25-45	Housewife	10-20	< 3	Frequent
Meg	F	46-65	Employed f/t	>40	> 12	Frequent
Brian	M	46-65	Employed f/t	>40	> 12	Frequent
Dick	M	> 65	Retired	10-20	> 12	Frequent
Sally	F	> 65	Retired	10-20	> 12	Frequent
Hazel	F	46-65	Housewife	20-40	> 12	Frequent

4.4.2.3 The focus group interviews

In order to test the efficacy of the interview schedule (see Appendix I), a pilot FG was held at the house of the researcher. Seven people, who were known to shop at FMs in the local area, were invited. The results were encouraging, in that people seemed very willing to express their opinions about the general themes raised by the moderator (who was the researcher). Participants also expressed that they had enjoyed the experience, and that it had encouraged them to think more deeply about the issues involved. Moderator input was restricted to introducing new themes, occasional prompts, and to encouraging each of the participants to have their say. The pilot FG also established that a one hour meeting was ideal for a detailed exploration of all the themes within the schedule. The resultant data from the pilot FG proved to be comparable to the case study FG data, and are therefore included in the analysis chapters, with appropriate referencing.

The six case study FGs were conducted in August and September 2001. With the unavoidable exception of Islington, each of the venues was within 100m of where the FM was held in order to retain a sense of locality. Devizes was held in the meeting room of a public house, Warminster in the public library, Swiss Cottage in the local community centre, Islington in the local town hall, and Stroud in a meeting room made available by the organisers of the FM. A table and chairs were set up prior to the arrival of participants, as well as glasses and a choice of FM sourced apple juice or water. The decision was taken to record the FGs, in that although there are concerns that this might distort some responses (Sarantakos, 1998), it ensured that none of the conversation was missed. Two Sony personal tape recorders were used, one at each end of the table. This provided extra security in the event of one of them failing, and it meant that no data need be lost if the tapes were turned over sequentially. It also facilitated the subsequent transcription by ensuring that each participant would be relatively near to at least one microphone. The latter proved to be particularly important in London, where background traffic noise was troublesome.

In order to enhance the reliability of the research process, the same moderator was used for all the FGs (Albrecht *et al.*, 1993). An assistant moderator was present at each of the FGs, who contributed by helping to set up the room, turning the tapes over, and partaking in a feedback session with the moderator at the end of the FG. This enabled an immediate analysis of the tenor of each FG, which contributed to the triangulation of the later transcription data, as well as providing a check on the consistency of the FGs.

With the exception of Warminster, which was held at 5.30 p.m., each of the meetings was held at 7.30 p.m. to enable those people at work to attend. People were very punctual, and the meeting normally started on time. The moderator introduced the session by stressing the relevance of the participants' experiences and opinions of FMs, and by pointing out that the conversation was being tape recorded, but that their confidentiality was assured. As mentioned above, the inclusionary nature of the process was also stressed (see also Appendix I). People were then asked to give their names on tape, to facilitate their identification within the subsequent transcription.

The moderator then introduced each theme in turn, keeping his input to a minimum and prompting only when necessary. Most of the FGs had sufficient momentum amongst the participants to keep the conversation going, however at Devizes there was a need for more prompting. This is perhaps reflected in the subsequent data (which is reported in Chapter Six), in that there seemed to be a relatively lower level of engagement with the FM, than at the other markets. In general, though, the participants seemed to be sufficiently homogenous and 'information rich' to provide good quality data. There were no noticeable dynamics within the groups, although certainly there were some people who were more inclined to talk than others, and on occasions the moderator intervened to give everyone the chance to have their say. There was also evidence of the participants enjoying the chance to interact with other people about a subject in which they were interested (FMs). This resulted in participants reminiscing, and making wider connections, thus demonstrating FGs synergistic capacity to elicit rich qualitative data.

Having gone through each of the themes, the moderator spent the last five minutes of the FG summarising what had been discussed, and asking whether anyone had anything else to add. Usually it was agreed that the summary was a fair reflection of what had been discussed, and sometimes additional ideas were mentioned. It also usually resulted in the moderator being asked what his research was about, and for wider information about FMs. Each session ended with the participants drawing lots for a box of FM foodstuffs, which included apple juice, honey and cheese. Rather than the winner taking all, each participant had the choice of one item, with the winner having first choice.

This was a popular feature of the FGs as it made a material link with the produce of the FMs and ended the meeting on a very positive note, both for the research team, and for the participants.

Although no transcriptions were made of the FGs before all six of them had been completed, two things became clear. Firstly, a very considerable body of useful data had been generated that would be sufficient to address the research questions. Secondly, although there were some differences between the FGs, many of the responses were similar, and it was likely that whilst more FGs would throw up *some* different responses, in most respects 'theoretical saturation' had been reached.

4.5 Data analysis and the presentation of results

4.5.1 The Farmers' Market manager survey

As discussed within Section 4.2, the interviews with market managers were not tape recorded because most of the interview was fairly standardised, enabling the rapid input of data onto hard copy paper. The more qualitative responses were paraphrased, and where necessary written down verbatim. Although some of the qualitative data may have been lost with this approach, it saved considerable time, and was considered a pragmatic compromise within the overall management of the project.

The results of the interviews were input into a Microsoft Access database. Subsequent analysis of the quantitative data from the closed questions was conducted using the statistical package SPSS v.10 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). This enabled the generation of tables, which summarised the key elements of FMs that were considered useful in deciding which markets to use as subsequent case studies[79]. The more qualitative responses to the open ended questions were also input into Microsoft Access, and reports made that collated the responses to particular questions within the interview schedule (see Appendix D). From these reports it was then possible to analyse the data into themes, which could be supported by the use of direct interviewee quotations. The resultant data are presented within Section 4.7 and provide another perspective on what underpins FMs, thus contributing to the overall integrity of the research through data triangulation.

4.5.2 The Farmers' Market case studies of producers and consumers

All of the consumer FGs were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. The voice recognition computer software 'Dragon Naturally Speaking' was used, but even so this proved to be very time consuming, taking between 10-12 hours per FG, in that people often spoke over one another. Similarly, all the telephone producer interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim, taking between 2-3 hours per interview. Although this verbatim transcription was highly time consuming, it was felt to be essential, in that it familiarised the researcher with the data and enabled an initial identification of data categories. It also allowed for the use of the interviewee's words, rather than substituting them with those of the interviewer (May 1997; Fielding 1993). Knodel (1993: 50) suggests that "the accuracy of the interpretive analysis is...enhanced if the analysts are intimately involved with the actual data collection", and in this case, the data collection, transcription and analysis were all undertaken by the same researcher. A full transcription also enabled the subtle nuances within the data to emerge, and provided a more complete record, should other researchers wish to critically evaluate the production of the data (Burgess *et al.*, 1988a). In other words, it contributed towards making the research "systematic and verifiable" (Krueger 1993: 79).

Having completed the transcriptions for all the interviews and FGs, a hard copy was produced amounting to a total of approximately 210,000 words. Each of the transcripts was then examined, and some early coding implemented by highlighting the text with different coloured pens. This was done mainly to extract some data relatively quickly for a paper the researcher was giving, but also as a precursor to inputting the transcripts into NU*DIST v.4 (Non-numerical Unstructured Data * Indexing Searching and Theorizing), which is a computer software package designed to facilitate the management and analysis of large amounts of qualitative data (Richards, 1998). The early coding formed the basis for the index categories (or nodes) that were originally set

[79] The relevant data from the tables are presented in graphical form within Appendix E, as explained under Section 4.2.

up within NU*DIST. The use of NU*DIST then allowed for the repeated examination of the transcripts, which as Burgess (1996) stresses, is so important to the ongoing development of coding, issues, and themes. Unlike a manual cut and paste system, within NU*DIST there is no limit to the number of categories that can be conveniently set up. It is also a simple process to move segments of transcript text between categories, whilst at the same time retaining the ability to see individual quotes and references within the context in which they were made.

Initially, this process of coding and re-coding was largely descriptive, but the flexibility inherent within the NU*DIST software allowed for the iterative development of categories, and subsequently themes. This in turn allowed a more interpretative approach to the data, to enable "meaningful conclusions" to be drawn (Knodel 1993: 45). These conclusions could then be supported by illustrative quotes from respondents, that captured the essence of what was expressed in the interviews (Krueger and Casey, 2000).

4.5.3 Presentation of the results

As explained within Section 4.2, the FM manager survey involved the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. In essence, the quantitative data related to the justification of the case studies chosen, and are reported graphically within Appendix E. However, as discussed under Section 4.1, this study is set within a qualitative methodology, and has largely involved the collection of qualitative data. These data have sought to establish the perceptions of 'information rich' respondents about a complex topic, through obtaining their in-depth views. Krueger and Casey (2000: 201) suggest that there are no instruments as such to quantifiably measure this type of information, and that the results should be expressed in a descriptive, rather than a numeric form. Likewise, because the samples are purposive (aiming at 'typical' and 'information rich' cases), rather than random, it is unwise to turn the results into percentages and project them to the population as a whole. Nevertheless, the use of modifiers such as, 'some', 'several', 'many', or 'the majority' can be used. These are not part of a statistical analysis, but rather an aid to the explication and description of the qualitative data (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Within the consumer FGs, FG filters and producer interviews, shorthand terms are used to identify the source of the quotation and to ensure anonymity. The same approach is applied where respondents are quoted from the FM manager interviews. First names have been used for the FG respondents, and because in some instances their names are unusual and therefore potentially identifiable, they have been substituted by pseudonyms. This is then followed by the market they relate to, for example, (Rachel, Devizes FG). The FG filter respondents are identified by a number, followed by the market they relate to, for example, (FG filter 6, Swiss Cottage). Likewise with the producer interviews, respondents are identified by a number followed by the case study area to which they relate, for example, (Producer 1, Wiltshire). Data from the pilot FG and pilot producer interviews are also quoted in some instances, and are identified as, for instance (Paul, Pilot FG) and (Producer, Pilot 1) respectively. Where quotations are referenced from the FM manager survey they are indicated by FMMS, followed by the area within which the market is held (the area relates to the NAFM website described under Section 4.2). In addition, the number of the interview is given after the FMMS, in order to provide an audit trail, for example, (FMMS 122, Surrey) or (FMMS 168, Wales).

4.6 Research evaluation

It is important to assess what needs to be done to ensure that the results of research are worthy of consideration, especially where it involves a qualitative methodology, as in this case. The analysis of qualitative data is highly subjective, and in order to validate its interpretation there needs to be a practical, systematic and verifiable approach taken. There must be clarity and transparency in the research design, which includes explaining the reasoning behind the methodology chosen, information on respondent selection, and the procedures used for analysis and presentation (Baxter and Eyles, 1997). In other words, the researcher needs to provide a 'thick description' (Burgess *et al.*, 1988a), or audit trial, of how the research was undertaken (Sarantakos, 1998).

Baxter and Eyles (1997) maintain that evaluation within qualitative research creates an inherent tension, in that evaluation implies standardised procedures, whereas qualitative research, by definition, is context dependent. However, for qualitative research to be taken seriously it needs to be possible to judge its integrity, wherein "reliability and validity are indicators of consistency, truthfulness and accuracy" (Sarantakos 1998: 95). Reliability means that similar results would be obtained by another researcher using the same questions and the same sampling criteria. Validity can be either: internally derived, where the study actually measures what it sets out to measure, and in qualitative terms means that the findings represent the reality of what has been studied; or external, which is concerned with 'generalisability', or the general applicability of the results of the research (Newell 1993; Punch 1998).

Many authors now suggest that the terms credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are more appropriate for establishing qualitative research rigour, than validity, reliability, and generalisability, which are considered more apposite for quantitative research (e.g. Punch 1998; Sarantakos 1998; Baxter and Eyles 1997). *Credibility* refers to the research data accurately reflecting the object of the research, and can be improved by selecting 'information-rich cases' and sampling on the basis of saturation, whereby no new themes start to emerge. Triangulation, both in terms of methods and data sources, can also help strengthen the credibility of research. *Transferability* is similar to generalisability (which would require a large random sample, rather than the 'information rich' purposive samples of qualitative methodologies), and refers to the extent to which research findings might be relevant to contexts outside the specific study. Although qualitative research does not tend to make transferability claims, it is important to provide the potential for it to be used by other researchers in other situations. Critical to this is a 'thick description' of the research processes, as described above. *Dependability* refers to the consistency and plausibility of the research process, and can be enhanced by using tape recordings, and making comprehensive field notes. *Confirmability* is an attempt to provide objectivity, in what is essentially a very subjective process, through providing a research audit trail which explains how decisions were made regarding credibility, transferability and dependability within the research process (Baxter and Eyles, 1997).

> "Questioning how things are done - an essential component of self-reflection - allows qualitative research to demonstrate the relevance of the single case (credibility) and to move beyond it (transferability) with a degree of certainty (dependability and confirmability)" (Baxter and Eyles 1997:521).

This chapter has, therefore, gone into considerable detail about the way this research has been conducted in providing a 'thick description' of the processes followed, which enables an assessment of its integrity and helps to validate its potential to contribute to the wider body of knowledge.

4.7 The Farmers' Market managers' perspective on the management and long-term role of Farmers' Markets

4.7.1 Introduction

Before proceeding onto the main findings of this research in Chapters Five (producers) and Six (consumers), Section 4.7 now presents data from the FM manager survey (FMMS), apposite to the triangulation of the case study data. These data provide a national-level perspective on the perceived viability and long-term role of FMs, through the eyes of the people most directly associated with their management. The data are reported at this juncture because they do not form the nub of this research (which are the data collected within the case studies from the producers and consumers), but they do provide context, and can contribute to the overall credibility of the research. As such, reference will be made to the FMMS data within Chapters Five and Six, where it corroborates or elucidates the responses of producers and consumers.

4.7.2 The management of Farmers' Markets

4.7.2.1 Introduction

To some extent, reporting the findings of the FMMS is complicated by the pace of change within the management of FMs in the UK over the timeframe of this research. For example, the growing tensions between the integrity of FMs versus their commercial viability, and the development of the NAFM certification scheme, have emerged since this survey was undertaken in December 2000 to January 2001 (as discussed under Chapter Two, Section 2.5). Nevertheless, it was considered appropriate to include a certain amount of background data, where they can usefully contribute to the overall argument.

4.7.2.2 Management objectives

As identified within Table 2.2 (Chapter Two), there are a wide range of economic, environmental and social benefits proposed for FMs within the literature. These were broadly echoed within the FMMS, where they can be conflated into the following management objectives[80]:

Table 4.9[81] The principal management objectives of individual Farmers' Markets

- To support the local farming community.
- To assist in town centre regeneration.
- To benefit consumers and the wider local community.
- To enable the promotion of sustainable development issues, and in particular to highlight the connections between the production and consumption of food.

The majority of FM managers highlighted the role FMs can play in helping small and medium-sized farmers (or producers) to survive, through providing an affordable outlet that enables them to add value to their produce: "without the FM, a number of farmers would not still be in farming" (FMMS 26, County Durham). Selling at FMs was also seen as having increased the profile of these producers, facilitating their access to a range of other local food outlets (such as local shops), and promoting their existing marketing channels such as box schemes and pick-your-own (where they have them). Several managers mentioned that some of their producers now access outlets that are no longer local to their place of production, as a result of selling at FMs: "a number of small businesses have now grown into larger things and several now sell to London...the FM is a very good stepping stone" (FMMS 24, Cornwall).

[80] Although there were certain differences in emphasis between the FMs, there was a general recognition of the broad range of possible benefits accruing from them. In selecting the case studies, markets were chosen that covered a range of management objectives (see Section 4.3), in order to ensure that they were representative. However, whilst different management emphases between FMs is certainly important, it does not form the main focus of this research (which is an analysis of producer-consumer relations at FMs). Nevertheless, where management objectives clearly do impact on producer-consumer relations, this is examined.

[81] This figure is also included within Appendix E where it is used to help justify the choice of case studies within Section 4.3.

There was widespread agreement that FMs have a role to play in revitalising town centres, through providing an added attraction which can complement other businesses and increase the retail offer[82]. FMMS 129 (West Midlands) described FMs as "new destination experiences", and certain respondents saw their FM(s) as 'an event', which contributes towards the atmosphere of the town. A number of managers also stressed that their FM(s) had helped to reinvigorate traditional town markets that were in decline, by re-acquainting people with the benefits of a market culture: "the general retail market is in the doldrums...the FM has brought shoppers back to the markets, sparking a renaissance" (FMMS 16, Somerset).

Many FM managers considered that their FM(s) provided a valuable alternative shopping destination for consumers, that increased the availability of fresh, seasonal, and local produce. There was also a perception that consumers enjoy shopping at FMs, due to their sociable and vibrant atmosphere. However, the most commonly perceived consumer benefit of FMs was the ability to talk directly to the producers of the goods on sale, which was seen as enabling transparency and traceability in its provision:

> "Traceability is crucial, the consumer wants to know about the product and the seller therefore needs to know about the product" (FMMS 1, Gloucestershire).

Respondents frequently mentioned that FMs also have a vital educational role in the general promotion of sustainability issues. In some cases, this was expressed in terms of making consumers aware of the benefits of reducing food miles through purchasing locally produced food, but also by promoting the benefits of contributing towards a vibrant local economy, socially, environmentally, and economically. In this context, FMs were seen as making the linkages between the production and consumption of food more explicit, principally through enabling direct contact between producers and consumers, which was seen as facilitating a cross referral of information: "linking food, health and producers at a local level: it's an education thing" (FMMS 144, Yorkshire). Furthermore, it was often mentioned that FMs can contribute towards social and community capacity building: "there is a positive ambience which is hard to measure,

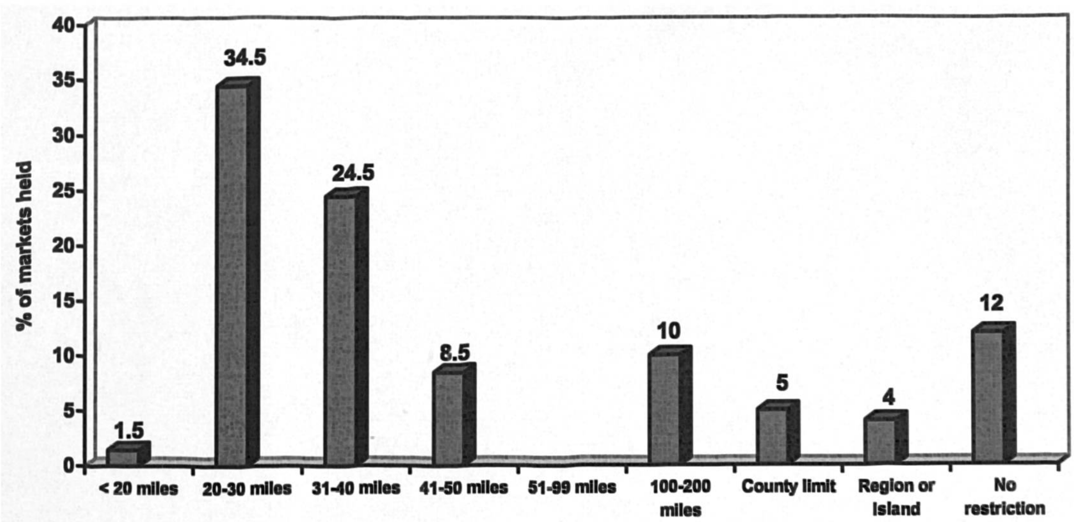
[82] Over 60% of the FMs in this FMMS were held in town centre locations.

but yet quite tangible...a fantastic feeling of empathy and synergy between customers and farmers" (FMMS 129, West Midlands).

4.7.2.3 Market regulations

In pursuit of these management objectives, it was apparent within the FMMS that the regulation of FMs had three principal elements. Firstly, producers must comply with all relevant health regulations and have completed their HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) training where necessary. Secondly, 85% of the FMs insisted that their producers came from within a certain distance of the market, which in nearly 70% of cases was between 20-50 miles (see Table 4.4). Thirdly, 93% of the FMs did not allow any bought-in produce, which meant that the vendor must have been directly involved in actually producing or processing the produce they are selling. Although the first element is clearly important to the overall management of the FMs, it is the latter two elements that are particularly relevant to the aim of this thesis, and they are discussed in further detail below.

Figure 4.4[83] The radius restriction on stallholders who may come to the Farmers' Markets



The intention of the latter two elements of regulation within the FMMS were twofold. Firstly, ensuring that the produce is of a local origin was seen as supporting local producers and the local economy, reducing food miles, and creating a sense of locality.

[83] This figure is also included within Appendix E where it is used to help justify the choice of case studies within Section 4.3.

Secondly, insisting that the vendor must have been directly involved to some extent in the production of the food they are selling was perceived by the managers as facilitating the transfer of knowledge within the food chain, and increasing the transparency of food provision. Notwithstanding the desire of the majority of managers to uphold these regulations, most allowed for some discretion in their implementation. The reason given was invariably to sustain the vibrancy and commercial viability of their FM(s), by assuring a variety of produce and hence market interest[84]. For example, 75% of the FMs allowed some extension of the market radius, with the justification that "direct from the producer supersedes geographical location" (FMMS 168, Wales). This was generally done on "a case-by-case basis to help overcome seasonality and to maintain a balanced market" (FMMS 44, Dorset). In addition, 60% of the markets in the FMMS allowed some form of producer sales cooperative, so that individual producers did not have to attend every market at which their goods were sold. This was seen as providing a necessary degree of flexibility, where for example, a producer may be ill, or where a small producer does not have enough produce on their own to make a stall commercially viable. In these cases, the intention was usually for the actual producer to attend at least one market in three, with all members of the cooperative being expected to have some knowledge about all the produce they are selling:

> "They [cooperative stalls] facilitate getting smaller producers in, for example honey, but co-knowledge about products is crucial to their success and priority is given to individual producers [rather than cooperatives] where there is a clash" (FMMS 168, Wales).

Ironically, perhaps, these reasons for flexibility in the implementation of regulations are broadly the same as those given by the managers of FMs that do not insist on the latter two regulatory elements above. For example, those managers that did not restrict what may be sold at their FMs (7% of the FMMS), affirmed that their main aim was to maximise the variety of produce available for the consuming public's benefit: "if it provides something different, then it is providing the public with a service" (FMMS 18,

[84] 50% of the FMs within the FMMS also allowed locally produced crafts. In some cases this was because they were seen as part of the local economy, but more particularly because they added diversity to the market, especially during the winter months (when there was often an expressed shortage of vegetables). Many of those markets that did not allow crafts stalls were emphatically against crafts being sold at FMs, insisting that FMs were all about food: "the markets are definitely for farmers...we don't want socks and doughnuts" (FMMS 57, Hampshire); "no crafts so far, as we are anxious not to create just another craft market... no more jewellery and knitted loo seat covers" (FMMS 65, Herefordshire). The

Cambridgeshire); "bananas are allowed to increase variety" (FMMS 107, Shropshire). Similarly, amongst the 15% of respondents that had no stallholder radius restriction:

> "The idea is to provide the public with a service. If someone has something to increase the variety at the market and they can make it pay, then they are welcome to come to the market" (FMMS 14, Berkshire).

Allowing for discretion in the implementation of FM regulations suggests that any understanding of what determines the format of a FM is a matter of degree, or interpretation. For instance, the London FMs (run by LFM) have a stallholder radius of 100 miles from the M25, compared to Stroud which has a radius of 25 miles (with some discretion up to 50 miles). Clearly, London is a much larger town (city) than Stroud which necessitates a wider production catchment area, but it does raise the question as to whether this radius variation has any bearing on the 'qualities'[85] of the markets concerned. Likewise, where the market radius is extended to maintain market balance and variety, what determines the limit of these extensions? Why not allow marmalade oranges from Seville, for example? Furthermore, in seeking to increase the variety and scope of FMs, at what point is the Rubicon crossed between providing a service element to consumers, and commercially freeloading on the current popularity of FMs without delivering the proposed wider environmental and social benefits?

Equivocation amongst FM managers as to exactly what should constitute a FM, is exemplified by the perceived role of NAFM. For example, many managers felt that NAFM's primary function should be to protect the integrity and credibility of FMs, through the development of a certification scheme which would ensure adherence to the second and third elements of the regulation of FMs (outlined above)[86]. These regulatory aspects were perceived as underpinning FMs, and their maintenance critical to retaining the uniqueness of FMs and safeguarding their continued ability to deliver a broad range of management objectives (see Table 4.9):

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inclusion of this data on crafts is to provide a general context, but the focus of this research is on food, and hence crafts will not be discussed in any further detail.

[85] Quality in this context meaning the essence, character, or 'farmers' marketness' of the individual markets.

[86] Essentially, these two elements of regulation are encapsulated within the NAFM FM criteria (NAFM, 2000a) which are shown in Appendix A. As explained in Chapter Two (Section 2.5) these were then incorporated into the NAFM Certification Scheme that was launched in March 2002 (NAFM 2002c), which contains a considerable degree of flexibility.

> "[NAFM's role is] to add strength to the accreditation side. Many markets are calling themselves a FM, but they are not really" (FMMS 151, Yorkshire).
>
> "Maintaining the NAFM principles is the bottom line in that it retains the uniqueness of FMs. The concept of an FM is vital, otherwise they will just become another market outlet" (FMMS 27, County Durham).

Yet, on the other hand, there were some managers who felt that the NAFM criteria were too strict, and would hinder the ability of markets to remain commercially viable through overly restricting the range of produce on offer: "some of the regulations are getting a bit silly and are too stringent and inflexible - the market couldn't function on that basis" (FMMS 25, Cornwall). Indeed, nearly 50% of the FMMS respondents identified a shortage of suitable producers (and hence range of produce), as a major concern for the future sustainability of their markets:

> "There is a problem getting traders of the right size for this type of selling: too big and they don't make enough money; too small and they can't do enough markets to make enough money" (FMMS 133, Wiltshire).
>
> "From January to July there were no vegetables at all last year and consumers were unhappy" (FMMS 1, Gloucestershire).

Many managers stressed that the shortage of producers had been exacerbated by the proliferation of FMs, with some areas effectively becoming saturated with FMs, and having insufficient numbers of suitable producers to adequately serve them all. This had meant that producers were able to pick and choose which FMs they attended, and those FMs with a larger pulling power were seen as being able to draw producers away from their more local markets:

> "Many producers will go where they make the most money, which might mean travelling to London, and this undermines the local market, which in turn can undermine the whole purpose of local food to a local market" (FMMS 170, Suffolk).

Most respondents were also very aware that they needed both enough producers *and* enough consumers in order to survive:

> "This market is running on a tight rope between having enough producers and consumers. If one or two producers go then we will be in real trouble in

> that consumers will no longer feel it is worth coming" (FMMS 113, Somerset).
>
> "If consumers don't come, then nor will the producers" (FMMS 21, Cheshire).
>
> "It is a Catch-22 between more producers and more consumers" (FMMS 3, East Sussex).

This management dilemma is clearly pivotal to the future of FMs, and will be considered further within the summary section (Section 4.7.4) of the FMMS.

4.7.3 The long-term role of Farmers' Markets

There was concern amongst many of the managers that FMs were failing to provide the necessary service element to consumers, particularly where they are held monthly[87]:

> "They must provide a better service to consumers...a market once a month is not really relevant to people's shopping needs" (FMMS 168, Wales).
>
> "People want a market each week, but there simply aren't enough producers...once a month really isn't enough for consumers" (FMMS 52, Essex).

Several managers also recognised that supermarkets are increasingly selling produce with locality specific identifiers. This was perceived as a potential threat to the viability of FMs, and that it was therefore important to make consumers aware of what distinguishes FMs from other outlets (especially supermarkets):

> "Customers want convenience and choice and FMs don't always achieve that...supermarkets are starting to give their products a local or regional identity...it comes down to the relationship between the producer and the consumer, which the supermarket can't really replicate...we need to tell the story as it is" (FMMS 46, Dorset).
>
> "Touchy, feely, esoteric, which is something supermarkets do not offer" (FMMS 129, West Midlands).

[87] Nearly three-quarters of the markets in the FMMS were held monthly (see Figure A.3 – Appendix E), for a variety of reasons. Some respondents were concerned that if the markets were held more frequently, they would start to compete with other local traders; others felt that they would lose their novelty value for consumers. In some cases there were planning restrictions on holding the FMs more often than monthly, but most commonly it was that there was insufficient suitable produce available for more frequent markets.

In some cases, managers saw their FMs largely in social and communitarian terms, rather than as a genuine retail outlet: "the main point is that it is a 'community focused event', and this is vital...it is more of a social event than a serious shopping provision, especially as it is on a Sunday" (FMMS 78, Kent). However, to most managers in the FMMS, their FM(s) was definitely seen as having a commercial role to play:

> "The markets provide good entertainment, and many consumers see them as a good day out, but they are definitely a market and not just an event" (FMMS 57, Hampshire).
>
> "People really do shop at them, and they function as a good meeting point…they may be small, but they are beautiful" (FMMS 95, Northumberland).

Nevertheless, despite this acknowledgement of their role as a commercial food outlet, there was a widespread understanding that FMs are not a panacea, and that they are only ever likely to appeal to a relatively small number of both producers and consumers. As such, it was perceived that their impact on the food chain was likely to remain small, unless they can extend their linkages to other food outlets with access to a wider customer base:

> "Only limited quantities of stuff can be sold at an FM due to the size of the stalls; the size of their van; and the fact that they are only selling for four hours over a six-foot table...the future is in ensuring that more local food is sold through farm shops and direct through high street retailers...I see FMs as: firstly, a place where people can go to buy food; and secondly, where they can go to see what is available and then to subsequently buy from other outlets as well...FMs are partly a shop then, but also a showcase" (FMMS 110, Somerset).
>
> "FMs can only be for a special occasion...it is the collaborative mechanisms and the build-up of trust between producers and consumers that is their most important contribution...they must be seen in the broader context of local food economies or they will peter out" (FMMS 46, Dorset).

The two quotations above are representative of the large majority of managers, who were keen to see FMs as an integral part of a growing local food economy. Indeed, some respondents suggested that the high media profile afforded to FMs, has distracted attention away from local food initiatives in general: "the FM must be a system of mobilising local food within the local economy, otherwise they are just a fashion item that will run out of steam in due course (FMMS 168, Wales). However, there were also a number of managers, who, whilst tacitly supporting the overall objectives of FMs (identified within Table 4.9), clearly favoured the physical benefits of holding a vibrant market in their towns: "the market is partly for farmers, but they [farmers] are only part of the community...importantly it brings a good atmosphere into the town" (FMMS 154, Scotland); "hopefully it will continue to function, as it is a good way of drawing people into the town" (FMMS 52, Essex). In these cases, there was often a greater emphasis on ensuring the continuance of the FM through a relaxation of the rules on who may sell at their markets, even if this meant sacrificing some of the wider benefits associated with a 'true'[88] FM.

4.7.4 Summary of the Farmers' Market manager survey

It is apparent from the FMMS that despite a broad agreement in principle about the management objectives of FMs, there is a potential schism in the practicalities of their ongoing management. In many cases it is clear that FMs are struggling to remain commercially viable due to a combination of factors, such as a shortage of suitable producers, the relative infrequency of many markets, and seasonal or geographical limitations on produce availability. One managerial approach is to ignore the NAFM guidelines on who may sell at FMs, and what may be sold. This, it is argued, increases the service element to consumers (in terms of variety and regularity), and facilitates the commercial viability of FMs. However, the self-evident danger with this approach is that the underlying tenets of FMs will become diluted, or lost, potentially disabling the much heralded range of FM benefits[89].

The second managerial approach is to abide by the NAFM guidelines, but to allow a degree of latitude in their implementation. The question then becomes, how much latitude is there before the proposed wide ranging benefits of FMs no longer accrue. However, if the management of FMs is too constrained, there is a danger they might fail to remain commercially viable. In this latter scenario, they may have remained true to the underlying tenets of FMs, and hence in theory enabled their wide ranging benefits to be realised. However, the reality is that they may be unable to continue functioning due

[88] 'True' in the sense of adhering to the NAFM FM criteria (NAFM, 2000a) – see Appendix A.
[89] See Table 2.2, Chapter Two.

to their lack of variety, regularity, and ultimately commerciality, in which case they will not yield any benefits at all.

These two broad perspectives on how FMs should be managed exemplify the debate between the 'authenticity' or 'integrity' of FMs, versus the 'variety' of produce available at FMs and their 'commercial' viability. This debate was highlighted under Chapter Two (Section 2.5) when discussing the development of FMs in the UK, as well as under Chapter Three (Section 3.6) when examining the relevance of Conventions Theory (CT) as a theoretical framework with which to understand 'alternative strategies' ('AS').

As identified within Chapter Two (Section 2.6), it is the relationship between the producers and consumers that embodies FMs. It is therefore critical to understand its characteristics, in terms of the mutual expectations involved, the conventions of exchange employed, and the negotiated perceptions of quality. This will help resolve the way in which FMs should be managed, which in turn will have a major bearing on their potential role and durability as an exchange context. It will also assist the development of a theoretical framework with which to interpret the wider significance of 'AS' within the UK agro-food system. Chapters Five (producers) and Six (consumers) now present the data collected within this research. The data provide an in-depth and qualitative insight into the relations between producers and consumers at FMs, which has been largely missing from previous research undertaken in this context.

Chapter 5
THE PRODUCERS AT FARMERS' MARKETS

5.1 Introduction

In presenting the data collected within this research on the relations between producers and consumers at FMs, consideration was given to whether they should be reported within separate chapters for producers and consumers, or within chapters based upon emergent themes within the data. The latter would allow for an immediate comparison between responses around these themes, but would lack clarity in terms of a wider examination of producer-consumer relations at FMs. As detailed within Chapter Four, the data collection methods employed for the producers and consumers were also fundamentally different. It was decided, therefore, to devote one chapter to reporting the data on producers (this chapter), followed by another on consumers (Chapter Six). In this way, the opinions of each could be clearly built into a wider picture that better enabled an examination of the characteristics of the relationship between them, and therefore address the main aim of this thesis.

The data presented in this chapter are qualitative in nature, the result of 40 telephone interviews with producers from three case studies who regularly sell their produce at FMs[90]. Where appropriate, these data are triangulated with data from the FMMS, which were largely reported under Chapter Four (Section 4.7). The chapter is structured as follows:

Section 5.2 Producer motivations for attending FMs.
Section 5.3 The way in which producers promote the quality of their produce at FMs.
Section 5.4 The significance of being able to interact directly with consumers at FMs.
Section 5.5 Producer perspectives on the management of FMs.
Section 5.6 Summary of the producers at FMs.

[90] Chapter Four explained in detail the selection process for this sample of producers, and Appendix F contains a copy of the interview schedule used.

The producer interview responses have been grouped under those sections and sub-headings that best represent the main intention of the response, but frequently the responses comprise elements that could be included under a number of different sections. The text accompanying the quotations is intended to provide clarity and a degree of analysis, whilst still allowing the reader to see for themselves the often convoluted nature of the responses. Section 5.6 summarises the producers' attendance at FMs, before the format of this chapter is replicated in Chapter Six, but from the consumers' perspective. Chapter Six then concludes with a summary analysis of producer-consumer relations at FMs, which addresses the first objective of this thesis and its three associated sub-objectives (see Chapter One, Section 1.3).

5.2 Producer motivations for attending Farmers' Markets

Producers were asked about their initial motivations for attending FMs, as well as the ongoing significance of FMs within their overall food marketing strategy. This included an investigation of the direct economic returns achieved through selling at FMs, but also their broader economic value to producers as a promotional and product development tool. Specific questions were also asked to try and elicit whether producers had any non-economic motivations for selling at FMs, and how they compared selling through FMs with other food retail outlets. Section 5.2.1 sets out producers' initial motivations, and the remainder of the section deals with FMs ongoing significance, but as will become apparent, initial and ongoing motivations were often difficult to disentangle.

5.2.1 Initial motivations

5.2.1.1 As an additional or replacement outlet

Some of the producers interviewed had been selling a portion of their produce to friends, neighbours, local shops and hotels for some time. However, this was usually on an ad hoc basis, and FMs provided a more dynamic and structured framework for them to sell their produce:

> "Really, because I have always made associated products such as cheese cakes, quiches, anything I can make from goats cheese, and I was selling

> those to local areas, but that was very erratic. So I thought, well we could put the two together, and do them through the FM" (Producer 14, Stroud).

In many instances, existing outlets were failing to provide a sufficient income for producers, either because the prices being paid were too low, or because there simply was not enough custom. For example, wholesale prices were often cited as getting progressively worse, and producers who had been selling their produce through Pick-Your-Own (PYO) were finding that people were no longer coming in sufficient numbers to make it profitable. Indeed, in a number of cases producers said that were it not for FMs, they would no longer be in business. FMs were also seen as enabling producers to gain a better margin on the produce they sell, either through being able to add value to their produce, or by selling directly to the end consumer and gaining the full retail price:

> "I think we were primarily PYO and farm shop producers prior to that. We realised that the market was in decline, and this seemed quite a good opportunity for us to replace that" (Producer 74, London).

> "You are taking a retail price for your product, cutting out the middleman, which was important with the wholesale market getting worse and worse over the last ten years. I was getting lower prices than I was ten years ago for anything sent to market" (Producer 58, London).

> "Well the cheese production and the FM was all triggered off really by the milk price eighteen months ago, when they dropped it down 16p, which basically meant we weren't making any profit. So that was our way to try and generate extra cash and keep afloat" (Producer 26, Stroud).

In this context, the initial motivation for producers to attend FMs was to replace (or extend) existing outlets, which were either failing, or incapable of providing the necessary income levels for producers to remain in business.

5.2.1.2 As a business test bed

In a few cases, producers had used FMs as a means of establishing the viability of a business idea. For example, in the first quote below, a dairy farmer was considering diversifying some of his liquid milk production into yoghurt, which he intended to sell through supermarkets. However, he was uncertain about how good his flavours were, and so piloted the yoghurt at his local FM where he was able to get direct consumer feedback on how they rated the flavours. In the second quote, a woman wanted to give up her career in banking and to set up her own catering business. She saw FMs as providing a low-cost option to test whether or not her business idea could succeed:

> "When we first started it was a test-bed basically for the flavours and the products that we were doing with the consumer more than anything else. The interaction week in and week out...we asked them whether they were happy with this, or not happy with this...It still is very important...[and] we are constantly having a good rapport with the consumer that we don't have selling to local shops" (Producer, Pilot 3).

> "The idea for the FM really came from the notion that it would be a sounding board if you like for [our] business idea, and it would give us a platform without the expense of going into a shop, or the normal huge outlay that you have when you start a business....From our point of view the FM has been a great way to springboard a business...[and] it gave us a great insight as to whether we had a viable product" (Producer 29, Stroud).

In these cases, the initial motivation for selling at FMs was to use them as a test bed for their proposed business ideas. The FM was not seen as the ultimate retail outlet for either business, although at the time of the interview both were still selling a proportion of their produce at FMs. Producer (Pilot 3) continued to value the consumer feedback on his products, while Producer 29 (Stroud) enjoyed the experience of selling at FMs.

5.2.1.3 Ethical considerations

Although increasing profit levels was almost invariably the primary initial motivation for attending FMs, there was occasional evidence of an ethical impulse, which usually included seeing FMs as somehow in balance with their business ideals:

> "I don't want to go into any of the big supermarkets, I want to keep it small. It is a small business, and I think selling it through the FMs really is a continuation of what the business is all about. It is a handmade product, really handmade, I mean there isn't any machinery involved or anything" (Producer 14, Stroud).

The following quotation is from a farmer in Wiltshire who has a 770 ha arable farm which is in the process of organic conversion, and he was selling at least some of his produce through FMs in order to relate more closely to the people within his local area:

> "It's something that I feel is worthwhile. Neither of the two enterprises are going to make us a fortune [vegetables and beef]...I haven't set them up

> because I think they are going to be very profitable enterprises, it is more from the point of view that I want to be dealing with people directly and to be producing the food that people want, rather than just producing some commodity that gets shipped off somewhere and processed. It's making the farm more visible to the local people, bringing them back in touch with food production and understanding what food production is all about, and making people more aware of what goes on in the countryside in general, and certainly for schoolchildren. So it is all hopefully part of an educational process" (Producer 80, Wiltshire).

Both of these producers still aimed to make a profit from their enterprises, but the opportunity to sell through FMs was also seen as providing an opportunity to gain (or perhaps reclaim) some control over the way in which their produce travels through the food chain. This included making more direct connections between the way in which the food is produced, and its sale to the end consumer.

5.2.2 Their economic significance

Either directly, or indirectly, making more money was almost invariably cited as the principal reason for attending FMs, although the extent to which producers depended upon FMs for their livelihoods varied enormously. In certain cases, sales through FMs amounted to 100% of their income, while for others it was as little as 1% (see Appendix H). To some producers, FMs were simply an extra outlet with a good profit margin, but for many they had become the life-blood of their business. However, whatever the percentage of their output that went through FMs, the main economic benefit was almost invariably expressed as being the opportunity to get the full retail price for the produce being sold:

> "The advantage of selling it through FMs is that you are cutting out the middleman, you sell at a fair price, then you can get a better margin, and that is probably one of the main reasons why we all do it" (Producer 61, London).

The producer in the following quote farms 162 ha in Wiltshire, and sales through FMs represent only about 1% of the total farm turnover. However, she still finds it economically worthwhile to go to FMs due to the profit margins achievable:

> "We are a big farm and have got a big turnover, but there again it is not the turnover, it is actually the profit you can make. The bit of profit I make does

> add up, and I expect I make a tenth of the profit, but I only have a hundredth of the turnover, so that is a difference" (Producer 41, Wiltshire).

For a number of producers the extra profit margins available through selling at FMs have been critical to enabling them to stay in business:

> "To survive on this size farm basically…I can exist on what the supermarkets charge the customer; I can't exist on what the supermarkets pay me. And that differential is substantial enough that we can live out of the farm, well reasonably well, which you should be able to do. For our efforts we are being ably rewarded, and also we are selling our own product, which I think by all accounts is appreciated by the people that buy it" (Producer 78, London).

To those producers that depended heavily on FMs for their income, FMs were seen as an ideal way to sell their produce, although a number were concerned about 'having all their eggs in one basket'. In this respect, the Foot and Mouth epidemic (in 2001) gave many producers a real shock, in that for several weeks they were unable to sell at FMs and their income plummeted. In some cases this had prompted a re-evaluation of their marketing strategy, in order to lessen their dependence on FMs. For example, one producer who had 90% of their produce going through FMs said that:

> "I would like it to be 50% FMs and 50% wholesale. The advantage of FMs is that you get your money on the day, and you get the full retail price. But the disadvantages were shown with the outbreak of Foot and Mouth, where all of a sudden we had no income, and I seemed to have too many eggs in one basket…So I need to do more wholesale…and that is what we are aiming to do now" (Producer 15, Stroud).

Producers frequently mentioned that they try to sell their produce at those FMs that will give them the best economic returns. In a number of cases this had meant producers giving up selling at certain markets, which had not been economically worthwhile:

> "Really we choose the markets where we are going to earn the most money to be fair…The trouble is there are only so many markets you can do. I would rather build up the markets that I have got and take more money at each market, because it cuts the overheads down" (Producer 48, London).

Nevertheless, this goal of economic maximisation was sometimes tempered by a desire by producers to sell their produce as locally as possible. This was particularly the case at the Stroud and Wiltshire FMs, where a number of the producers stressed that selling at their most local FM was part of the underlying ethos of FMs, and something they valued:

> "Basically if there is a local FM, we try and sell at it...I would think about 25-30 miles is the maximum...I fccl very strongly about the local aspect of food, it's something I think both the consumer and the producer have to get back to" (Producer 35, Stroud).
>
> "All the regulars say we ought to get involved in doing the big London ones...They say you take three times at a London market, what you take down here...[but] it smacks a bit of losing the point doesn't it; if everything is meant to be produced within forty miles, and then you are driving 110 miles to sell something, it kind of spits in the face of Wiltshire FMs doesn't it" (Producer 9, Wiltshire).

In contrast, the producers attending the London FMs were generally not concerned about how far they travelled to the markets, provided it did not make their working day too long:

> "We obviously go to the markets where we think we are going to sell the product best...Distance isn't a problem really, I go as far as London and that is probably as far as I would want to go, and that is normally a 50 or 60 mile round trip, which is a nice enough distance...to not have to leave too early" (Producer 61, London).

Underlying producers' attendance at FMs was a clear desire to improve their profit margins. For some producers FMs were only a small part of their overall marketing strategy, but in some instances selling at FMs had been pivotal in allowing them to stay in business. However, whatever the economic significance to individual producers, there was again frequent evidence of an ethical impetus to affect change in the relationships within the food system.

5.2.3 As a promotional tool

Nearly all of the producers interviewed sell at a range of outlets, and in some cases FMs were viewed simply as *an* outlet within that range, albeit one which allows them to make a good margin through selling directly to the consumer:

> "As long as the markets keep going alright, I'm happy the way it is. Perhaps a little bit of mail-order...I'm not looking for chefs or restaurants to come onto me. I mean if they turn up and want to buy at the market, I will sell to them. But I am not going out looking for them, I've done that" (Producer 48, London).

However, more usually producers said that through selling at FMs they had increased their sales at other outlets and, in some cases, this was an important motivation for coming to FMs. For example, producers felt they were able to make consumers aware that their products were also available in local shops or a farm shop. Alternatively local businesses, such as restaurants and delicatessens, could be introduced to their produce at FMs and subsequently encouraged to stock it. As such, FMs were frequently seen as a very cost effective 'shop window' which allows producers to promote their produce to a targeted audience, and yet at the same time make money through selling at a good profit margin:

> "We are doing all our promotions, all our marketing effectively for less than nothing, and coming back with money in our pocket as well. So from that point of view they are a very cost-effective way of getting our produce across to a wider audience" (Producer 9, Wiltshire).

> "It is definitely a promotional tool because people want our vegetables more than once a month...I think the organisation and the publicity that goes with it is good from the point of view of making people aware generally of eating local food and thinking about what they are eating. I think in the future they will be a way of attracting more customers; a shop window for us if you like" (Producer 80, Wiltshire).

In a number of cases, it is apparent that as producers gain extra outlets as a result of selling at FMs the percentage of their turnover that goes through FMs falls, even though their actual FM turnover remains steady. This indicates that the promotional aspect of FMs has allowed producers to increase the size of their business, and in only one instance did a producer suggest that they intended to move away from selling at FMs, once their other outlets had grown sufficiently. More normally, the on-going benefits of selling at FMs were seen as worth continuing with:

> "When we started it was 100% [of our output that was going through FMs], and gradually we have found other outlets and we have established a reputation and a name...The FM is staying steady, but other sides are increasing...[and] now probably the FM is only a third to 50%...Although the percentage of our income has become less...a lot of it has come from the

> FM. So to give the FM up…I don't think would be viable, because they are interrelated" (Producer 29, Stroud).

However, despite the promotional benefits for many producers, this was not invariably the case. The following quote is from a producer who was selling much of his produce through a van delivery round, which he hoped would be increased by his exposure at FMs:

> "Well that was one of the big driving forces for doing it [selling at FMs], and I have to tell you it is astonishing how little extra custom we have generated for the other stuff…I can't believe there is no crossover; that's been one of the enormous disappointments" (Producer 45, Wiltshire).

There seems little doubt that the promotional role of FMs is an important element of their appeal to many producers. In some cases it is an added bonus, but to others a deliberate component of their overall food marketing strategy.

5.2.4 Selling at Farmers' Markets compared to other food retail outlets

5.2.4.1 Wholesale outlets

The principal advantage producers recognised for selling at FMs compared to selling through wholesale outlets, was the superior profit margins available. However, producers also identified a number of disadvantages. In the first quote below, this involved FMs' lack of regularity as a retail outlet, as well as their relatively restricted ability to handle large volumes of produce:

> "For us as egg producers targeted on wholesalers, it [the FM] is an adjunct. We could never let go of that umbilical cord, because we can't risk being left with eggs, they have just got to go…So when we are looking at sales income from the FM, it is not the price of the eggs that we are looking at, it is the difference between the price of the eggs, and for wholesale; because they could go to wholesale for no extra effort whatsoever. So we are only actually scrabbling for a tiny bit of extra margin…My wife gets some pleasure out of it, but it is not hugely significant to us…To us it is a deviation from wholesaling…but it is not a lifeline" (Producer 22, Stroud).

To several producers the biggest drawback of selling through FMs relative to wholesale outlets was the extra time involved in selling at FMs. This takes the producer away from their production process, and necessarily limits the number of FMs that they can attend. In some instances, producers overcame this dilemma by having employees selling on their stalls. However, as discussed under Section 5.4.3, this solution was not without controversy:

> "Because we are full-time farmers, time is the biggest crunch to the FMs. By the time we have packed the van up in the morning, go over there, sell, and then pack and then come back; I have got to do a full day's work before and after [the FM]" (Producer Pilot 3).

In addition to the extra time burden of selling through FMs, there was usually an extra workload. For example, a honey producer used to sell all his honey in barrels to wholesalers, whereas when selling through FMs he decants it all into jars. Although this enables him to make a better margin on the honey he sells, he doubted whether it was worth all the extra work involved, yet he continues to sell at FMs because he enjoys the experience. Similarly, the following quote relates to a herb producer who also commented that selling at FMs was very hard work, but that it was both more economically rewarding and more personally satisfying than selling through wholesale outlets:

> "It makes you feel as though all your hard work has been worth the effort. Because I could work just as hard sending huge quantities of stuff to wholesale, and possibly making the same amount of money, but the way things are going you seem to send more and more, to get the same level of income, and that is really depressing...Whereas if you are selling on the FM, you have got a retail margin, and you've got lots of satisfied customers if you're doing it right" (Producer 58, London).

The economic motivation for selling through FMs is again demonstrated, but with a recognition that there is a price to pay for the extra margins available. There is also evidence of a more personal non-economic motivation for attending FMs, that will be demonstrated further within Section 5.2.6.

5.2.4.2 Local independent food retailers

Several producers expressed that they felt much more in control of their produce when selling it through FMs, compared to selling it through local food shops, because they knew exactly how their produce was being handled, and were able to promote it to its maximum effect:

> "When I used to sell cheeses into shops, they used to say oh well the customer didn't like that, or the yoghurt went off, and you would say and what temperature were you keeping it at, and you never know who is at fault if you are selling it indirectly...But [at the FM] it comes out of my cold store, onto the van, into the market, and I know exactly what I am selling. I'm there if there are any problems" (Producer 48, London).

> "If we sell produce to a shop they won't put the effort into selling it and getting people to taste it and to talk about it, that we will at a FM. Nobody sells your own stuff like you do"(Producer 03, Wiltshire).

There was a recognition that in some ways FMs may inadvertently be in competition with local shops, about which a number of producers expressed concern. Producers who also sell their produce through local shops have found that the latter are generally supportive of FMs, because they can provide publicity for them. However, the producers recognised that it was important for them to maintain the same selling price for their produce when it is sold at the FM, as is being charged for it in the local shops, or else consumers may no longer buy their produce from the local shops, but wait for the FMs. A few producers also suggested that in smaller towns there is only so much business available for independent food retailers, and that there may not be the commercial room for both FMs and local food retailers to sell comparable produce:

> "It is a shocking shame that they can't seem to make [the Tetbury market] work. They have a fabulous butcher that has been established there for years and years. Just round the corner from the butcher, there is one of the greatest cheese shops in the country. They have all their own produce there already, and...you do have a job to compete. I mean Stroud doesn't actually have its own butcher anymore, so the meat producers can usually get by very well in Stroud, and there is not really a particularly good greengrocer" (Producer 13, Stroud).

> "One of the reasons [for going to the London FMs] is because we are selling meat and meat products, and we don't want to compete with our local little butchers...The second reason is that the job can become overdone in the provincial towns...and it becomes unviable...because there isn't the footfall.

> So we go to London for the number of people, and also their personal spend is probably higher than in our locality" (Producer 78, London).

There was a sense that many of the producers saw independent local shops as somehow similar to FMs, and that there needed to be some form of coordination between them, or else either of them (or both) will potentially struggle to survive. Having said that, producers clearly felt that selling through local shops still entails a disjunction between the producer of the food on sale, and the final consumer.

5.2.4.3 Supermarkets

It was unusual to find producers who sold any of their produce to supermarkets, and many were implacably opposed to the idea. Either this was on the grounds that supermarkets squeeze producer margins to such an extent that it is not possible for them to make a living, or producers were intent on creating a different relationship between the production and consumption of food:

> "I think they are an absolute travesty in terms of any small business development...the margins that they effectively dictate [to you] don't allow you to earn a living" (Producer 77, London).

> "Somehow an innate knowledge that [FMs are] actually the correct way of doing it, [and] politically I hate the supermarkets and all that they have come to represent" (Producer 30, Stroud).

> "I wouldn't sell to supermarkets...because I don't believe in them...We don't call them supermarkets in our house, they're called food distribution centres" (Producer 42, Wiltshire).

Effectively, many producers within this study viewed supermarkets as being structurally incompatible with their own business (see also Section 5.2.1.3), not only because of the scale of their respective operations, but also their underlying ethos. Supermarkets were generally perceived as businesses whose exclusive aim was to maximise their own profits, irrespective of the consequences for others, economically, socially, or environmentally.

5.2.5 Loyalty

Almost without exception the producers insisted that they were loyal to their principal FMs[91], which they felt necessitated doing their utmost to attend each of the markets held, even if they did not have much produce to sell at certain times of the year. Sometimes this was in order to inform consumers about the seasonality of their produce, but principally it was to ensure that the market remained viable, and would still be available for them when they did have produce to sell. Concordant with the latter point there was often a sense of interdependence and communal endeavour, which entailed actively supporting other stallholders as well as the structure of the markets themselves:

> "I think it is a self-supporting thing. I mean we support it in order for them to support us" (Producer 4, Wiltshire).
>
> "The more variety there is at any given market the better it is for trade generally. So yes, you all try to make sure that you are there when you're supposed to be there, because it makes a full market. There is nothing more depressing than seeing gaps around where there should be a stall, it doesn't look good from the public's point of view" (Producer 58, London).

Most of the producers also expressed a loyalty towards the consumers at FMs, which they felt was fulfilled through turning up for each market, being honest about what they do, and providing consistently good quality produce. In some instances, producers also gave discounts to their regular customers, although they then make it clear to the consumer that they are receiving a discount. Many also mentioned that selling at FMs is a bit like 'the old shopkeeper routine', whereby loyalty to consumers is manifest through taking a personal interest in them, giving them a cheerful smile, and generally making them feel welcome. This was seen as building up a rapport and engendering trust, which in turn would induce consumer loyalty to the producer. In other words, loyalty was seen as a two way thing:

> "Yes definitely [I feel loyalty to the consumers], and I hope they feel a sense of loyalty to us as well...The only way we can show our loyalty is to keep being there at the markets...and to keep the product as good as possible. And the only way they can show their loyalty, is to keep coming back" (Producer 61, London).

[91] Some producers sold to as many as 65 FMs per month (see Appendix H), and there was sometimes no particular FM that was seen as the principal market. However more usually, producers expressed that there were certain markets that were more important than others. This might be on the grounds that they were the most local; that they were the first FM they had attended; that they were involved in the management of the FM; or that it was a particularly remunerative FM.

> "If I know the person...I always round it down 10 or 20p and they know I have done it, which brings them back the next time. So you win, and what you lose you win" (Producer 48, London).

The loyalty being shown by the producers is, therefore, distinctly commercial in its intent, both to the FMs themselves in order to safeguard their continuance, but also to the consumers, to ensure their repeated custom.

5.2.6 Enjoyment and job satisfaction

Although often acknowledged as hard work, producers invariably said that they enjoy selling at FMs, with typical comments including: 'I love the atmosphere'; 'it's great fun'; 'you get to know your regular customers and build up a rapport'; 'it's pleasant, and a very nice way of selling'; 'yes, I definitely do enjoy it'; 'I enjoy the interaction with the consumers and seeing their reactions'; 'it gives you a bit of a buzz'. Usually, the enjoyment of selling at FMs was seen by producers as a welcome by-product, rather than a primary motivation:

> "I mean there is a wonderful atmosphere there and I just enjoy going there. I do quite well financially there as well, but I just enjoy it" (Producer 6, Wiltshire).
>
> "I just feel that I am so proud of FMs, I get a real buzz from selling at them, and I know I am making a good living, and I just think the feedback is brilliant" (Producer 17, Stroud).

The chance to meet up with other producers, and to be with like-minded people, was also seen as adding to the enjoyment element of FMs. Whilst some producers only rated this contact as an opportunity to exchange practical information on such things as production techniques, many more saw it as having an important social benefit:

> "Oh I think it's really important, because for one thing farming is a fairly solitary business, and it makes you realise that you are not the only one in that boat...and you realise that you are part of a fairly big group of people, who are all working their fingers to the bone. So the camaraderie is considerable; it becomes like a little club really" (Producer 15, Stroud)

Very often coupled with enjoyment, was job satisfaction, and a sense of pride in being able to sell their own produce directly to the consumers of that produce. The opportunity to get direct feedback from consumers was of considerable value to the producers, and something that is not usually forthcoming in farming. As illustrated under Section 5.2.1.2, this direct consumer feedback was acknowledged as having a commercial value, but clearly there is also a non-commercial, or 'human' value as well:

> "We have had a general interest in where our livestock went and just being able to sell what we produce. We know it's good quality and it is a personal pride factor I suppose really. I can't really explain that one, it's strange, but I like selling what I produce" (Producer 78, London).
>
> "Actually I do enjoy FMs, although it gets really tiring because I am out both Saturday and Sunday from March until October/November when we finish. From that point of view it is a bit of a strain, but on the other hand I like selling to people and it is nice. It gives you a worthwhile feeling when people come back and say how much they enjoyed what they bought from you last time, and can they have some more. So yes from the psychological point of view it's gone from feeling like, would anybody actually notice if I disappeared from the wholesale markets...You end up feeling why the hell am I actually bothering at all. If they don't get it for me, they'll get it from Spain or wherever. You do feel worthy, valued" (Producer 58, London).
>
> "I think it gives us all a bit of a moral boost if nothing else" (Producer 41, Wiltshire).

The enjoyment and job satisfaction of selling at FMs may not have been given as the primary motivation for attending FMs by producers, but they were clearly of notable value to the majority of them. This was partly through feeling included within a wider community of producers, and partly because the direct contact with consumers allowed them to provide a context and legitimacy for the food they were selling.

5.3 The way in which producers promote the quality of their produce at Farmers' Markets

Within this section of the interview, producers were asked about the way in which they promote the quality of the produce they sell at FMs. For example, this included establishing the perceived relevance of official certification, and the importance of being able to explain directly to the consumers why they should be buying their particular product(s).

5.3.1 Production methods

Producers commonly mentioned that they produced their food in a 'traditional' way, implying that somehow this positively differentiated it from the produce consumers normally bought, and in many cases specific comparison was made with the produce available from supermarkets. Most producers were aware that consumers are often concerned about the provenance of their food, and the opportunity to make transparent their production methods to consumers was seen as one of the principal benefits of selling at FMs. The range of descriptors used by producers to do this included: 'home-made'; 'hand-made'; 'free-range'; 'local'; 'animal friendly'; 'healthier'; 'tastier'; 'uses minimal pesticides'; 'as good as organic'; 'natural'; 'superior'; and 'fresh':

> "What we are promoting is that it is a superior product using local ingredients; it is a handmade product...It is like the stuff you would like to make if you had time to do it yourself" (Producer 29, Stroud).

Very often coupled with the promotion of quality on the basis of the production methods employed, was the actual taste of the produce on sale. Producers often quoted their consumers as saying that 'it tastes better than in the supermarkets, and reminds me of when I was a child'. Most of the producers offered samples to the consumers at FMs, which they felt was an important way in which to promote the quality of their produce:

> "I think our whole marketing strategy is done on firstly the taste, and secondly that the meat has been born and bred on the farm, and that we mill our own food and we are nice to our pigs, and that we don't put antibiotics and all the other nasties in the food" (Producer 4, Wiltshire).

> "Mainly by sampling and tasting, and listening to me really; finding out how things are produced. But they certainly sample it, taste it and they decide it is very good. It is better than what they have been used to, and they come back for more" (Producer 20, Stroud).

Sometimes, where sampling is not feasible, many producers said that they make it quite clear to consumers that they are free to try the produce, and if they don't like it, to bring it back for a full refund:

> "Very often I give them a few [vegetables] to try and say take them home and cook them and see what you think. And I would say 99 times out of 100 when I have done this, people have come back the following market and

> bought more. So by giving them a little bit, in the weeks to come I will get my money back" (Producer 32, Stroud).

Interestingly, the producers were often promoting their produce on the basis that it was variously superior to comparable produce available in other outlets, yet most of the product descriptors used, such as 'animal friendly', are not legally defined. Instead, there is a reliance upon the integrity of the producers themselves, and a requirement that they have a degree of intimacy with the production process itself.

5.3.2 Freshness

Particularly with vegetables and certain fruits, producers emphasised the freshness of their produce, which had usually been harvested the day before, and occasionally on the morning of the market itself. Often a comparison was made with supermarket produce, or wholesale produce in local shops, which it was suggested may sometimes have been in cold storage for six weeks. Similarly, egg producers stressed that, at best, supermarket eggs are a week old by the time consumers buy them, whereas at a FM they are likely to be from the day before:

> "Our promotion at the FM…is the freshness…We feel there are welfare reasons for buying free range eggs, which we moderately promote, but freshness…is far more important as regards the product of an egg" (Producer 22, Stroud).

Allied to the freshness of produce at FMs, was the enabled immediacy between its production and consumption. This was seen as allowing producers to pick their produce when it is at its prime, and to grow varieties for their taste rather than for their keeping properties. In some cases, the point was also made that by getting the full retail price for the produce being sold, yield maximisation need no longer necessarily be the over-riding growing objective:

> "The first time I took some peppers to market, somebody picked one up and their first surprise was that it was firm, because your average Tesco peppers are getting a bit flabby by the time it goes out onto display; and also that it was so heavy. Because basically I had left them on the plant longer than a high-pressure commercial grower would, because if you leave it on the plant to ripen, you don't get the total yield…But from my point of view, it is compensated by the fact that I sell the pepper at a retail price; I don't need a

> huge yield to make the income...A lot of people have forgotten what proper stuff tastes like because it never arrives ripe; they are never plant ripened because it doesn't stay on the shelf long enough if it is too mature...It is not the best that a plant can do for you. I think that part of the success of FMs, is the freshness of everything" (Producer 58, London).

Although limited to certain product types, these responses again indicate the importance of the directness between the producer and the end consumer at FMs, this time in permitting the produce to be available at the point of sale in its prime condition.

5.3.3 Organic certification

Data from the Farmers' Market manager survey (FMMS) (see Chapter Four, Section 4.2) suggested that nearly 80% of FMs have less than 20% of their stallholders as certified organic producers, with more than 10% of the markets having no certified organic producers at all (although many of the managers said that they had producers 'in conversion'). Nevertheless, the issue of organic certification amongst the producers interviewed elicited strong responses, both pro and anti. To some organic producers, certification was seen as an extra layer of security, in that consumers are then legally assured that certain standards have been rigidly adhered to:

> "I think it's a lot easier to do it by being organically certified, because the organic certification process is the only process that absolutely guarantees to the public that there is no dodgy business at all. The food industry generally has been blighted by dodgy businesses in the food processing chain, and the one real benefit from the organic movement is that they insist on proper certification, and there is no bending of the rules whatsoever" (Producer 35, Stroud).

However, it was clear that some producers claim that their produce is grown to organic standards, even though they do not have certification as such. This was a source of considerable irritation to many of the certified organic producers, who felt that in being deliberately vague as to whether they were certified or not, producers were making use of the fact that many consumers appear to assume that much, if not all, of the produce at FMs is organic:

> "We mention that we grow our produce using biodynamic farming methods; that we don't use any artificial pesticides or fertilisers. So in effect we are

> providing organic biodynamic vegetables, although we are not certified to do that" (Producer 36, Stroud).

The importance of being able to talk directly to consumers about the production methods employed, was most often cited by those producers who were not certified organic (see also Section 5.3.1). There was a recognition that whilst a small proportion of consumers will only be satisfied with produce that is organically certified, many more are simply concerned about the way in which their food has been produced. The latter consumers were perceived as usually being satisfied about the quality of the produce they were buying, once they had been able to talk to the producer about the production methods employed. Even amongst certified organic producers, there was a feeling that organic certification was perhaps less important at FMs, than at outlets where there is no direct contact with the producers:

> "We get quite a few people that ask, are we organic. We're not, but many people have assumed we are because we are in the FM. And once we explain that we are not, but we don't use sprays heavily and we don't use fertilisers heavily, once we have actually explained how we rear the animals, I would say 90% of the time they will actually buy" (Producer 26, Stroud).

> "The organic was just something that I felt was important...with the way farming is at the moment...I mean we have gone down the route of organic, but it doesn't really matter with the FMs" (Producer 5, Wiltshire).

A number of the producers were also highly sceptical of the production benefits of organic certification, seeing it as just another marketing label that costs a prohibitively large amount of money to sign up to:

> "In practice we are virtually organic, but the actual step to get organic certification would cost us a lot of money, and I don't know that we would get the returns. And also I feel that I am producing a quality product, if you like in a commonsense way, using the best of modern technology, having regard to animal welfare and travelling distances and all this sort of thing. So I don't need for somebody to give me a set of rules" (Producer 78, London).

Whilst organic certification was of overriding importance to a few producers within this study, most considered that the ability to explain their production methods directly to consumers enabled a greater sense of confidence for consumers in the quality of the produce they were buying. Indeed, some producers clearly felt that organic certification was not primarily about quality assurance, but commercial advantage.

5.3.4 Local

Amongst those producers that were certified organic, there was also a recognition that there is a trade-off to be made between the benefits of local and organically produced food. For example, in many instances it may make more sense to buy non-organically certified food from a FM, where the alternative is to import organically certified produce from the other side of the world. In other words, there was a perception that organic in a wider sense should include the distance that food travels:

> "I think primarily it is organic, and obviously you can't do this at a FM, but if we were just selling someone else's organic produce from Thailand, then they could go to Waitrose to buy that. So it is a combination of both...partly the organic, but definitely the local is important as well" (Producer 80, Wiltshire).

Some of the producers felt strongly about the ideal of selling 'local produce to local people' and that this was what FMs were all about (see also Sections 5.2.1.3 and 5.2.2). In the context of promoting the quality of the produce being sold at FMs, its localness was seen as enabling transparency within its provision, and hence restoring consumer confidence in the food they are buying:

> "Confidence. Purely and simply to restore confidence in food...because the consumer knows you. It brings back that personal touch and responsibility which if you sell to supermarkets, the supermarkets try and take away from their producers" (Producer 35, Stroud).

There was also an appreciation that 'local' food is what certain consumers are looking for, and that the appendage 'local' can therefore provide a commercial advantage. However, this aspect should not be overstated, in that the producers generally felt that ultimately people bought it because it was high quality produce:

> "I think it has an influence, but at the end of the day I think it is a fresh high-quality product that really counts for most of it. But I think you get a lot of sympathy, and people are prepared to try it because it is local" (Producer 3, Wiltshire).

> "Well I hope it is the quality of the produce first and foremost. I think the fact that I can persuade people to try it, and then they come back and say they actually did enjoy it. Being local I think means a lot to them as well. So I think all three, but I would like to think it is the quality mainly" (Producer 14, Stroud).

The importance of 'local' produce and the localness of the producers also seems to differ between the FMs. In this respect, there was a notable difference between the markets in Wiltshire and Stroud, and the markets in London. For example, in Wiltshire and Stroud, several producers commented that consumers seem to value the direct local connections they have with the production of their food. At the London markets, the producers perceived that the consumers were not that concerned about where the produce had come from, other than the fact that it was very fresh and of a high quality:

> "In certain markets it's really important...[but] where I am less local...I don't think it makes the slightest bit of difference to them really; they just want cheese. But in the county a lot of people get to know you; they know you because they see you at markets, and they see you in the paper because you have done something, and you become sort of fairly well known because of your localness really" (Producer 15, Stroud).

The significance of 'local' to the promotion of quality at FMs seems to have two principal elements. Firstly, it contributes towards transparency within the provision of food, although this benefit seems to be less significant at the London FMs compared to those FMs situated within predominantly agricultural areas. Secondly, to some producers 'local food for local people' symbolises FMs, and therefore contributes to the overall 'quality' of the produce being sold at FMs. In addition, the 'localness' of produce was to some extent seen to bestow a commercial advantage.

It is apparent that the producers promoted their produce at FMs in a number of ways, which included: talking to the consumers about the production methods they use; extolling the freshness of the produce (where applicable); and in some cases highlighting that the produce is locally produced. Official certification was generally not seen as that important to assuring most of their customers about the quality of their produce. There was also a broad consensus amongst the producers that the most important aspect of their produce promotion was its intrinsic quality, which many stressed was the best available and self-evident to many of their customers.

5.4 The significance of being able to interact directly with consumers at Farmers' Markets

The benefits to producers of selling directly to the consumers of their produce at FMs have been mentioned throughout this chapter. However, the purpose of this section is to examine the nature of the interaction between the producers and consumers at FMs (from the producers' perspective), and the essence of the relationships formed, rather than simply its practical benefits.

5.4.1 Consumer feedback or complaints

Generally the producers within this survey said they had seldom received complaints, but when they do, they sort it out by immediately offering a full refund or a replacement. Many said they adopt this policy even if they feel it is not their fault, as 'the customer is always right', and they want to keep them coming. A number also said that they specifically ask for feedback from consumers, in order to develop their product range (see also section 5.2.1.2), and therefore in a sense, complaints (negative) habitually become feedback (positive):

> "You get a good rapport with a number of the customers, and over time you build up I suppose a bit of mutual trust. They know they can come to you, certainly to hopefully get a good product, but they also know they can come to us and say...well that wasn't quite right, what was the problem, and then you can discuss it with them and either put them right, or say look I'm very sorry we'll improve it next time. And it actually helps us with our products by talking to the customers" (Producer 61, London).

Several producers also remarked that just because they have not had many complaints, this does not mean that all their customers are satisfied, as there was a perception that many people in Britain do not like to complain:

> "What we find, is that we don't tend to get complaints, but what we do get is a lot of feedback. We'll get people saying your lamb Madras[92] was really hot last time, could you tone it down a bit...I don't know that really it is in

[92] It is perhaps ironic that this respondent should choose lamb *Madras* as an example of her home-made produce, which had used local ingredients, including the lamb!

> the British psyche to complain, but we certainly get a lot of feedback on the quality" (Producer 29, Stroud).

However, at the monthly markets in Wiltshire, it was recognised that it is difficult for consumers to come back a month later with something they are dissatisfied with, and producers believed they are more likely to just not come back at all:

> "If somebody buys a piece of chicken and they think it is shit, can they really be bothered to come back and see you in a month's time...Had it been Sainsbury's of course, you know you would take it back the next day, because you are in there everyday" (Producer 9, Wiltshire).

It is apparent that where there are complaints about produce at FMs, they are dealt with by producers in one of two ways. Firstly, by minimising the damage done to the commercial relationship by instantly appeasing the disgruntled customer, or secondly, by encouraging consumers to give them feedback on their produce, involving them (the consumers) in the whole process of quality control.

5.4.2 Consumer questions

The opportunity afforded to consumers at FMs to question the producers of their food directly, was widely seen by the producers as an important benefit of FMs. Inherent within this was the necessity for producers to be able to answer any questions that consumers may have. The immediacy of the reply made possible in this way was seen as facilitating a much better exchange of information, compared to something more passive like brochures, or labels. Likewise, through asking the producer questions, it was felt that consumers were able to develop a personal relationship with them, and to feel more in contact with the produce itself. Producers often insisted that this process enabled a transparency of food provision, which seemed to give consumers confidence in the food they were buying, while adding to the overall quality and value of the produce. Several producers also highlighted the importance of being honest with consumers, allowing them to make an informed choice as to whether to buy their produce or not:

> "I am just a simple chap who produces honey. I have no marketing skills whatsoever and people are not pressurised at all, they simply come along

> have a chat, I tell them the honest truth, they sample my honey and they buy it" (Producer 22, Stroud).

> "I feel it is important to a lot of people to have a connection with where their food comes from. And I suppose the evidence is that people are keen to talk about the chickens and how many eggs do they lay a day or a week...And so being able to talk knowledgeably about that gives them confidence as to what you're doing, and I think that breeds confidence for them in the food they are eating" (Producer 77, London).

> "People can ask you so many more questions, so I think that does make quality. They can say when was this pig killed, and you can tell them exactly when it was and where. I mean people have said to me, can I come and have a look at the farm; yep, that's fine as long as I get a phone call and I am happy to take anyone around" (Producer 17, Stroud).

However, despite the acknowledged benefit to consumers of being able to question producers directly, some producers remarked that they were surprised at how seldom consumers do question them. Their supposition was that many consumers probably make assumptions about the produce quality, solely on the basis that it is being sold at a FM:

> "They're very trusting I think. Their trust comes from the FM being there, they trust the organisation to vet people I think. But some do...They want to know, are you the grower, and where do you come from, and basically that is it" (Producer 72, London).

More usually though, producers replied that consumers often ask questions when they initially buy produce from them. But after a while the consumers seem to build up a confidence and trust in both the produce and the producer, and their questions become more conversational than interrogative, often around farming issues more generally. For example, at the time of the interviews in July and August 2001, Foot and Mouth was still in the country, and hence was often the major talking point:

> "The regulars obviously don't anymore because they know the product and they know me, but new customers do regularly" (Producer 15, Stroud).

The producer perspective on consumer questions at FMs was principally that they can increase the transparency of food provision for consumers. But critically, they as producers must be knowledgeable about the produce they are selling, so as to be able to answer any questions they may receive. Producer knowledge about the produce, and the opportunity to disseminate it to the consumers, also enables them to engender trust in themselves and legitimise the produce they are selling.

5.4.3 Employees selling at Farmers' Markets

Whether it is the actual producer, or an employee directly involved in the production process who sells at FMs, was an issue certain producers felt very strongly about. On the one hand, it was acknowledged that the time involved in selling at FMs necessarily constrains the number of markets that may be attended, unless employees are used to sell at some of them. Yet on the other hand, the direct relationship between the actual producer of the food and the consumer was seen as a critical part of the whole process at FMs (as discussed above). The most important element of this relationship, highlighted within the context of employees selling at FMs, was that the producer themselves knows their produce better than anyone else:

> "I have noticed on one or two occasions, when I don't think the young lad who has been fetched out from somewhere just to man the stall because they were short-staffed, necessarily knows anything about what he is selling...The FM is special if the rules are obeyed, otherwise it is like a street market...The whole essence of it is that the person selling the stuff knows exactly what happened to it" (Producer 58, London).

Where producers did have employees selling for them at FMs, they were always insistent that the employees were directly involved in the production process in some way. This meant that they were capable of answering any questions consumers might have about the production of the food they were selling. Almost invariably, even where producers had employees selling at FMs, they themselves also sold at some of the FMs thereby still getting the direct benefits of personally selling at FMs:

> "You obviously need one person per market per day, and I think at the moment we are doing about 12 markets a week on average...Everybody that works on the markets actually do work in here as well, even if it might only be one day a week or something, because we get so many questions asked of us. Like what have you got wheat free...what have you got yeast free...and so it is important that our sellers know what they are talking about" (Producer 75, London).

In addition to the concerns of some producers about the knowledgability of employees selling at FMs, there was a widespread recognition that employees are unlikely to sell the produce as effectively as the producer themselves. In some cases (generally the larger enterprises), this was seen as an acceptable compromise in order to increase the volume of produce that can be sold through FMs. However, a number of smaller producers were emphatic that they would never have employees selling their produce, because they lost too much revenue as a result:

> "I think it is absolutely essential. I've found that on the odd occasion when other people have sold for me…you just lose it really…because they never have the same sort of involvement in the product that you do yourself; and they are not able to promote it as well as you are yourself" (Producer 15, Stroud).

A few producers also remarked that being able to speak to the actual producer at FMs was part of the aura that makes FMs special, and there was a perception that it was something consumers are looking for when they shop at FMs. In a sense, this aura was seen as part of the marketability of FMs, that gave them a competitive edge as a brand:

> "Well I think that is all part of it [being able to talk to the actual producer], almost to the extent that it really is almost a marketing thing; that is what people want. They come to the FM and they want to speak to the producer, so if I just put somebody else behind the stall, they are not going to speak with the same passion about my lamb stew, or whatever, that I am" (Producer 29, Stroud).

There was clearly a divergence of opinion amongst producers about having employees selling at FMs, both commercially and in principle. However, as with Section 5.4.2 on consumer questions, it was generally agreed that if employees do sell at FMs, they must be knowledgeable about the produce they are selling. As above, this again concerns the opportunity at FMs for producers to regain power and legitimacy within the food chain, which could be dissipated if the employee was incapable of accessing the potential available.

5.4.4 The ongoing relationship with consumers

Many of the producers interviewed felt that the relationship they build up with their regular consumers at FMs is more than that of an acquaintance, preferring to describe it as almost a friendship, even though the relationship may be based upon meeting each other for as little as 30 seconds once a fortnight. There was also an understanding that this relationship was something that consumers were looking for at FMs, and therefore it was in their business interests to cultivate. Certainly, the producers enjoyed the build up of a more personal relationship with their consumers for social reasons (see also Section 5.2.6), but their primary motive for attending FMs was to sell their produce, and this was seen as another aspect of FMs that enables them to do so:

> "Regular consumers do become a friend I think really. Your friendship only exists across the counter, but they chat to you...and you do build up a kind of superficial friendship which of course they like, and then that of course develops into a loyalty; you know it is in your interests really to keep them coming" (Producer 15, Stroud).

> "Well I think it is more on a friendly basis...It is a very personal relationship with a lot of them. I do find that I have to try and remember and recognise people; they like to be recognised...they really do want the personal side of it as well" (Producer 14, Stroud).

> "[It] is the same as in a shop, except that it is a little bit more intimate than that I think...I think it is based upon the fact that they can interact with you as a person. I mean if you are selling from a shop, the shop is the thing they are visiting. If you are selling at a market, it is you they are visiting" (Producer 6, Wiltshire).

Cultivating a more personal relationship with their consumers was also seen by most producers as enabling the build-up of rapport, and generating a sense of trust in themselves and consequently the produce they are selling:

> "I find the general public don't want to know about the animal particularly...the fact that calves come off the cow after 24 hours to enable you to drink milk; but they want to know the person that is doing the job. That's why people stick to a butcher, they like to rely on the person that's choosing the materials for their product...and develop a relationship with that person" (Producer 42, Wiltshire).

> "You get a good rapport with a number of the customers, and over time you build up I suppose a bit of mutual trust" (Producer 61, London).

Producers often suggested that it is the personal element that differentiates FMs from supermarkets, and that it is a return to the sort of relationship producers and consumers used to have in small local shops. The idea of an 'old-fashioned service' was evoked, which the producers felt was something consumers at FMs seem to enjoy, and which is largely lacking in supermarket outlets. This personal element was seen as important in assuring consumers of the quality of the produce they are buying, but also as something that is of value in itself:

> "Quite personal, well very personal in some respects...Obviously there is a buyer and a seller attitude, but you can have banter with them and you get to know them...it's more back to the old shopkeeper routine if you like, with people actually meeting each other and talking, whereas with supermarkets it's in, get all your shopping, and get out again" (Producer 78, London).
>
> "It is the old-fashioned service, it is the thing they can't get in the supermarkets...People often come to me and...say I went into so and so supermarket and asked them...where the cod had come from, or where the haddock had come from, and they didn't know. They are simply there just to sell the produce which is laid out on the counter; they don't know anything about it...they couldn't care less as long as they get their wage at the end of the week" (Producer 66, London).

The ongoing relationship with consumers at FMs was almost invariably described by the producers as friendly, and in some cases developing into a friendship. This relationship was seen to be of benefit in two principal ways: firstly, as an opportunity to sell their produce in an environment in which they feel personally valued; and secondly, that it engenders consumer trust in their produce, facilitating its sale.

5.5 Producer perspectives on the management of Farmers' Markets

As discussed within Chapter Four (Section 4.7), when reporting the results of the FMMS, there is a potential schism about how FMs should be managed. This management debate centres around the 'integrity' of FMs, versus the 'variety' of produce available at them, and its resolution is critical to the future of FMs as an entity. As argued within Chapter One (Section 1.2), although a number of bodies are involved in the management of FMs, it is the producers and their produce together with the consumers who embody FMs. Their respective perspectives on the management of FMs are therefore of central importance to the resolution of this debate. Section 5.5 now presents the producer perspective, whilst the consumer perspective is presented under Chapter Six (Section 6.5).

Amongst many of the producers interviewed, there was an intuition that producers at FMs will normally be trustworthy. However, it was also widely accepted that there were occasions where producers were not being honest about what they produce, and in some cases were even buying-in produce to sell on. As a result, there was a perception amongst the producers that consumers were sometimes being deliberately misled, and concern that the reputation of FMs could be damaged, perhaps even to the point of "degenerat[ing] into car boot sales" (Producer 74, London). At the time of the interviews[93], the producers generally acknowledged that self-regulation and goodwill were the major factors ensuring the trustworthiness of producers at FMs, but that somehow these needed to be backed up by regulations, in order to safeguard the integrity of FMs:

> "You have to rely an awful lot on people's goodwill and ability to want to do something that is genuine and good...[and] I am concerned that people jump on the bandwagon and start FMs, and use the name which is not legally tied in any form, just to get customers there...And I think that is very much the wrong way to go. I think you have to build it on people who are genuine, and who want to provide something for the public which is really good, and very accountable, and where possible, as local as possible" (Producer 11, Wiltshire).

> "I think there could be the odd instance where people aren't being genuine. Where somebody might be buying-in some produce...I think people are seeing it as a business, and of course it should be run as a business, and so hopefully you turn up at the right markets to generate a profit. Having said that, I don't think that should mean that people can just wantonly sell...whatever they want, the moment they see a niche or loophole in the market" (Producer 13, Stroud).

> "There is nobody that comes round from the FM to check that you are selling your own stuff, and I think it would be nice if there was a bit more [regulatory] backbone to it all...I'm worried that we might lose our good name" (Producer 17, Stroud).

There was almost unanimous agreement amongst the producers that FMs needed regulations to ensure that it is only the producers of the goods being sold, or someone who has been directly involved in the production process, that may sell at FMs. This was seen as differentiating FMs from other retail outlets, making producers more

[93] The interviews took place in July and August 2001. Since then the NAFM have introduced their accreditation scheme (NAFM, 2002c), which seeks to ensure the integrity of FMs. This includes the inspection of individual FMs and their stallholders, once every three years. See also Section 2.5.2.

directly accountable to consumers for what they sell, and allowing consumers to make more personally informed decisions about the produce they buy:

> "There should be no fudging. They should be purely and simply producer markets...I think they can widen their scope, but it's got to be a producer, or a multiplier, or a local manufacturer of quality goods: it must be. If they just start letting people in that can sell anything, then they will disappear very quickly" (Producer 35, Stroud).

Most of the London FM producers were very supportive of the strong stand taken by LFM as to who may sell at the FMs run by them, and that they have a system in place for inspecting producers on a periodic basis[94]. However, at the same time there was concern that the regulations should not become too burdensome, a sentiment that was broadly echoed by producers at all the FMs:

> "I think the farms need to be checked to make sure they are producing what they say they are producing, but...I would hate to think of ourselves and other producers having to keep loads of extra paperwork" (Producer 67, London).

Similarly, there was a general consensus that basic hygiene regulations must be adhered to at FMs. Although no producer dissented from this basic premise, several were concerned that FMs should not be unnecessarily regulated in this regard, and the produce became "all wrapped in plastic and everything" (Producer 14, Stroud):

> "Obviously you have got to have basic rules. I think generally we don't have any problems with the TSO and EHO[95], because everybody wants to do a good job to start with...But what it mustn't do is become onerous such that we are having to do things that don't benefit the customer, and don't benefit our business...This idea of perception and image, and at the end of the day, a lot of the people we trade with don't want to use supermarkets, because everything is pre-packaged, everything is labelled, everything looks nice, and tastes the same...We don't want to become if you like sanitised, like supermarkets have become" (Producer 78, London).

[94] London Farmers' Markets Ltd (LFM) insist that all producers who sell at their FMs must sign an agreement that states they will abide by the rules of the markets. These rules cover: that it should be producers only, which includes the producers family, or employees directly involved in the production process; the distance producers can travel from their place of production to the FMs; permitted products; the degree of processing allowed, and where the ingredients for processed foods should come from; that adequate insurance is held; and that the manager will make scheduled visits to the places of production, in order to ensure that the producer-only rule is being adhered to (LFM, 2001).

Despite widespread support for the idea of safeguarding the underlying tenets (or integrity) of FMs, many producers also asserted that a degree of flexibility was essential, in order to maintain a sufficient variety of produce at FMs and hence ensure their commercial viability. For example, they believed there should be some market radii flexibility, in that to some extent it is self-regulating anyway, through the travel times involved in getting to the markets (notwithstanding the earlier comments in this chapter relating to 'local'). However, the two principal areas of flexibility raised by producers were: firstly, the use of employees at FMs; and secondly, the degree of processing that should be allowed for the produce being sold at FMs.

The issue of employees selling at FMs was discussed under Section 5.4.3, when examining the significance to producers of being able to interact directly with consumers at FMs. Nevertheless, it was the difference of opinion amongst producers over processed foods being sold at FMs, that best exemplifies the management debate over the integrity of FMs versus the variety of produce available at them.

Some producers felt that FM organisers are often too flexible in their interpretation of what constitutes the reasonable processing of food for sale at FMs. For example, the importation of olives, which are then minimally processed, was often cited as unacceptable by those producers wary of processed foods at FMs. As with the site visits above, there was considerable support amongst London FM producers for the relatively tough rules of LFM, regarding processed foods at a FM[96]. Part of the argument seems to be that FMs are there to provide an outlet for UK farmers, and that by allowing extensive processing this aim becomes diluted[97]:

> "I think it is crucial that they stay as FMs, for farmers to sell their products...In my own case, you have to produce the milk that makes the cheese. At other FMs you can buy in milk from anywhere, produce the cheese, and still do a FM" (Producer 48, London).

[95] TSO (Trading Standards Officer). EHO (Environmental Health Officer).

[96] For example, that all the meat in processed foods such as sausages should have been raised by the producer, although minor ingredients may be purchased. With baked goods, the ingredients may be purchased, but should be local where possible. With preserves, chutneys and pickles, ingredients may also be purchased, but the major ingredients should be from within 100 miles of the M25, and where possible, from the FM itself (LFM, 2001).

[97] 22% of the producers in this study did not have any land (see Appendix H). Some of these were selling processed foods like preserves and stews; whereas others were selling primary produce such as fresh fish and game. None of them could be described as being UK farmers, but clearly they were increasing the variety available at the markets they sold at. They were also able to make a profit from selling at FMs (in one case 100% of their income), therefore indicating a demand for their produce.

The second part of the argument expressed against the proliferation of processed foods, was that the relationship between the production of food and its eventual sale at FMs, changes. For example, where the produce has been grown or reared by the person selling the produce at a FM, there is a direct connection between the producer and the end consumer. Likewise, where the ingredients for processed foods have been grown or reared by the producer themselves. However, where the producer selling the processed goods at the FM has bought the raw ingredients from a third party, there is an inevitable disconnection. In essence, the more processes there are between the original production of the raw food material and its eventual sale at the FM, the less a connection exists. In this context, the intrinsic qualities of the produce might be sound, but the person selling it is no longer so directly accountable to the end consumer. There were concerns that one of the main benefits of FMs was then in danger of being eroded, to the extent that FMs might become little different from any other market. The counter argument was that through extending the range of processed foods at FMs, consumers are provided with a greater variety and choice. This, it was argued, makes FMs a more realistic shopping alternative (to supermarkets for example), as well as contributing to the economic viability of the FMs themselves. However, almost invariably, even amongst those producers who were in favour of relaxing FM restrictions on processed foods, there was an awareness that it is a matter of balancing the need to create an economically sustainable market, with the underlying principles (or integrity) of FMs:

> "I'm very much against things like olives coming in, where the basic raw material is not even grown in this country...You know it is balancing...the authenticity if you like against the needs of the public, or at least the perceived needs of the public. In other words what they expect to go and be able to buy" (Producer 11, Wiltshire).
>
> "I do the [FMs] at Blackheath and Peckham...but on those markets there is very little variety; that's the problem. I think if they had more variety, they would do better" (Producer 66, London).
>
> "The Borough market[98] maybe goes a little bit too far, but it gives a lot more variety, it's not just a producers' market, there are importers and that sort of thing....I think that [FMs] can probably allow more than they do...Then on the other hand just allowing anybody to come in with any product...and not knowing exactly who they are...that's not good enough either. It has got to be somewhere in the middle" (Producer 72, London).

[98] The Borough Market was established by an Act of Parliament in 1756 and is one of London's oldest fruit and vegetable markets. It is located off Borough High Street, London SE1. For more details see http://www.boroughmarket.org.uk.

Although there was little or no equivocation amongst producers concerning the hygiene element of FMs' regulation, their sustainable management in terms of what may be sold at them (and who may sell it), was clearly more open to debate. As within the FMMS, this debate again revolved around getting the balance right between maintaining the integrity (or underlying tenets) of FMs, and ensuring that they remain commercially viable through having sufficient variety.

5.6 Summary of the producers at Farmers' Markets

In essence, the responses within this study strongly indicate that the predominant producer motivation for attending FMs was the pursuit of commercial gain. Inherent within this was an overriding desire to make more money as a result of selling their produce at FMs. This was either through the direct sales achieved at the markets themselves, the promotional opportunities afforded by FMs, or the ability to get direct consumer feedback on a new product, or business venture. Underlying these commercial benefits was the direct contact possible between the producers and the end consumers of their products. This direct contact was perceived as enabling the producers to attain the full retail price for their produce, to remain in full control of their produce until the final point of sale, and to gain immediate verification on how consumers related to their produce. The findings of the FMMS reported under Chapter Four (Section 4.7) also highlighted the commercial benefits of FMs in helping small and medium-sized producers to survive, by enabling them to get a better return on the produce they sell and to promote their produce more widely.

In pursuing their commercial goals, producers within this study sought to sell at those FMs which would give them acceptable economic returns. For some producers, 'acceptable' meant the maximum returns possible. Whereas for others, the goal of economic maximisation was moderated by a desire to retain very local linkages between the place of production and its point of sale to the end consumer. In these latter cases, the producers were intent on selling at their 'local' FMs, with the proviso that these must be sufficiently economically profitable for them (rather than necessarily seeking to maximise their profits). Their intention was to clarify to consumers the connections between the produce they were buying, and its place of production. As above, these findings accord with the FMMS, where FMs were also seen as having an important educational role in making consumers more aware of the impact of their food purchasing decisions.

In comparing FMs as an outlet, with supermarkets and wholesalers, the producers again pointed out the improved profit margins available at FMs (notwithstanding that there was an extra workload involved). Many producers were also adamant that supermarkets were structurally incompatible with the scale of their business, and its operational ethos. These ideas resonate with those of Latacz-Lohmann and Foster (1997) and Morgan and Murdoch (1998), both of whom made a similar observation with respect to the organic purists' perspective on the sale of organic food through supermarkets. In contrast, many producers within this study felt that local independent food retailers were somehow structurally comparable with FMs, even though they still viewed FMs as offering more direct connections within the food chain, and certain commercial advantages.

Commercial motivations also determined the producers' loyalty to both the FMs at which they sell, and to their customers at those markets. Although there was often a sense of mutual endeavour when discussing their loyalty to the FMs themselves, the intention was always to ensure a commercially successful market. Likewise, the producers' loyalty to their customers was invariably aimed at securing the latter's loyalty, by making them feel welcome and ensuring that they continue to come and buy their produce.

Nevertheless, despite the dominance of commercial motivations amongst producers for attending FMs, there was also considerable evidence of non-commercial motivations. This was particularly apparent in the expressions of enjoyment and satisfaction expressed by the large majority of producers within this study. Their enjoyment was the result of the vibrant atmosphere of the markets, and the chance to interact with other producers and to feel part of a community of like-minded people. Many producers also enjoyed the social interaction with their consumers, because they appreciate the positive feedback they receive from them, which helps to create a sense of job satisfaction and personal pride in their produce. To some producers, the ability to explain their production methods to consumers also had value as a means of establishing a legitimacy for the produce they were selling, at a time when food production methods were increasingly being questioned. Therefore, while not denying the primacy of commercial motivations for producers to attend FMs, these non-commercial motivations were ostensibly a welcome by-product of selling through FMs. This would seem to endorse Laughton's (1999) suggestion that profitability alone is unlikely to sustain producer attendance at FMs.

Many of the producers highlighted that it is the intrinsic quality of the produce they are selling which ultimately determines that it is purchased by consumers. This quality was expressed in terms of the 'traditional' production methods employed, its 'superior' taste, and the freshness and ripeness of the produce (especially fruit and vegetables). The localness of production was also seen as contributing to the freshness of certain produce, as well as being something that a number of producers felt added to the ethical (or extrinsic) quality of the produce. There was also a perception amongst producers that certain consumers were looking for local produce, and that it was therefore in their commercial interests to promote their produce as such.

However, despite the widespread confidence in the intrinsic qualities of their produce, the ability to explain its benefits directly to consumers was seen as a major advantage of selling through FMs. This was understood by producers as facilitating a transparency of food provision for consumers, as well as allowing them to promote their produce to its best effect. A number of producers also believed that part of the 'aura' of FMs for consumers was the opportunity to buy their produce direct from the producer, and therefore this represented another commercial advantage for producers in selling their own produce at FMs. As such, it was widely recognised that the person selling the produce at FMs must be knowledgeable about its production in order to be able to answer any questions from consumers. In reality, many producers found that after a few visits consumers no longer ask questions about the produce, a fact which the producers explained as being due to the build up of trust in them as a person. Their relationship with consumers was invariably described as friendly, and in some cases developing into an actual friendship. But as suggested above, the main purpose of developing this relationship was to engender trust in themselves, and consequently in the produce they are selling. However, for many producers it also clearly contributed to making them feel more *personally valued* for the work they do.

Underpinning the producers' attendance motivations at FMs are a number of guidelines or regulations which have evolved since the first FM in Bath in 1997 (Tutt and Morris, 1998). As set out within the literature review in Chapter Two, growing concerns that the identity of FMs was under threat, led to the setting up of the NAFM and the development of a list of FM criteria and subsequently a certification scheme (Hoskins 2000; NAFM 1999b; 2000b; 2002b; 2002c; Luc *et al.* 2001). These established that FMs should be based on two tenets: firstly, that the produce should come from within a predetermined radius of the FM; and secondly, that the vendor should have been directly involved in the production process in some way. The intention was to protect what distinguishes FMs as a food retail outlet, and to ensure that the foundations for the producers' (and indeed consumers' – see Chapter Six) attendance at FMs would be maintained. However, this management trajectory is questioned within the literature (e.g. Purvis, 2002), and within the FMMS. The debate centres on the variety of produce available at FMs, versus the integrity of the FMs themselves (or the adherence to their underlying tenets).

There was little disagreement amongst the producers that the vendor at FMs should have been directly involved in the production process. This is not surprising given that the their motivations for attending FMs were based (either implicitly or explicitly) almost exclusively on this premise. To some producers the market radius was certainly an issue, although some degree of flexibility in its implementation was generally acceptable as a means of increasing the availability of produce at FMs. The main issue of debate for producers concerned the extent of the vendor's connection with the produce for sale. Some were emphatic that it should only be the producer themselves, selling minimally processed foods, who could attend FMs. This perspective was considered important because otherwise the direct connections enabled by FMs could be lost. However, there was also evidence of an underlying desire to protect a commercially profitable outlet for a particular type of UK farmer or producer. Allowing employees to sell at FMs was also seen by some as diluting the connection between the production process and the end consumer. Employees were also felt to be less likely to sell the produce to its maximum effect. Proponents of using employees to sell at FMs accepted these arguments to some extent, but stressed that their employees always had first-hand experience with the production process. There were deeper concerns about heavily processed foods at FMs, which some producers felt profoundly reduced the transparency of a product, and were not what FMs are all about. The counter-argument was that processed foods can help to increase the variety and interest at FMs, thereby contributing to their overall commercial viability.

Chapter Four (Section 4.6) set out the importance of providing a 'thick description' of qualitative research processes, in order to help validate their potential. Baxter and Eyles (1997), in their paper on the evaluation of qualitative research, additionally highlighted the necessity of relating a study's findings to the existing literature in order to further corroborate their validity. Some reference has already been made to the existing literature on producers' attendance at FMs within Section 5.6, and to the FMMS[99]. The study data reported within this chapter have confirmed the domination of commercial motivations amongst producers identified within previous research, and in this sense are not that distinctive. Indeed, this is important because it suggests that the data do not represent exceptional responses, and can therefore be construed as 'typical' of producers who attend FMs. However, what is distinctive about this study is the rigorous way in which it has been collected and described, and its qualitative and illustrative nature, as opposed to the previous, essentially quantitative research. This has enabled the researcher to tease out a broader universe of more subtle drivers that collectively seek to bridge the producer-consumer fault line. Fundamental to FMs is the relationship of producers to consumers and the multiplicity of exchange modalities and experiences that this entails. This chapter has identified and described these modalities and experiences from the point of view of the producers. The following chapter considers the consumers.

[99] The data from the FMMS provide triangulation from within the same study framework.

Chapter 6
THE CONSUMERS AT FARMERS' MARKETS

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined the ways in which producers experience selling at FMs, and in particular the significance of their direct interaction with consumers. The purpose of this chapter is to broadly explore the same issues, but from the perspective of the consumers who go to FMs to buy produce. The data presented in this chapter are qualitative in nature, based on seven focus groups (FGs) which were conducted with consumers who shop at FMs, together with data from 120 focus group 'filter' interviews (see Chapter Four). Additionally, where appropriate, these data are triangulated with data from the FMMS which were reported within Chapter Four (Section 4.7). This chapter follows the same overall pattern of sectional headings as in the previous chapter, although the sub-headings differ in order to accommodate the fundamentally different perspective that each has on FMs: producers go there to *sell* produce; whereas consumers go there to *buy* produce. As in the previous chapter, Section 6.6 summarises the key elements to emerge from the data. Section 6.7 then cross-examines the summarised data in Chapter Five (Section 5.6 - producers) with that of Section 6.6 (consumers), in order to provide an initial analysis of producer-consumer relations at FMs. Chapter Seven then examines the resultant findings through the notions of 'embeddedness' and 'regard', before situating them within a theoretical framework developed from CT. This chapter is structured as follows:

Section 6.2 Consumer motivations for attending FMs.

Section 6.3 The way in which consumers assess the quality of the produce they buy at FMs.

Section 6.4 The significance of being able to interact directly with producers at FMs.

Section 6.5 Consumer perspectives on the management of FMs.

Section 6.6 Summary of the consumers' attendance at FMs.

Section 6.7 An analysis of producer-consumer relations at FMs.

6.2 Consumer motivations for attending Farmers' Markets

Consumers were asked what prompted them to attend FMs, which included establishing any ethical motivations they might have, as well as the overall value they ascribed to the experience of shopping at FMs.

6.2.1 Supporting local and smaller farmers

There was a general interest in supporting farmers across all the FGs, with reference often made to the particular problems caused by the Foot and Mouth epidemic[100]. Concern was also widely expressed about the power of large retailers over smaller producers, and their perceived tendency to squeeze them unfairly on price, threatening their ability to stay in business. In the case of the London FGs, support was couched in terms of wanting to support *smaller* farmers, whilst in Stroud and Wiltshire, the support was more focused towards *local* farmers:

> "You do like to think that in buying their products you are benefiting your neighbours, even though you may not know them particularly at all…so it is a feel-good factor" (Rachel, Devizes FG).

In addition to the idea of wanting to support farmers perceived to be struggling, there was a widespread sentiment amongst the consumers that something of value to them would be lost if smaller/local farmers were allowed to go out of business. Frequently this sense of loss was expressed in relation to supermarkets and their perceived "stranglehold on buying habits" (FG filter 37, Warminster). Shopping at FMs was a means of actively helping to counteract this process:

> "I also feel quite strongly about supporting farmers, especially after what has happened with the foot and mouth and all that sort of thing. And I feel that we will all lose out if we let those small producers go…I feel that it is a very small thing I can do" (Helen, Islington FG).
>
> "(Linda) Globally you know the supermarkets have a monopoly and I think that is not healthy, and therefore that is why I'm quite keen on supporting smaller local producers. Because I think that way you get diversity, more competition and different qualities. And so I think it is important politically to do it…(Paula) I think it is a way of making sure we maintain choice…and by choosing to shop there [at FMs] we are saying this is the kind of food,

[100] The Foot and Mouth epidemic was ongoing at the time of the focus groups – July-August 2001.

> this is the kind of shopping that we want. We don't just want the soulless mass-produced supermarket produce...So it is partly my way of saying; that's not what I want, I'm rejecting that" (Stroud FG).

A number of consumers also felt that they wanted to support small farmers who were not local, through buying 'fair-trade' produce. Inherent within this support was a desire to buy from identifiable producers. In this way FMs and 'fair-trade' produce were perceived as having similarities, even though they operate at different scales:

> "Well it's fair-trade isn't it if you are buying directly from the people who produce the food...There has got to be a benefit to that producer, and it stops them being kind of faceless individuals as well...it gives us the opportunity to treat them as people, and people who have actually toiled to produce the things that we need. And although we never get to meet the people who make our Café Direct coffee, the fact that we buy that particular label means that we have faith, and we are saying we are supporting a particular group of farmers. So I think there is a real link between FMs and fair-trade" (Susan, Stroud FG).

The support of local and smaller farmers was often an initial motivation for consumers to attend FMs. Principally this was to contribute towards the continuance of an alternative to mass-produced produce. It was also seen as enabling a more direct connection to the producers of the produce being purchased.

6.2.2 The 'local' element

Apart from wanting to support 'local' farmers, many consumers at the Stroud FGs said that they endeavour to buy their groceries from local shops, in order to contribute towards the community of Stroud more widely. In this respect, FMs were seen as being a valuable addition:

> "Everything is local which I like, and I like to help local people, rather than supporting supermarkets. It brings a lot to the town - it is vibrant, alive and friendly" (FG filter 48, Stroud).

> "I do very much still feel that I should try to support the small shopkeepers as well...whether it is a butcher or a greengrocer or a local hairdresser...I feel that we should try and shop in Stroud at the FM, but in between times use the small shopkeeper and help him on his way, because he is also battling against supermarkets" (Rosa, Stroud FG).

At both the Wiltshire FGs, consumer support for 'local' producers was extended to include UK farmers more generally. This was partly to help safeguard UK farming jobs, but more emphatically because of frustration at what was perceived to be the unnecessary importation of minimally identifiable produce. In this context, shopping at FMs was seen as at least guaranteeing that the produce is of a UK origin:

> "(Joanna) I suppose the good thing about the FM is that it is British produce. When you go to the supermarket and pick up some tomatoes, they could be from anywhere...(Sonia) I think that is one of the things, they are going to be British, even if they have come from out of the county" (Devizes FG).

As mentioned above, participants at the London FGs were primarily concerned to support 'smaller', rather than 'local' producers, although 'local' was still an issue in a number of ways. In the first instance, consumers appreciated that the FM they attended was very local to where they lived, with most people travelling less than a mile to their FM. Secondly, local was seen as being important in terms of the produce at FMs being from an identifiable UK location, rather than from the 'nondescript' world market. In this second instance, there was a widespread sentiment at all seven FGs that flying produce around the world that can be grown in the UK was 'lunacy'. Indeed, a number of participants at the Stroud, Islington and Swiss Cottage FGs, had seen a recent television programme about how mange tout peas get from Kenya into Tesco's supermarkets, and many were 'appalled' or 'disgusted' by the processes involved:

> "(Gill) I remember buying some carrots once...that were all packaged up and you looked on the label and they were from Florida: and I thought my God we can grow carrots [general signs of agreement and exasperation]. (Michael) Well in Waitrose last week I saw raspberries from the United States. Now that is ludicrous, absolutely ludicrous" (Swiss Cottage FG).

> "I just like that contact, I like the fact that we are supporting the farmers directly. The stuff that you do buy from Waitrose, you don't know if they have bought cheap apples from New Zealand or wherever...because flying fruit and vegetables from other places can work out cheaper for big supermarkets than actually going directly to the producer down in Kent. So I like that part of it as well, that there are people not too far away, from places like Kent, producing fruit and vegetables" (Elizabeth, Swiss Cottage FG).

The relevance of 'local' to consumers varied to some extent between the FGs held, but at the very least entailed an appreciation that the produce at FMs will have been UK sourced, rather than being imported from abroad.

6.2.3 The enjoyment of shopping at Farmers' Markets

Almost invariably the FG participants expressed that they look forward to going to the FMs, and that in most instances they dreaded going to the supermarket. The FM was seen as being 'more pleasurable', 'more interesting', 'more intimate', and 'not so mechanical as going buzzing round the supermarket'. Shopping at the FM was described as 'a pleasant experience', 'a community experience', 'a convivial experience', 'an all-round sensory experience', and that it does not actually feel like shopping, because it is enjoyable and personal:

> "You have time to talk to the producer, pass the time of day, and it is a much more leisured and pleasurable activity" (Gill, Swiss Cottage FG).
>
> "For me it is a lifestyle choice as well, shopping somewhere like a FM because...if I am having a good positive shopping experience and cooking nice food...then even though I am really busy...there is a bit of my life which has gone from being just about convenience, and just about getting things off the shelves because I need to get things into the cupboard. It has actually made it something pleasurable - and has made a horrible job into something I enjoy; and that has got to make my life better really" (Susan, Stroud FG).
>
> "I think it's more of a convivial shopping experience, than the mass foraging one tends to see in supermarkets" (Duncan, Stroud FG).

Neither of the London FMs, nor the Wiltshire FMs, have any entertainment at the markets. However, at the Stroud FM there is always a cookery demonstration, a café, and music, all of which were commented on as contributing something extra to the overall atmosphere of the FM:

> "(Penny) I think it is terrific fun, I think it is a fortnightly party. (Rosa) Yes I love it...We usually get musicians, sometimes a lady spinning. You know, there is always such a lot going on...so I think it is more than just buying food really" (Stroud FG).

Several respondents across all the FGs commented that FMs reminded them of markets in Spain and France, and that FMs had reintroduced quality into UK markets which were considered to have become 'cheap and nasty'. Part of the perceived attraction of shopping in markets was their variety and unpredictability, and that you never quite know what you are going to be able to get there. This was usually stated in opposition to shopping at supermarkets, which were often described as anonymous and predictable. Generally price was not the overriding factor for consumers at FMs, but rather freshness and good quality, both of which were seen as being higher than at supermarkets:

> "Principally I suppose it's because having lived abroad for quite a number of years, I'm very used to the concept of markets, not necessarily FMs, but generally shopping in markets, and I do appreciate that one doesn't have to go to anonymous supermarkets, however good their products may or may not be, however cheap they may be. It is a good thing to be in contact with the producers, or the people who are supposed to be the producers, and to be able to have a little chat with them occasionally if they are not too busy, and to ask questions about their produce, which also of course I find to be good and fresh. Cheap is, I don't say it is a secondary consideration, but it is quality that principally concerns me" (Michael, Swiss Cottage FG).

It was clear that the consumers within the FGs thoroughly enjoyed shopping at FMs because they have the attributes of a vibrant market which sells quality produce.

6.2.4 The 'human' element

The 'human' element of FMs was frequently mentioned at all the FGs, either implicitly or explicitly. This encompassed the ability to talk directly to the producers about their produce, but also to meet people and be sociable. People appreciated the one-to-one contact and the chance to talk to another person, rather than being a mere number at the supermarket checkout. At the Stroud FGs in particular, participants felt that the FM enhanced the sense of community in Stroud on the Saturday mornings on which it is held, with a number saying that they would not come into town on a Saturday morning were it not for the FM. At the London FGs, the FM was also seen as enhancing the local community experience and participants recounted how they often bump into friends and have a chat, or even that they enthuse with strangers about the quality of the produce available at the FM. On the other hand, at the Devizes and Warminster FGs, a sense of community was rarely mentioned except in so far as wanting to help local producers and hence the local community. It seems likely that the relative infrequency of the latter markets was the principal reason for this differential, in that the consumers did not generally engage so actively with their markets as those at the more frequent markets:

> "Well I think we miss the small shops around, and I think here is an opportunity to hear a person talking to another person, not just a sort of number coming out of the sausage machine at the checkout…it is a much more normal way of living" (Gill, Swiss Cottage FG).
>
> "There is a face at the end of the counter so to speak…it is not just a shelf full of stuff that you put in your bag, you go down and you pay the girl at the end, there is a bit of a human element there, a human touch" (James, Devizes FG).
>
> "It is also a good place to meet friends and people generally, which is what one has really missed in the supermarkets. I think it has a great social function as well" (FG filter 114, Stroud).
>
> "I've got a feeling, that despite the fact that there are obviously other means of getting quality products that could be developed, or perhaps already exist, I just think there is probably still a residual social value about that kind of market that will appeal to people. And I suspect it is not for everybody, but…progressively people have got a bit more time, and just that mixing and mingling…I wouldn't rule that out as just a value in itself, even if you can't measure it" (Simon, Pilot FG).

A number of consumers also expressed that although they expect high quality produce at FMs, they do not want them to *appear* too commercial. In other words, producers must be professional in what they do, but without making it too obvious, or else part of what makes FMs special may be lost:

> "If the promotional material looked too slick, then people would think oh well it is just like any other commercial operation…and then you start thinking is it really what one expected. Because quite often we think, well if it looks a bit rustic it has got to be alright, but if it looks too professional, even though the content is the same, we judge it differently. So I think there is quite a fine balance between those extremes" (Rachel, Devizes FG).
>
> "It has to stay amateurish for me really, if it got too professional it would put me completely off…It has got to be a little bit home-made, but with a lot of quality attached to it" (Anne, Pilot FG).

The personal contact with producers as individuals, as well as other consumers, was an important aspect of FMs across the FGs. Intriguingly, the latter two quotes also suggest that to some extent the contact with producers as social beings was understood by consumers as an aura, in which they suspend their knowledge of the underlying commercial realities.

6.2.5 Food quality

Throughout the FGs, the quality of the produce available seemed to be the principal motivation for consumers' attendance at FMs, with quality usually expressed in terms of product freshness and as being better than from supermarkets. Indeed, participants often asserted that although there are a range of motives for going to FMs, if the produce was not of a high quality, they would not continue to go:

> "The quality of the food is certainly very striking. One of the reasons I started going, my wife she is Italian, and she recognised the experience of shopping for real food in a way that she doesn't really recognise the weekly trip to the supermarket" (Alan, Islington FG).

A wide assortment of produce was singled out as being of a high quality at the various FGs, for example: a particular type of bread; fresh and smoked fish; matured cheeses; home-made pies; sausages; and organic eggs. However, the most common product to be highlighted was vegetables, which were invariably cited by participants as being of a higher quality and much fresher than from other food retail outlets. This was most notable at the Islington FG, where consumers said that there were no other local outlets selling good quality vegetables:

> "I go to the FM because of the quality and the freshness, particularly of the vegetables, which I find just taste so different from anything that you could buy from supermarkets...The real problem around here is there was nowhere to buy good vegetables until the FM, so it was the vegetables really that I was interested in" (Helen, Islington FG).

At the Devizes FG and both Stroud FGs, the quality of the meat was singled out as exceptional, mainly because there was no longer a good local butcher:

> "I have been so pleased, particularly with the meat...We have lost a good local butcher, and when you find someone that does provide very good meat products, then you will start going out of your way" (Margaret, Devizes FG).

However, by contrast, at both the London FGs and the Pilot FG (in Monmouthshire), there was widespread scepticism about the quality of the meat available at FMs. This related less to the production quality of the meat itself, and more to the way that it is displayed and sold at FMs:

> "(Dawn) I think one of the things I find that actually stops me buying meat down at the FMs at Islington, is that it is not refrigerated...I would buy meat from any of the butchers on Essex Road...and down at the Borough market[101], where everything is properly refrigerated. But particularly in the summer, I am kind of reluctant to do that down at the FM. (Helen) Yes, I rather agree" (Islington FG).
>
> "I think one problem with the FMs is if you buy meat...especially in the summer. How well is that food being kept whilst it's sitting on the table. If it is in a small shop you'd like to think that it is kept in better condition, and I think buying things from supermarkets" (Paul, Pilot FG).

There was some divergence of opinion about whether the produce at FMs is good value. The FG participants at Devizes and Warminster often felt that the produce was too expensive. But at the other FGs, there was a widespread recognition that although the markets are not particularly cheap, this is not the overriding factor. Rather, that the produce is of a high quality and should be compared on that basis:

> "I think the meat seems expensive if you compare it with the cheap meat in the supermarket...But if you compared it with meat in a butchers, I don't think it would come up expensive, and you have got to think about it as being a different quality of meat [to that in supermarkets]" (Paula, Stroud FG).

Linked to the quality of the produce available at FMs was a sense of loyalty shown by some consumers to the producers who were selling them quality produce:

> "(Liz) The very first time we went...we bought some pork at this particular stall, and I have never tasted anything like it: well I did when I was young, but I haven't tasted pork like that in 30 years, and that was why I came back really...And there are other stalls that sell pork, but I don't think I would want to let her down you know. (Roger) You feel guilty if you are seen going somewhere else. (Liz) I buy other things elsewhere, but not pork. So yes there is a strong loyalty in my view, if you feel they have done well for you" (Stroud FG).

[101] See earlier footnote.

> "I think the loyalty is based on the quality [a general chorus of agreement]. If the goods are up to the same quality each time, then the loyalty is there, and I think that is how they need to build loyalty. It is product loyalty if you like, not so much the producer" (Peter, Devizes FG).

Although there were variations between the FGs, and between products, consumers frequently insisted that the quality of food at FMs was higher than at other outlets, particularly supermarkets. The quality available at FMs was often welcomed as a replacement for good local shops that had closed down. Nevertheless, despite the self-evident primacy of the intrinsic qualities of the produce at FMs for consumers, there was ample indication that many other factors are also important to the overall experience of shopping at FMs:

> "I think if the food wasn't always excellent and varied and interesting I wouldn't bother. But I think there is a lot of extra things that you get beyond that, I think the variety is nice, the fact that it is seasonal which you don't seem to get with supermarkets. Surprises like - there was a huge stall of sunflowers this week which was wonderful really, and I think that's something we miss, and I always feel good for the rest of the day. You know there is something that is completely different qualitatively about shopping there, and I think it has a sort of continental feel really. This kind of contact reminds me of shopping in a market in Provence: you know, much closer to perhaps how people have always done it, and I've got a kind of good weather kind of feeling about it" (Penny, Stroud FG).

Shopping at FMs is clearly a total experience for most consumers that encompasses a convivial atmosphere, high quality produce, social interaction, and ethical impulses.

6.3 The way in which consumers assess the quality of the produce they buy at Farmers' Markets

The often complex nature of consumer responses within the FGs means that there is inevitably a degree of overlap between the various sections of this chapter. However, having established in the last section that the intrinsic quality of the produce at FMs underpins consumers' attendance, this section now examines how consumers actually assess the quality of the food they buy at FMs.

6.3.1 Taste and samples

The actual taste of the food from FMs was often cited by consumers as a reason for buying from them. Similarly, the samples available at FMs were widely appreciated and seen as part of the pleasure of shopping at FMs. It is clear that being able to sample the produce at FMs gives consumers a sense of confidence, through enabling a more informed choice about the quality of the food they are buying:

> "(Helen) It is just so nice to be buying something that you know is really going to taste, and it gives you a pleasure doing it...(Alan) I think the tasting comes into it as well in terms of the pleasure, and that bonus that you are making the choice, and that you are not just guessing" (Islington FG).

> "Certain things where I have actually been able to taste it and I do feel as if I know what I'm getting. Whereas in the supermarket you pick it up and you think well you are just taking a bit of potluck" (Margaret, Devizes FG).

6.3.2 Production methods

Explicit reference to the production methods employed was seldom made within the FGs, although a few participants expressed that they felt the meat was tastier from FMs than from a supermarket because it had probably been hung for longer. Several participants said that the FM produce reminded them of when they were children. Many also believed that it had been produced using more traditional methods, with the inference that somehow this was qualitatively better than the methods employed for supermarket produce. Additionally, certain consumers equated the produce at FMs with how you would produce it yourself, if you had the time:

> "There is a sense of buying the food from your neighbour, or having it from your own garden" (FG filter 71, Devizes).

> "It is a movement back towards more traditional ways, and something that one wants to support. Crucially it is nice for the consumer to be able to talk directly to the producer, which you can't do at the supermarkets. I know the food is not all organic, but it is certainly using more traditional methods of production" (FG filter 114, Stroud).

Allied to the production methods employed, a number of consumers appreciated that you can buy the produce in a more natural state at FMs, and that somehow this all added to its overall quality. For example, carrots can be purchased with their tops on, or sprouts still on their stalks. Similarly, the point was sometimes made that the directness between the production of the food and its purchase at the FM enables producers to pick the fruit or vegetables when they are at their peak, rather than having to pick them when they are under-ripe for subsequent storage:

> "(Meg) I just love having that stalk of Brussels sprouts. (Hazel) They last longer. (Meg) Oh they do last longer and I just enjoy having them, rather than just a bag at the bottom of the fridge: it makes me feel much better" (Warminster FG).

> "I like buying straight from the producer, and I like the fact that it hasn't been stored for months somewhere else, and that the fruit especially, has been allowed to get ripe on the tree, and that it is picked just before it is sold (Elizabeth, Swiss Cottage FG).

With respect to the production methods employed for the produce at FMs, the consumers' responses were perhaps slightly naïve. There was often a supposition that it had been traditionally produced, or even organically produced (see Section 6.3.3 following), although the production methods themselves were barely mentioned at the FGs. Nevertheless, the recognition that fruit and vegetables can be picked in their prime for FMs is clearly relevant.

6.3.3 Organic certification

Many consumers assumed that most of the produce at FMs is organic, or at least nearly so, and for a small number of them it was critical that they only bought organically certified food. But for the majority, being able to question the producer directly about their production methods was seen as more important to assessing a product's quality than organic certification itself. There was also widespread scepticism about the organic food in supermarkets, which was often seen as an over-priced niche product with inadequate labelling that may well have travelled from the other side of the world. Some participants also expressed concern that there are many certifiers of organic farming, and what is accepted as organic in one country may not necessarily be the same as in another:

> "I think actually in the FM, although there is stuff that isn't organic, somehow just by the way it has been grown it is organic, if you know what I mean [general sounds of agreement]. So although it isn't, you are doing the

> next best thing to organic, whereas I think the difference between organic and non-organic in other places is very wide" (Frances, Stroud FG).
>
> "I think the distance travelled thing is really important...the idea of organic food coming all the way from New Zealand kind of defeats the object [general agreement and cries of absolutely]" (Ben, Islington FG).
>
> "If you go to the supermarket, the organic produce can be from all over the world, and it has the vitality of a matchbox" (FG filter 116, Stroud).

It would appear that for most consumers organic certification was not that significant as a means of determining produce quality, particularly when buying produce from FMs. In part, this is indicative of a general lack of engagement with the production methods by consumers, but it is also illustrative of a more general suspicion about quality assurance within the 'conventional' agro-food system.

6.3.4 Freshness

Produce freshness was almost invariably mentioned as the principal identifier of quality at FMs, most particularly at the London FGs. There was a widespread perception that the produce is better than in the supermarkets (especially vegetables) because it is fresher. The fact that people have just driven in with it from the place of production was seen as endorsing this perception, particularly in comparison with produce on a supermarket shelf, where it was impossible to tell how old the produce was. The ability to question the producer directly about when the produce was harvested (or caught etc.) was seen as an added benefit in this respect:

> "I would say that the fish on that stall is actually very fresh, and the crab particularly is brilliant, and the shrimps. They are much fresher than any I have ever bought, even from John Brown our local fishmonger who I go to a lot" (Helen, Islington FG).
>
> "I always think here's an opportunity...I won't buy the vegetables at Waitrose because I am going to the market tomorrow and I will get some fresh ones. I mean they are not all prepacked, and the carrots are not scrubbed until there is no skin left on them, so it may need a bit more preparation, but at least they are crisp and fresh. I just like the sort of the country feeling that it brings to the town" (Gill, Swiss Cottage FG).

6.3.5 Local

As mentioned in the section above, the local nature of the food produced for FMs was seen as contributing to its freshness, and hence its quality. In addition, several participants at the Wiltshire and Stroud FGs, in particular, mentioned that because the producers are local, they feel more connected with the food they buy at FMs. This was partly through knowing the individual producers concerned, or at least the location of their farms. There was also a perception that the producer will then have a sense of 'local' responsibility because their reputation is more directly at risk:

> "We have often been to Bromham where they grow a lot of the leeks for instance, and actually bought stuff from the farmers there. It is very instructive to see them on a February day with a tractor just knocking over a load of leeks and then two or three people coming along with frozen hands and knocking the soil off...So I mean it is that aspect of it as well, we will know that this stuff is fresh and we can see it growing, we know it has not been trundled around the country on the backs of lorries for weeks" (Brian, Warminster FG).

In comparison, the consensus at the London FGs was that the quality of the produce at FMs was related to its freshness, seasonality, and 'localish' production. Local in this context meant an identifiable place of production (the UK was usually cited, as opposed to the 'nondescript' world market mentioned under Section 6.2.2), which enabled them (as consumers) to have a more direct connection with the produce than was possible in a supermarket, as well as meaning that it will keep longer once it has been purchased.

6.3.6 Seasonality

The 'local' element of produce quality determination at FMs was linked to the seasonality of produce at all the FGs. Supermarkets were acknowledged as providing a very wide range of produce year-round, but only by importing it, which many consumers felt was largely detrimental to the taste, quality, and freshness of the produce concerned:

> "I think that is the main point of FMs, they are really about in-season food [general agreement]. So when you have got great plums like now, you buy them there and they are fresh - you sort of go along with the seasons. If you go now to Sainsbury's you can buy anything, but it's not going to be fresh" (John, Islington FG).

> "(Hazel) I think really we have a lot of reasons for enjoying FMs…We would like to see a return to such things as the seasonality of vegetables for example, and I have a great dislike of seeing vegetables on sale in supermarkets that are air-freighted from the other side of the world…(Meg) I too feel that I want to cut down on the amount of transport of food, and I liked particularly Hazel what you said about the seasonality of getting back to actually quality food that it is available when it is at its best" (Warminster FG).

The seasonal nature of some of the produce at FMs (fruit and vegetables in particular) was often expressed as being part of the pleasure of going to FMs, as it introduces an element of unpredictability. This was again perceived as putting the consumer more in touch with the way their food is produced, and in some respects adding to the authenticity of buying food from FMs through ensuring that it has been locally produced:

> "Perhaps the fact that there is seasonality adds to the authenticity [of the shopping experience at FMs], which again makes you think that it is something which is from this area, and it has not been hiked in from other parts of the world" (Rachel, Devizes FG).

> "We have just been so programmed into thinking everything should be available…But you have to sort of de-programme yourself to go back to thinking about local produce in season. But I don't go with a shopping list, I just go and think oh that looks nice, what can I make with that. Like you say, if there was something you particularly wanted for a particular recipe, then you would go to Waitrose [laughing]" (Paula, Stroud FG).

With respect to quality assurance at FMs, the seasonality of certain produce was seen principally as contributing to its freshness and taste, although clearly it also contributes to the overall quality of the FM shopping experience for consumers.

6.3.7 Talking to the producer

Despite the various methods by which the consumers at the FGs claimed to assess the quality of produce at FMs (see above), many said that they took on trust that the food at FMs was somehow genuine. Buying the produce from a FM established a baseline trust for consumers, which was then built upon by developing a relationship with the producers over time. There was widespread scepticism about the quality guarantees offered by supermarkets, and that the labelling of products did not offer the same level of confidence as buying the produce directly from the producer themselves:

> "It's a trust in the person, you develop that trust somehow, by having a relationship with that particular producer [general agreement]" (Elizabeth, Swiss Cottage FG).
>
> "I think in terms of the repeat business, it is based on trust. At the end of the day I can walk into a supermarket, it's there on the shelf, it's packaged, with a British farm assurance standard on it perhaps. However that is not necessarily a guarantee, whereas if you have actually got somebody to talk to; in your own mind you can assess the quality for yourself" (Marjorie, Stroud FG).
>
> "I think you are always buying your food on trust in a sense. Whenever you go to the supermarket, the FM or wherever, we don't know most of us, and most of us care not to know, how our food has actually been produced, how it has reached the point where it is going to be cooked and on our plates. But I have more confidence being able to look at the person who has actually been involved in that production in the eye, rather than feel that they are several people back up a chain before it actually reached me" (Meg, Warminster FG).

The ability to talk to the actual producer at FMs was frequently mentioned by consumers as an important means of assessing the produce quality. In some cases this was to ask specifically about the production methods employed (e.g. Section 6.3.3 on organic certification). But more usually it was to develop a relationship of trust with the producers, which gave consumers more confidence in the food they were buying.

6.3.8 In comparison with other outlets

Extensive comparisons between FMs and other outlets have already been made throughout this chapter. This section will not re-visit these, but will draw out further comparisons not covered under previous sections. For example, there is certainly evidence that consumers ascribe produce quality differently, depending upon the outlet they are buying it from:

> "(John) I think if you go into a supermarket and an apple has a brown spot, you think gosh this is a rubbish apple. Whereas if you go to the FM, you are more likely to think, gosh this is quite a quaint brown spot [general laughter]...There is a barrier into the supermarket, by virtue that everything has to be sort of big and green and just slightly red, and yet other apples may be perfectly alright. (Helen) But I'm always very suspicious about that in a

> supermarket, because I know what you have to do to fruit to make it all look uniform, and I don't want my fruit like that...I don't want the processes it has been through. So I suppose I feel that somehow there is something better about the fruit that is misshapen" (Islington FG).
>
> "I think I might be prepared to look at more lumps and bumps and blemishes on fruit and vegetables in the FM, and not mind. Whereas somehow in the supermarket everything is so glossy and uniform, that you tend to pick out the glossy and the uniform; you sort of slot into a supermarket buying persona when you walk through the door (Hazel, Warminster FG).

At both the Swiss Cottage FG and one of the Stroud FGs, a number of participants had read about a report published that week[102] on pesticide levels in own-brand supermarket food, and that Marks & Spencer were signalled out as having the highest levels. This had shocked people, in that Marks & Spencer were perceived as a quality food outlet that inspired trust in the produce they sell. The report had made people think that perhaps the produce quality at supermarkets in general was mainly for show (and at Marks & Spencer specifically), whereas at FMs it was somehow more intrinsic and of genuine quality:

> "You get the impression from Marks & Spencer that in terms of quality it is not so much intrinsic quality...but more about how it is actually displayed, such as huge beautiful glossy shiny vegetables" (Elizabeth, Swiss Cottage FG).
>
> "It was a really bad story...for Marks & Spencer. You know what I mean, it's like dressing things up, or the real thing I think" (Penny, Stroud FG).

A few of the participants, particularly at the Islington FG, had bought some food produce through the Internet, although it became clear that this was very much product dependent. However, there was a more prevalent sense across the FGs that people had not really come to terms with the principle of shopping for food on the Internet. This was partly due to quality issues, and the need to have some form of independent assurance that the produce on sale was of good quality. For some consumers the Internet was too intangible and impersonal in this context:

> "With fruit and veg, I like to be able to touch it and smell it and feel it. Whereas I am quite happy to buy wine or meat over the Internet from a good supplier" (Dawn, Islington FG).

[102] Swiss Cottage FG held on 21.08.2001. Stroud FG held on 23.08.2001.

> "Something like apple juice which is a made product, I don't think it would make a great deal of difference if people knew it came from the same source. The FM for me [though] is about fresh produce, not about manufactured" (Michael, Swiss Cottage FG).

> "For some sort of specialist items...I was thinking oh yes that might actually be worth doing, but I have never actually pursued it, and I don't like it as an idea...There seems to be something missing in the whole arrangement" (Roger, Stroud FG).

These comments again suggest that consumers' quality assessment at FMs is often very personal. They like to be able to make up their own mind about the produce they are buying, and FMs are perceived as a medium which facilitates this process.

6.4 The significance of being able to interact directly with producers at Farmers' Markets

The benefits of consumer interaction with producers have been mentioned throughout this chapter, most particularly in relation to the assessment of produce quality under Section 6.3. This section now builds on that analysis, in examining how direct interaction with the producers can allow consumers to assess the risks of buying produce at FMs and to feed back their comments to the producers. It then examines the nature of the ongoing relationship consumers feel they have with producers and its relevance to their experience of shopping at FMs.

6.4.1 Providing feedback or complaints

At most of the FGs consumers appreciated that in being able to meet the producer face-to-face at FMs, it was possible to build-up a relationship which enabled them to make comments and suggestions about the produce available. This might be through complaining about unsatisfactory produce, but was more likely to entail making suggestions as to how things might be done differently, or to say that they really liked a particular variety or product. Comparison was frequently made with local independent food shops (particularly butchers), where many participants felt that it was possible to establish similar relationships:

> "I feel because I now go regularly and I get to know some of the stallholders, I can say well I would really like it if you would have this variety, or I would really like it if you would do this. And I feel they would listen and take it on board" (Helen, Islington FG).

> "If you go there regularly and have built up a good relationship, then it is a bit like a good local butcher. If you get a piece of meat you're not happy with, then you would have no hesitation in going back and saying that was a really tough joint last time, and I think you would probably do the same at FMs" (Margaret, Devizes FG).

Although very few FG participants had complained about produce they had purchased from FMs, most did not foresee a problem going back to the producer if they did. Nevertheless, it was acknowledged that the process of complaining at FMs is markedly different from that at supermarkets. At a supermarket this was described as highly impersonal and formalised, whereas at a FM it was seen to be much more personal and direct. This was perceived to be potentially more confrontational, and a number of people commented that it was almost like questioning the integrity of the producer themselves:

> "(Frances) In a way I think it is easier in a supermarket situation because they are totally anonymous, and there is a customer service, and you can go up and either be very polite, or rant and rave as the case may be. Somehow I think in the FM, you can still do it, but you would do it in a very different way. (Liz) It is the downside of the personal interaction. You don't want to upset this nice person that you have built up a relationship with, by rejecting their produce [laughter], and I would find that very difficult. I have never had to do it. (Frances) Nor have I. (Robert) It's a bit English that isn't it? (Liz) Yes, far too English!" (Stroud FG).

At the Devizes FG[103], although no-one had yet had cause to complain, there was scepticism that people would actually bother to complain about something they had bought four weeks previously, and were more likely to simply not go back to that producer:

> "(Clare) If you have eaten a pie from the supermarket, my feeling is no one is going to be accountable for that pie. But if you go to the market, when I say I have eaten this pie and I was violently sick, it only needs a few people to hear...(Paul) Yes, but how many people would actually say that to the small trader...(Clare) Well maybe it is something we have got to think about. (Paul) Exactly, it is" (Pilot FG).

[103] The FM at Devizes is held monthly.

It is apparent that even though the direct contact with producers at FMs provides an opportunity to complain, this may be difficult to take advantage of in practice. If anything, consumers are more likely to provide constructive feedback on the produce they have purchased, rather than direct criticism.

6.4.2 Risk assessment

The way in which consumers valued their direct relationship with producers at FMs varied between the FGs. However, what seemed to be commonly recognised was that while talking to the producer does not in itself guarantee the quality of the produce, it does enable consumers to make a personal judgement as to its trustworthiness. This assessment is based to some degree on the information the producer can give the consumer about the produce, but also on the consumer's appraisal of the integrity of the producer as a person. This was often seen as enabling a more tangible assessment of food quality than is possible at other food retail outlets (most notably supermarkets):

> "The face-to-face thing, that you have seen the person and you might rightly or wrongly judge their integrity from your encounter with them" (Liz, Stroud FG).
>
> "Now the way I would suss them out is to look at the people first that are selling it, and then I would sort of look at the produce, and if it looks good I would buy it and taste it, and if I didn't like it, I wouldn't go back there" (Anne, Pilot FG).

As with complaining about disappointing produce, a few of the FG participants were reticent about asking the producers questions for fear of somehow offending the producer by impugning their integrity (e.g. 'did you grow these carrots yourself?'). Secondly, some consumers did not always feel like actively engaging with the producer and would like there to be more passive information available, such as through leaflets and labelling:

> "I'm sometimes not in the mood to ask questions...and then I like the anonymity of the supermarket" (Clare, Pilot FG).

However, the vast majority did recognise the value of being able to ask the producer questions at FMs, because it increased the transparency within the provision of their food:

> "You are getting input from the people who actually know the product, which you really can't get anywhere else I don't think" (Liz, Stroud FG).

At the Devizes FG, meeting the actual producer was seen as important to building trust in the produce because they were able to answer any questions about their produce, as opposed to the "zombie-like experience" (Rachel, Devizes FG) of shopping at supermarkets:

> "He does know his own product, whichever stall you go to he should be able to help you with any questions you've got. Whereas you don't get that in a normal supermarket, you just get a little label saying New Zealand or Argentina, or whatever it is, and that's it" (James, Devizes FG).

Participants at both the Wiltshire FGs often expressed that it was of value to them that the stallholders were local producers, in that they then take a 'local' responsibility for the produce they are selling because in some way they belong to the same community:

> "I think it is very much more of a personal thing...Their reputation is on the line isn't it; they are local people...they have to be locally aware...There was an organic vegetable stall in the market last week for the first time, and they said we...picked all this yesterday, and you can look them in the face and hopefully you know that they are not spinning you a story. Whereas how long have they been picked and packaged in the supermarket?" (Hazel, Warminster FG).

Personal contact with the producer was again seen as important at the Stroud FGs. This was partly because they could ask how to cook the produce and give direct feedback to the producer, but most importantly, the face-to-face interaction enabled consumers to evaluate for themselves a producer's integrity. The second quote below emphases the added importance of it being the actual producer who is selling their own produce:

> "I think the contact with somebody who is actually involved in the production, I hadn't thought about it, but it actually creates a feeling of confidence about it. Because you can see, you have a personal feeling, is this person robbing me or selling me something nasty or whatever, and you

> can try and make an assessment about it by contact with the person" (Roger, Stroud FG).
>
> "The closed market in Gloucester, or a similar market anywhere else, I still feel that the stallholder is not the person that is ultimately responsible for what he is selling. So…it could be the same meat that had gone in a different direction to some supermarket or shop, and the vegetables as well…I never feel that many of them are actually responsible. How did you grow that, you know; where did that piece of meat come from" (Rosa, Stroud FG).

At the Islington FG especially, and to a lesser extent Swiss Cottage, meeting the producer was often appreciated for the knowledge and passion they had about the produce they were selling. This allowed consumers to strengthen their faith in the quality of the produce they were buying. However, as the FG conversation developed, a number of the participants reflected that perhaps it did not have to be the producers themselves, but that the vendor must be knowledgeable about the produce they are selling:

> "I love markets, I like having that more direct relationship with the producers, with people who really know what they're talking about…[*and a little later*] If I think about it, I don't think it has to be the producer, it is just somebody who is really knowledgeable about the product. You know like the butcher – Elliott's are knowledgeable…the Italian deli is knowledgeable" (Dawn, Islington FG).
>
> "(Alan) I do think that with all these things…you cross the threshold of trust, and you then just trust what you are getting from them: at a market, at the shop, that region…(Helen) I do think this sort of thing of trust is important because you don't want to have to every time you shop, sort of work out…what is the best. You do want a shortcut really that you trust somebody, on the basis of your experience so far that they produce, or deliver, or sell something good. So meeting the producer to me isn't perhaps the key thing, now you have made me think about it more. It is a pleasant thing and I like it, but I don't think it is the key thing" (Islington FG).

Similarly, a comment at the Warminster FG endorses the perceived benefit of being able to put your trust in an individual, and then not have to constantly check on the quality of the produce itself:

> "We always buy those lovely pies that the lady makes…I mean to say she is the symbol of the pies and you can look her in the eye…If there was a

> different person selling them every week, I would pay more attention to the pies possibly" (Dick, Warminster FG).

The face-to-face contact with producers at FMs clearly gave many consumers added confidence in the produce they buy, not least because it allowed them to assess the integrity of the vendor themselves. Crucially, for most consumers it was important that the vendor was actually the producer, or had at least been directly involved in the production process. However, a number of participants mused that as long as the vendor was knowledgeable about the produce they were selling, it was not imperative that they had produced it themselves.

6.4.3 The ongoing relationship with producers

Almost invariably, across all the FGs and the FG filters, consumers commented positively on their interaction with the producers at FMs, although several pointed out that it was not necessarily a personal relationship. Typical comments included: 'they seem to recognise me which is nice'; 'a nice change from buying at supermarkets'; 'very friendly and helpful'; 'always very friendly, although I don't know them really'; 'very amicable'; 'very willing to help'; 'very friendly and chatty'; 'always convivial'; 'you can talk to the producer about the food...a human way of shopping'; 'not personal, although very pleasant and helpful'; very good, welcoming and friendly - a little whisper of society again'; 'a very friendly atmosphere, and a nicer way of shopping than going around Tesco's, although I have no relationship as such with the stallholders'.

None of the consumers expected any special deals as a result of this human interaction, but it increased the enjoyment and interest of buying their food. It also engendered trust in the producer, and their produce (see Section 6.4.2 above). Some consumers felt that their relationship with certain producers had in fact become quite personal after a time, and that liking individual producers as people was a factor in determining who they bought produce from:

> "One of the reasons why I buy my vegetables from the people who do the kitchen garden, is that they are nice people. Whereas the lady, where there is always a queue, she is just a miserable old bag isn't she [general laughter but also agreement], and never smiles" (Dawn, Islington FG).

> "I would trust the beef man, he is a thoroughly nice man. The chicken man is new, and I don't know him" (FG filter 11, Swiss Cottage).

> "It becomes quite personal and this is one of the joys of FMs...An integral joy of the FM experience is the personal element" (FG filter 37, Warminster).

> "Well it almost turns into personal friends...It is at least at the level of an acquaintance (FG filter 114, Stroud).

> "When it is very busy there is no real relationship possible, except that if you come regularly they seem to recognise you...[But] you do feel that what they are selling is honestly fresh" (FG filter 85, Islington).

However, several consumers commented that FMs were not unique in this regard, and that it was possible to build up similar relationships in other outlets, such as the local butcher:

> "(Hazel) It is also a personal experience isn't it, shopping in a FM. You develop a personal relationship, as I presume people did years ago when one went round a town and went to individual shops. (Lizzie) I don't think the FM is unique in having that relationship, because I also go to the butcher [and] the fishmonger. It is just the regularity of contact I think, which the FM is very good at, but it is not the only place" (Warminster FG).

Shopping at a FM was also regarded as a co-operative venture by some consumers, who wanted to acknowledge the effort that producers had made to provide them with 'high quality' food:

> "I like this thing of trust, I really like the thing of looking at that person and feeling that they have worked hard and it's an exchange, an interaction with that person as a reward, me saying thank you very much...for taking the time to look after the way you have produced the food that is going to nourish me" (Angela, Pilot FG).

Despite the preponderance of positive comments about the intimacy and personal interaction at FMs, one participant at the Islington FG cautioned that in some instances it could be a barrier to potential customers. This observation resonates with those comments expressed under Section 6.4.2 about sometimes enjoying the anonymity (and lack of social contact) associated with shopping at supermarkets:

> "(Alan) I think there is a downside to this...Which is if someone wants to come in from the outside and just wants to do their shopping knowing that

> they are getting quality goods...(Helen) So basically just really to be able to take it off-the-shelf, rather than being bound to get through the sort of, can I help you thing. (Alan) Yes...I would like to be able to go and use it actually rather like I do use a supermarket" (Islington FG).

Almost without exception, consumers thoroughly enjoyed the rclationship they have with the producers at FMs. Often this relationship was not considered to be personal, but certainly always friendly, and the social contact an important and integral part of what makes FMs a special place to buy food.

6.5 Consumer perspectives on the management of Farmers' Markets

Section 4.7 (Chapter Four), in presenting the results of the FMMS, highlighted the controversy that exits over the management of FMs. This debate concerns the role of FMs, and in particular the importance of maintaining their 'integrity' in relation to extending the 'variety' of produce available through the flexible interpretation of their underlying tenets. Chapter Five (Section 5.5) provided the producer perspective on this debate. This section now sets out the consumer perspective.

6.5.1 Farmers' Market regulations

When consumers were asked in the FG filter interview whether they were aware of any regulations governing who could sell at the FMs, and what they could sell, 70% said they did not know what the regulations were. In some cases this was pretty emphatically stated: 'no idea!'; 'I don't know, I thought anyone could come'; 'no, I assumed it was a free for all'. But more usually their replies indicated that although they did not know what the regulations were, most were somehow aware that the produce was local, and in many instances that the producer must be selling their own goods. For example: 'not really, there is an assumption that it is their own produce'; 'no I am not...but one butcher was dismissed for selling bought-in produce'; 'not aware, apart from its localness'; 'I presume it is local, although I don't know for certain'; 'most likely to be organic, and it is their own produce'; 'I think it is organic produce, mainly from Wiltshire'. In one instance, a respondent answered that he did not know what the regulations were, and asked the interviewer. The interviewer replied that the FM was restricted to producers from within a certain radius of the market, and that it should be their own produce. His response was then: 'I should hope so, that is the whole point of it'.

This impression was endorsed by other responses from the FG filter interviews. For example, the following comments were all made by respondents who said that they did not know what the regulations governing FMs were:

> "The thought that the food is genuine food compared to supermarket food...With fruit and vegetables it is important that they come direct" (FG filter 28, Warminster).
>
> "We would rather pay the farmer than the supermarkets who do nothing but knock the farmers down...We wanted the fresh vegetables, and they are better than the supermarket ones" (FG filter 81, Devizes).
>
> "I like the fact that it is real people with their own produce and that it is not a supermarket or a great big company" (FG filter 119, Stroud).

Similarly, at the actual FGs, consumer motivations for attending FMs (see Section 6.2), and the relevance of meeting the producer themselves (see Sections 6.3.7 and 6.4), strongly indicate that although in most instances consumers did not know about the *actual* regulations at the markets, there was an unarticulated awareness about what makes FMs distinctive as a retail outlet.

Often respondents at the FGs said that they assumed the producers at FMs must be subject to all the usual environmental health and hygiene regulations:

> "You do also assume that the products are produced under hygienic conditions. It does cross your mind that it's not somebody's back kitchen, and there must be some level of control or they wouldn't allow it" (Margaret, Devizes FG).

But at the same time there were repeated concerns that FMs should not be over-regulated in that this could threaten the individuality of the stallholders, and indeed the FMs themselves:

> "I think if you start introducing too many quality controls, you are going to lose the originality, whereby people turn up with quite quirky unusual things at times" (Hazel, Warminster FG).

> "When all our high streets are getting more and more alike...I think that is what is so nice [about FMs]...and I would hate anybody from above to make it that for some reason they all ended up too much the same" (Penny, Stroud FG).

The following discussion about the regulations at FMs is typical of the attitude of consumers at many of the FGs. Namely, that to a large extent the actual quality of the produce at FMs is self-regulating:

> "(Robert) You could argue that if the quality wasn't there, then people wouldn't buy from them anyway. (Liz) Yes it is self-regulating. (Frances) So the public regulates it in a way doesn't it. (Rosa) Yes because it is not cheaper than supermarkets, so people have got to want and like what they buy. And as you say they regulate it themselves, providing they complain if they don't like something" (Stroud FG).

However, as discussed under Section 6.3, a critical component of quality assessment at FMs is that the produce is local and being sold by the producer themselves, or at least someone who has been involved in the production process. A number of participants, therefore, felt that the regulations at FMs should be to *enable* consumers to make their own assessment of the produce quality on that basis, rather than being overly prescriptive:

> "Regulation in the area of not so much quality, but in terms of the other thing we touched on there, who can sell, I think that is very important [murmurs of agreement]. It does matter that they are people who are fairly local. It does matter that they are involved in the production - very important in fact I think. So that kind of regulation I think is very significant, but in terms of quality things, it is self-regulating" (Roger, Stroud FG).
>
> "A farm shop used to be literally a stall at the side of the road, but now...there is perhaps just five percent of produce that might be from that farm, and it is important that FMs don't end up in that same state...[otherwise] the feel-good factor to think that I'm buying directly from the person who has produced the goods [is not there]" (Sarah, Pilot FG).

Although consumers were largely uninformed of the actual regulations at FMs, their responses throughout this chapter indicate a general awareness of what constitutes the 'integrity' of FMs. It is also apparent that for many consumers the maintenance of this 'integrity' was important to their assessment of the produce quality at FMs, as well as to their overall experience of shopping at FMs. The following subsection examines the tensions amongst consumer responses, with regard to the integrity versus variety debate over the management of FMs.

6.5.2 Variety verses integrity

The tensions within consumer responses are generally not articulated in terms of integrity versus variety, but centre on the frequency with which FMs are held. This may at first sight appear incongruous, but was mentioned at all the FGs as being the major factor in determining the role FMs can play in peoples' shopping patterns. Notwithstanding some reservations, there was widespread support throughout the FGs for holding FMs more frequently. However, as identified within the FMMS, nearly three-quarters of the FMs were held monthly, principally because there was a shortage of suitable produce for them to be held more frequently. It is apparent from the FMMS that these tensions were leading FM managers to variably interpret what defined their FMs, such as through extending the market radius and allowing more extensively processed goods in order to increase the range of produce available to their market(s).

At the London FGs, some of the participants recounted how they do most of their fruit and vegetable shopping at the FMs (which are held weekly), and that to some extent they structure what they are going to eat around the frequency of the FMs:

> "I should think maybe I buy about half my food from the market, and then like you I have got to run round to Tesco's or whatever and get this and that. But I try and make sure that I plan, and if I'm asking people for a meal, then I try and make sure they come at the beginning of the week[104], so that I can use things from the FM...So it does actually play a big part in how I work out what we are going to eat when" (Helen, Islington FG).

Similarly, for some of the participants at the Stroud FGs it was clear that the FM (which is held twice a month) plays a significant part in their food purchasing patterns and, as at the London FGs, a number seek to coordinate their supermarket shopping with the FMs:

> "We tend to do the FM, and then go to the supermarket afterwards. We get the bulk of our meat and vegetables from the FM, and then just get the basic household items from the supermarket later. The percentage of fresh food

[104] The Islington FM is held on a Sunday.

> that we have got from the FM has gradually been increasing as time has gone by" (Robert, Stroud FG).

However, more generally, the periodicity of FMs was frequently mentioned across the FGs as a major drawback. At the Devizes FG, all the participants said that the FM provided a very small percentage of their groceries, in large part because it was only held monthly. Most also said that they would not come into the town specifically for the FM, and there was a sense that the FM was of less significance to the consumers at this FG than at any other. Even the possibility of extending the frequency did not seem to generate much enthusiasm:

> "Not to us because we don't come into Devizes very often, it just happens that I have come in when the market has been on a few times (Margaret, Devizes FG).

Nevertheless at the Warminster FG, where the market is also held monthly, there was much more enthusiasm for the FM, with most of the group keen to increase the frequency of the markets in order to increase the impact of the FM on their shopping decisions:

> "Because they only occur on a monthly basis, I don't think they actually have a tremendous impact upon your...everyday shopping. We do tend to see them more as a treat once a month [general murmurs of agreement], rather than affecting our normal food intake: they are almost like add-ons, rather than instead off. If they did occur weekly, then I think they could actually alter what we buy and what we do eat" (Meg, Warminster FG).

> "I think mine is a reasonable amount [from FMs], but I would like...to shop regularly once a week at FMs definitely, to increase that amount. I mean obviously there are large amounts of goods that one just can't buy at a FM, so you would have to fall back on supermarket shopping for some of that...For me really FMs have...opened another door for shopping in a way that I feel is ethically correct for me, in that I try to buy as much British products as possible. I don't like to buy vegetables out of season. I don't like to buy things that have been airfreighted for miles" (Hazel, Warminster FG).

Consumers' views on the frequency of FMs were also to some extent determined by the type of produce they bought at the markets, coupled with the local availability of comparable produce when the FM is not being held. Often consumers highlighted that many of their good local independent food shops had closed down, and that in some ways FMs were a replacement for them. This was particularly noticeable at the Islington FG, where very high rents had meant that most of the small shops in the area had been turned into bars or restaurants:

> "I think for some things every other week is fine, but for other things it isn't. I mean if you haven't really got an outlet for vegetables that you're happy with, and FMs are the best place for fruit and vegetables, and it certainly is for me, then I would want fresh fruit and vegetables more frequently than once a fortnight. But with the meat I'm fine, and with the cheese I'm probably fine; so I think it varies a bit" (Liz, Stroud FG).

> "The real problem around here is there was nowhere to buy good vegetables until the FM...I think I would do more of my shopping locally if the local little shops were good...[But] now that I've been going to the FM, I do feel quite strongly about the farmers, and I really don't want those farmers to all disappear. Because then we will be forced to only buy what the big producers think we should have" (Helen, Islington FG).

> "If there were good local shops, I probably wouldn't necessarily travel out of my way to go to a [farmers'] market" (John, Islington FG).

There was a general sentiment that supermarkets offer far more convenience[105] than FMs, and most consumers acknowledged that they buy most of their groceries from them. However, FMs were not usually described by consumers as a replacement for supermarkets, but as a welcome alternative that had something different to offer:

> "It [the FM] depends what you regard it as, do you regard it as an adjunct to your normal shopping, or as a replacement. And I don't see it as a replacement for normal shopping, it is an adjunct, which takes part of what one would normally buy...but I don't actually see it as something all embracing where you can get all your food from that you want" (Michael, Swiss Cottage FG).

Almost without exception the FG participants felt that although FMs were a place to buy food, there was also a definite leisure element to attending them. This point was most emphatically made at the Islington FG, where a number of participants stressed that the FM[106] fits in with the weekend as leisure time, and was very different from normal weekday shopping:

[105] For example: that they are open seven days a week; have close car parking; are quicker to use; and stock the whole spectrum of grocery needs.
[106] The Islington FM is held on a Sunday.

> "It is a leisure experience for me...It is a luxury, the reality for me...is that the normal experience of shopping is quite different and a form of drudgery, and it is wonderful to have this little extra on top. And it would be even more wonderful if you could construct your whole shopping around it, but in reality there isn't time, either for us, or for them, or for the markets" (Alan, Islington FG).

At the Devizes and Warminster FGs, FMs were characterised as providing 'nice little extras' or 'add-ons', mainly because the markets are only held monthly and can't therefore provide a realistic shopping alternative. Similarly at the Stroud FGs, participants felt that due to their frequency (twice a month) the FM inevitably has a luxury or leisure element to it, although many emphasised that it was nevertheless a valuable food retail outlet. Essentially, FMs were seen as unable to sustain a 'normal' family shop, but were enjoyable and provide something a little bit different, both in terms of the produce available, but also as an experience. Indeed, several FG participants were concerned that FMs should not become too frequent, or they felt there was a danger they could lose some of their festiveness and leisure attributes:

> "I think it's a luxury, partly because of the fact that it isn't every week, so you have to be very well-organised to plan to buy everything you would want fortnightly. Usually with vegetables it won't last that long...I think as much as anything it is the social side of it, and the pleasant experience of shopping" (Paula, Stroud FG).
>
> "(Penny) I quite like the fact that it is not every week, because it means it is a bit of a special event, and if it was every week it would be less so...(Roger) Yes, it would be possible to overdo it" (Stroud FG).
>
> (Sonia) I think there is a slight novelty factor in it being monthly...(James) You get too familiar with it otherwise, and it just sort of wears off then doesn't it" (Devizes FG).

As identified throughout this chapter, there was widespread support amongst FG participants for upholding what it is that distinguishes FMs from other food outlets, whether this was explicitly stated, or implicit in what was being said. However, in a small number of cases consumers expressed their frustration that FMs do not stock such items as citrus fruits, which were perceived to be basic necessities. There were also occasional concerns that in being overly prescriptive about the distance rules, FMs were unnecessarily restricting the variety available, and that quality produce should be allowed at the FM if it added to the variety and was the most local available:

> "There are one or two things I miss though...that you have to import, like lemons...or fresh ginger...and it would be really nice to see perhaps some good quality importers. I mean one of the reasons why I go down to the Borough Market[107], is to go to...the Spanish importers. There is also an Arabian guy selling dried fruit and things like that" (Dawn, Islington FG).

> "About three markets ago there was a guy, he has only been here once, and he did the most wonderful venison...Now the reason he was here was that foot and mouth had hit the market that he was going to...He was not local, but his produce was wonderful, and there is nobody locally selling venison at the moment...So I prefer them not necessarily to be local if there is a wider range. Now if somebody else came along with sausages from a distance, then that would be pointless" (Peter, Devizes FG).

Unsurprisingly, those FMs that are held more frequently appear to play a larger role in consumers' shopping patterns. However, even at the weekly London FMs there was still frustration that they failed to provide the variety that some consumers would like. In several cases consumers saw their FM as being a replacement for local independent food shops, and most participants would like FMs to be held more often to increase their practical relevance as a food outlet. Yet more generally, FMs were not seen as a replacement outlet, but as a welcome alternative or adjunct (principally to supermarkets). Indeed, certain consumers were concerned that increasing the frequency of FMs to improve their practicality could even damage something of what makes them special.

6.6 Summary of the consumers at Farmers' Markets

The consumers' motivations for attending FMs were varied, and often quite complex. There was certainly evidence of a political will to support something that many consumers considered represented an important alternative to the other food retail outlets available. Usually this was in relation to supermarkets, which were widely criticised within the FGs for their perceived unfairness in dealing with smaller producers. Indeed, several consumers felt that their support for the producers selling at FMs was similar to buying 'fair-trade' produce. Most of the consumers valued that the produce at FMs was somehow 'identifiable', compared to the 'nondescript' produce from the world market, which supermarkets were seen as selling. Buying from FMs was

[107] See earlier footnote.

highlighted by some consumers as making a statement of choice, and signifying that they wanted to retain their ability to make their own decisions about what they bought, rather than being dictated to by supermarkets. A number of consumers, particularly at the Stroud and Wiltshire FGs, were also concerned to support FMs in order to contribute to the local economy. This direct support for the local economy was less evident at the London FGs, where avoiding the unnecessary importation of food produce from abroad was emphasised: sentiments which were replicated across all the FGs.

Whatever the political motivations of consumers the enjoyment of going to FMs was almost universal, based to a large extent on the human interaction with other consumers, as well as the producers. This was typically compared to the anonymity and mechanical process of shopping at supermarkets. FMs were frequently likened to the markets in Spain, France and Italy, and consumers often mentioned that they enjoyed the convivial atmosphere of a vibrant market which they felt FMs had returned to Britain. Consumers were aware of the underlying commercial motivations for the producers selling at FMs, and clearly expected them to be highly professional. However, the occasional comment suggests that sometimes consumers may suspend their understanding of the commercial realities in order to create an aura of home-made or bucolic exchange. Having said that, there can be little doubt that the intrinsic quality of the produce available to consumers at FMs was the primary motivation for their attendance, and what determined their loyalty to particular producers. The quality of produce at FMs was invariably described as being better than that available from supermarkets, and its price was not generally an overriding issue for consumers, who felt that the produce's 'superior' quality represented good value for money.

Consumer assessments of the quality of the produce available at FMs proved to be a composite of a number of factors. Specific production methods were seldom mentioned, and yet there was a widespread assumption that more traditional methods were being employed. A few consumers suggested that the food was produced in a way that they would like to do it for themselves if they had the time, and several highlighted the actual taste of the produce, commonly reminiscing that it was as good as when they were young. The ability to sample the produce at FMs was often valued by the consumers as allowing them to make a more informed choice about the produce they were about to buy. Likewise, the fact that vegetables could often be purchased in a natural state (such as carrots with their tops on), and through being locally sourced were very fresh and picked at their best. Indeed the freshness of produce at FMs (particularly certain fruit and vegetables, but also fish and eggs) was the most frequently stated quality identifier. Allied to the freshness of the produce was its seasonality, which was broadly recognised as contributing to its taste, and creating a sense of celebration and excitement. Habitually a comparison was made with supermarkets, which were acknowledged as having a wide range of year-round produce, but that in the process had often sacrificed a degree of taste and freshness, and were also predictable (in a negative sense).

There is evidence to suggest that buying from a FM provided a baseline trust in the quality of the produce for consumers, which could then be augmented by developing a relationship with the producers over time. It was widely appreciated that this relationship did not provide a guarantee of the produce's quality, but was highly valued by consumers as a means of allowing them to make a more personal judgment. Critical to the build-up of this relationship was that the producer was selling their own produce, which enabled consumers to ask questions about the produce concerned. Producers were also then seen to be directly responsible for the produce they were selling, which provided transparency in its provision, and for some consumers was enhanced when the producer lived in close proximity to the FM. Notwithstanding this majority view, a few consumers in one FG reflected that perhaps it did not have to be the actual producer, as long as they were knowledgeable about the produce they were selling. Comparisons were made with good local independent shops, such as butchers, where it was understood that it is also possible to build up these relationships of personal trust.

There was undoubtedly a practical or commercial aspect to the consumers' relationship with producers at FMs, but also clearly a social one. Even though the relationship was not commonly described as being personal, it was invariably felt to be friendly and sociable. It enabled consumers to better evaluate the produce they were buying, but there was also a human element to the relationship which was considered to add to the overall experience of shopping at FMs. However, despite the advantages of the personal contact described above, there were instances where consumers felt that it complicated the exchange process for them. For example, a number of consumers were reticent to complain about unsatisfactory produce to a producer with whom they had built up a relationship, in case they might personally insult them. This is something of a paradox, in that being able to buy the produce from the actual producer was often highlighted as a major benefit of shopping at FMs. However, there were other consumers who had no such compunction about complaining if they had a problem, although even they acknowledged that it was a more personal process than in a supermarket.

Despite extolling the virtues of FMs, few of the consumers knew what the actual regulations at FMs were, although there was undoubtedly a widespread understanding of what made them distinctive as a retail outlet. There was an assumption that the basic hygiene regulations were in place, and a common sentiment that the actual quality of the produce being sold was self-regulating, in that consumers would not continue to buy it if they were not satisfied with the quality. However, an area in which many consumers did feel there should be regulations, was in ensuring that FMs could maintain their ability to deliver the benefits outlined above, most particularly in respect of allowing them to make their own assessment of the produce quality. Although not stated as such, they wished to retain the 'integrity' of FMs, notwithstanding occasional expressions of frustration that FMs do not have such 'basic' items as citrus fruits.

Unlike the FMMS or the producer interviews, the debate about the regulation of FMs was not specifically couched in terms of their integrity versus variety, but about their frequency and role in peoples' shopping patterns. Not surprisingly, consumers from those FGs where the markets were held monthly bought less of their food needs from FMs than those where the markets were held weekly, or twice monthly. At the latter FGs, several consumers sought to actively coordinate their food shopping between FMs and supermarkets. Across all the FGs, consumers would generally have liked their FMs to be held more frequently, although as explained within Chapter Four (Section 4.7) this would then inevitably put pressure on FM managers to dilute the 'integrity' of their FMs.

Their relative infrequency unavoidably circumscribes the role FMs can play as a food retail outlet. They were often seen by consumers as being a valuable replacement for good local independent food shops that had closed down. However, they were not usually described as a replacement for supermarkets, more as a welcome alternative, or adjunct. For most consumers FMs were a valuable retail outlet that sold high quality and unusual produce (less so at the monthly markets), and yet at the same time there was also a clear leisure or luxury element to them. Inherent within the consumers' attendance at FMs was a sense of festival, enjoyment, and difference, both in terms of the produce available, and the overall shopping experience. As one of the participants at a Stroud FG suggested "there is something that is completely different qualitatively about shopping [at FMs]" (Penny). Thoughts like these led some consumers to reflect that perhaps FMs should not increase their frequency, in case they inadvertently lost the essence of what makes them special.

As with the data on producers under Chapter Five (Section 5.6), the data within this chapter broadly endorse the trends that have been identified within previous research on consumers at FMs. For example, that consumers attend FMs for a combination of reasons, which include the ability to purchase high-quality and fresh produce in a vibrant and social atmosphere. Likewise, quality signification for consumers at FMs incorporates elements of human-level trust, localness, and ethical considerations, rather than simply price considerations. It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that the concurrence of the data in this study with the wider literature, means that the underlying data are 'typical' of consumers who attend FMs.

The in-depth, qualitative, and rigorous nature of this research provides gravitas to these previous (largely quantitative) findings within the literature, as well as revealing a political will amongst consumers to take more control over the food that they buy[108]. This builds on the initial (somewhat superficial in empirical terms) work of Holloway and Kneafsey (2000), in providing comprehensive data on the more profound consumer motivations for attending FMs. The value of this data will become more apparent during its analysis in Chapters Seven and Eight, when they will be used to address objectives two and three of this thesis (see Section 1.3, Chapter One). However, before that, the first objective of this thesis is considered within Section 6.7 below.

[108] Sommer (1989) and McGrath *et al.* (1993) both identified that FMs exemplify a determination to preserve a more temporal, social and geographically specific exchange context. As such, they provide corroboration for the data within this research. However, both studies relate to the USA, and are several years old now, and clearly not representative of consumers interacting with producers at FMs in the UK.

6.7 A synthesis of producer-consumer relations at Farmers' Markets

The first objective of this thesis is to provide detailed empirical evidence of the extent to which producer-consumer relations are being reconfigured within the context of FMs. This section does this through synthesising the study's data on producers and consumers, and is structured according to the three associated sub-objectives within this first objective (see Section 1.3, Chapter One).

1. The motivations of producers and consumers for attending Farmers' Markets.

The primary motivation for producers to sell their produce at FMs was the ability to obtain a full retail price for it. The dependence on sales through FMs varied enormously amongst the producers, from as little as 1% of their turnover up to 100%. For those producers selling a relatively low percentage of their output through FMs, they represented a useful additional outlet where it was possible to obtain a premium price for their produce. However, for other producers, sales through FMs were critical to allowing them to remain in business. Allied to the price premium available, was the capacity to remain in full control of their produce until its final point of sale, and to promote it to its best effect. The direct contact with consumers at FMs was also seen as an opportunity to test out new products, as well as to promote other sales outlets that the producer might have. Occasionally the emphasis on commercial gain was tempered by ethical considerations that included creating more direct connections between the production process and the end consumer[109].

Notwithstanding the domination of commercial motivations for producers' attendance at FMs, there were a number of concomitant non-commercial benefits which may have led some producers to continue selling at FMs, even when they were no longer commercially essential to their businesses. Principally these were evidenced through the enjoyment that producers obviously derived from selling at FMs, which was the result of being able to meet up with other like-minded producers and to socially interact with consumers in a vibrant market atmosphere. Similarly, producers appreciated the personal feedback they received on their produce, which enabled a sense of job

[109] For example, through ensuring that they sell at the most local FM to them that will provide an acceptable economic return, rather than necessarily aiming for the maximum returns available.

satisfaction and pride in what they do, opportunities that were recognised as being unusual within farming.

In comparison, the consumers' attendance at FMs was for more complicated reasons, albeit underlain by a belief in the intrinsic quality of the produce available, which was perceived to be higher than otherwise available. Price was generally not the over-riding consideration, although consumers expected to receive good value for their money. The consumers' motivations also exhibited a political will to support a retail outlet that was different from the domineering corporate retailers. This was manifest in their desire to maintain local and smaller farmers; to contribute to the local economy and community; to reduce the unnecessary importation of food; to personally reward producers for their hard work; and to encourage more equitable trading relationships. Many consumers also expressed that they wanted to have more connections with the produce they were buying (which FMs were seen as enabling), and that through shopping at FMs they were making a definite statement of choice.

The practicalities of buying produce from FMs varied, depending upon the market frequency. At the more frequent FMs (weekly or twice monthly), there was evidence that certain consumers buy a considerable percentage of their fresh groceries from FMs and coordinate what they buy with other retail outlets. FMs were frequently recognised as being a replacement for local independent food retailers that had closed down, but considered to be alternative or adjunctive to supermarkets. At the monthly FMs, the practical motivations for shopping at FMs were diminished, and they were more often viewed as providing luxury or treat items. Indeed, whatever the market frequency, there was often a strong sense that FMs provided a leisured shopping experience.

The consumers invariably enjoyed going to FMs, based largely on their social interaction with the producers and other consumers. This feeling of conviviality was seen to be enhanced by the atmosphere of a vibrant market environment, which included the unpredictability and seasonal nature of much of the produce available. Ultimately, therefore, whilst it was the quality of the produce available at FMs that determined consumers' attendance, FMs also clearly provided something different and of value to consumers which was based on a more human-level and sociable way to buy their food.

2. *The way in which producers promote the quality of the produce they sell at Farmers' Markets, and the way in which consumers assess the quality of the produce they buy at Farmers' Markets.*

Most producers opined that the high quality of their produce underpinned its sale at FMs. Essentially, this quality was seen to be the result of the traditional production methods employed by the producers, and their personal pride and commitment in what they do. Particularly with vegetables, and certain fruits and eggs, the freshness and ripeness of the produce was also highlighted, largely as a result of it being locally produced and in season (the fruit and vegetables). This assertion was endorsed by the consumers, who emphasised that they would not continue going to FMs were it not for the intrinsically high quality of the produce available. Although specific production methods were seldom mentioned by consumers, there was an assumption that more traditional methods had been used, and being able to buy vegetables in their 'natural' state (such as carrots with their tops on) was seen as adding to their overall quality. The freshness of the produce (especially vegetables) was repeatedly mentioned as the primary quality identifier by consumers, and many also liked the seasonality of much of the produce, seeing it as an important contributor to its taste. In this respect, the relative localness of production and the directness of sale were widely regarded as important. Several consumers also remarked that the food had been produced in a way that they would like to do it for themselves, if they had the time.

The actual taste of the produce at FMs was frequently highlighted by consumers as being exceptional, and many reminisced that it tasted like the food they remembered from when they were young. Producers frequently offered samples of their produce at the FMs, enabling consumers to appreciate the quality of their produce by tasting it. This option was certainly appreciated by consumers, who felt that it enabled them to make a more informed choice about the produce they were buying and consequently gave them confidence in its quality. On the whole, consumers assumed that the producers at FMs must adhere to basic hygiene regulations, although some were concerned about buying meat at FMs due to the lack of refrigeration. It was also apparent that to some extent consumers evaluate produce quality differently, dependent upon the outlet they are buying it from. For example, in a supermarket consumers expected the fruit and vegetables to be physically perfect and uniform, whereas at a FM unusualness was acceptable, or indeed desirable.

To certain producers, the fact that they were organically certified added another layer of quality assurance to their produce. Correspondingly, a number of consumers were specifically looking to buy organically certified produce. More usually, however, consumers presumed that the produce on sale at FMs was somehow organic, and they were not that concerned as to whether or not it was organically *certified*. Indeed, many were highly sceptical of the certified organic produce in supermarkets, commonly recognising it as an over-priced niche product. Likewise, there was widespread scepticism amongst producers concerning the production benefits of organic certification, with many feeling that it was simply another marketing label, and that their own production processes assured a high quality food product.

In support of their firm conviction of the intrinsic qualities of their produce, producers highly valued the opportunity at FMs to be able to explain its benefits directly to consumers. This enabled them to promote it to its best effect, and to provide legitimacy and transparency within its provision. There was a perception that this was what consumers were looking for at FMs, and included clarifying the locality and nature of production. This producer perception was certainly corroborated by the consumer responses, which highlighted the value of being able to directly question the producer themselves in order to better assess the quality of the produce on sale. The data suggest that buying from a FM provided a baseline trust in the produce for many consumers, which could then be augmented by developing an unmediated relationship with the producers. It was generally acknowledged that whilst this relationship was not a guarantee of the produce's quality, it did allow consumers to make a personal and more tangible judgment as to its trustworthiness. Mainly this was through making an initial assessment of the integrity of the producer themselves, and consequently their produce.

In addition to their evaluation of the intrinsic qualities of the produce they buy at FMs, consumers were also clearly influenced by its extrinsic qualities. These were largely ethical considerations, such as wanting to buy local produce, reducing the importation of food, and a desire to support local producers, but also the overall atmosphere in which the produce is sold. Again, several producers expressed an awareness of these issues and made a point of emphasising the localness of their produce, where this was seen to be appropriate.

3. *An assessment of the way in which producers and consumers interact at Farmers' Markets in order to facilitate the exchange process between them, and the relevance of management decisions to this interaction.*

Although the intrinsic quality of the produce was critical to its sale at FMs, it is clear from the above that the direct contact between producers and consumers had a significant role to play in facilitating this exchange process. Underlying the value of this direct contact was the build-up of a good rapport between the producers and consumers. Consumers talked about crossing a threshold of trust. Asking questions of those directly responsible for the production of the produce they were buying enhanced its traceability, and enabled trust to develop in the producer themselves. Once crossed, this threshold was not then constantly re-evaluated, which explains why producers often found that consumers' questions cease to be interrogative after a time.

It was apparent that the producers were aware of this process and actively sought to provide what they surmised their consumers wanted, in order to keep them coming to their stalls. This entailed taking a personal interest in them, making them feel welcome, and being honest about what they do, which was sometimes described as providing 'the old shopkeeper routine'. Similar connections were made by the consumers, many of whom also suggested that the relationship with the producer at FMs was similar to that with a good local shop, such as a butcher. Nevertheless, it was often recognised (by both producers and consumers) that what was special about the FM relationship was that it usually involved the producer themselves, rather than an (albeit perhaps knowledgeable) intermediary. For some producers, using employees who had been directly connected with the production process was seen as an acceptable compromise, whereas others were insistent that it should only be the actual producer. The latter asserted that being able to talk to the actual producer was part of the aura of FMs for consumers, and therefore in their own commercial interests to ensure its provision. The consumer perspective largely supports this assertion, as most of them appreciated the exceptional opportunity of being able to meet the actual producer of the food they buy at FMs.

The relationship itself was invariably described as friendly and sociable by consumers, sometimes even developing into a personal friendship. However, whatever the degree of intimacy, the fact of having a direct relationship with the vendors at FMs was highly valued. This was often expressed in comparison with the anonymous experience of shopping in supermarkets, and was enhanced for some consumers by the producer being very local to the FM, in that there was then a 'feel-good factor' of actually buying from (and supporting) their neighbours. Therefore, the 'human' element of shopping at FMs empowered consumers to make a more personally informed judgment about the quality of the food they were buying, but also provided an alternative to the 'soullessness' of supermarket shopping. In addition, it seems likely that certain consumers deliberately suppressed their understanding of the commercial realities of FMs, in order to accentuate the social aspect of the exchange process.

For their part, the producers similarly perceived the relationship with their consumers as being friendly and sociable, and again acknowledged that on occasions it may even develop into a friendship. This friendship was usually realised as only existing at the FM, and that its cultivation was important to ensuring the continued loyalty of their customers. However, it is perspicuous that apart from their commercial motivations for developing this relationship, producers highly appreciated the experience of getting direct (and mainly constructive) feedback on their produce from the end consumer. This was a source of pride and satisfaction, and meant that they felt personally valued for their work. A number of producers also recognised a benefit in being local to the FMs where they sell, as this further connected them with the consumers and clarified the provenance of their produce and themselves.

Notwithstanding the undoubted benefits of the interaction between producers and consumers at FMs, there was occasional evidence of a downside. From a producer point of view this was restricted to a lack of time to be sociable at the busier markets. However, for a number of consumers the degree of intimacy afforded to them by producers, and the necessity to reciprocate, was sometimes felt to be an encumbrance to shopping at FMs. Likewise, complaining at FMs was a problem for some consumers, who were concerned that they might somehow impugn the integrity of the producer themselves and potentially damage an enjoyable relationship that they had built up over time.

It is apparent throughout this section that both the producers and consumers valued FMs as an exchange context that offers something positively different from more 'conventional' marketing outlets. Both agreed (or assumed) that basic hygiene regulations should be adhered to at the markets. However, in managerial terms, it was the maintenance of the direct contact between the actual producer and the end consumer that was generally recognised as being crucial. From the producers' perspective (notwithstanding the wider non-commercial benefits), this was principally to retain the commercial distinctiveness of FMs, and most were therefore insistent that the markets should be managed to ensure this was the case. For the consumers, the direct contact was perceived as enabling them to make a more personally informed judgement about the produce quality, and underpinned their evaluation of FMs. Similarly, the FM radius restrictions were seen as contributing to the identity of FMs by many of the producers and consumers concerned. It is also clear from the data that there is room for flexibility within the interpretation of these management decisions, which will be assessed more fully in the following chapter.

Chapter 7

FARMERS' MARKETS AS A 'BUBBLE OF ALTERITY'

7.1 Introduction

Chapters One and Two set out how pressures within the UK agro-food system have led to the development of 'alternative strategies' ('AS') which diversely seek to overcome, or at least circumvent, the problems associated with the disembedding tendencies of the 'conventional' agro-food system. Of central importance to these emerging 'AS' is the variable reconnection of the production of food with its consumption, and a concomitant reconfiguration of the relationship between producers and consumers. However, the determination of an 'AS' is often complex, its outcome dependent upon intricate exchange logics and the variable interaction of those involved.

As discussed within Chapter Three, research into the agro-food system since the early 1970s has been dominated by macro-level political economic approaches, which have been based on the logic of neoclassical economics and the demands of a highly abstracted 'market' (see Chapter Three, Section 3.2). This has enabled a sense of overarching change and the trend towards the globalisation of the agro-food system but, in the process, local level social and political contingencies have tended to be ignored and the focus has been at the production end the food chain. However, over the last decade there has been a growing recognition that a macro-level perspective is unable to encompass the emerging discourses within the agro-food system (and most especially within 'AS'), which often incorporate complex constructions of quality. These include a more explicit acknowledgement of natural processes within the agro-food system, as well as the social, cultural and ethical implications of food production, distribution and consumption. There has been a resultant growth in micro-level research approaches that can include these diverse elements within their framework and facilitate the examination of actual exchange contexts. This then allows for the explication of these social ingredients and conventions of engagement that lead to local level contingencies and help determine the structure of 'AS'.

The main aim of this thesis, therefore, has been to examine critically the characteristics of the relations between producers and consumers within a concrete exchange context, in order to better understand the emergence of 'AS' in the UK agro-food system. As argued in Chapter Two, FMs were considered to provide an ideal focus to achieve this, and as such have been used as the portal through which to access 'information rich' data. These data were analysed within Chapters Four (FMMS), Five (producers) and Six (consumers), which directly addressed the first objective of this thesis (see Chapter One, Section 1.3) and established that the data were representative of producers and consumers who attend FMs. It also illustrated the rigorous and in-depth qualitative nature of the data, and hence their appositeness to addressing the main aim of this thesis.

FMs have had extensive (and generally very positive) press coverage, which to some extent has given the impression that FMs are a kind of panacea[110] for the many problems faced by rural areas. They are singled out within the Curry Report (DEFRA, 2002a) as an exemplar of how producers and consumers can be reconnected within the food chain and, as shown in Table 2.2 (Chapter Two), are heralded as enabling a wide range of potential benefits. Yet, in economic terms at least[111], they are relatively insignificant within the agro-food system. However, as suggested by O'Doherty *et al.* (1999) and others, analysing the wider significance of 'AS' such as LETS and FMs, requires a framework of analysis that can incorporate more than just an economic perspective.

Chapter Three described how the notions of social (and subsequently local) embeddedness have been increasingly used as a means of understanding how economic exchange processes can be affected by their local and social contexts. It highlighted their relevance to the conceptualisation of 'AS', and in particular as a means of gaining a deeper understanding of what characterises FMs. In addition, the notion of 'regard' was introduced as providing an additional and complementary layer of analysis in the

[110] The data from the FMMS certainly indicated that FM managers are in most cases well aware that FMs are *not* a panacea.
[111] Although there are no detailed figures on the total turnover at FMs, the NFU FMs Business Survey (NFU, 2000) estimated total sales in the UK of £60 million in 2000, rising to a projected £100 million in the Spring of 2001. The FMD outbreak in 2001 meant that it was unlikely that the latter figure was reached (NAFM, 2001), but by September 2002 their second report (NFU, 2002) estimated the turnover to have risen to over £166 million. These figures compare with a total household expenditure on food and drinks in the UK in 2000 of £88.6 billion, and total agricultural output of £6.6 billion (DEFRA, 2002b).

context of face-to-face relations, as there are at FMs. However, as identified within Chapter Three, embeddedness may be diversely utilised within the agro-food system, which can substantially affect the outcome of the 'AS' involved (in this case FMs). Section 7.2, therefore, draws on the theoretical insights offered by the notions of 'embeddedness' and 'regard', to further conceptualise the data collected within this study. Section 7.3 then appraises the extent to which the embeddedness of the producer-consumer relations at FMs results in alterity within the agro-food system.

Despite the advantages of conceptualising FMs in this way, eliciting their potential role and durability (within the UK agro-food system), and relating the findings of this study to a wider understanding of the significance of 'AS' within the UK agro-food system[112], demands that the results are situated within a theoretical framework. As indicated in Chapter Three, Conventions Theory (CT) has been adopted as the theoretical framework for this thesis because it enables the researcher to distinguish between different types of embeddedness. This allows for the intellection of how different conventions or understandings of quality are negotiated to determine a particular outcome, in relation to other possibilities. However, the starting-point for CT was as a theory of *production* organisation (Salais and Storper, 1992)[113], whereas this thesis is essentially concerned with producer-consumer relations. It was therefore necessary to adapt CT and to develop a theoretical framework which can specifically address FMs, and subsequently 'AS'. This is considered within Section 7.4, and includes the possibility of incorporating a 'convention of regard', as well as developing the concept of a 'bubble of FM alterity', which has the potential to burst.

7.2 Embeddedness and regard

7.2.1 Social embeddedness

Neoclassical economics conceptualises the market as an autonomous, impersonal and self-regulating exchange context in which the participants are only concerned to maximise their own gains. However, as discussed within Chapter Three there is a

[112] In other words, objectives two and three of this thesis, as enumerated under Chapter One (Section 1.3)
[113] Notwithstanding Murdoch *et al.* (2000) who suggest that CT has since been extended to more broadly encompass negotiation processes within modern economies.

growing critique of this view of the market which acknowledges the inevitability of social and cultural influences on the exchange process, and a plurality of potential motivations. This has led many authors[114] to revisit the work of Karl Polanyi (Polanyi 1957 [1944]; Polanyi *et al.* 1957), who introduced the notion of 'social embeddedness' in recognising that economic activity is always embedded within a wider socio-cultural institutional framework. Polanyi's work was developed by Mark Granovetter (Granovetter 1985; 1990; 1992), who, in a seminal paper (*ibid.*: 1985), argued that economic actions are socially embedded in ongoing social relations between individuals, and that it is at this level that the social embeddedness of transactions is most relevant, rather than in analysing the socially constructed nature of institutions. Granovetter's approach has subsequently been widely adopted[115], and it is his version of social embeddedness that is used within this study.

Granovetter (1985) asserted that there is effectively a hierarchy of social embeddedness within exchange relations as a means of engendering trust within a particular exchange context, over and above any institutional protection. In the first instance, an individual will choose to deal with somebody who has a generally recognised good reputation. Preferable to a general referral is a personal recommendation from someone known and trusted by the individual. Better still is the individual's own experience of dealing with that person in the past. It is within this last instance, that the socially embedded nature of the transaction can be seen as the result of an ongoing relationship that is highly influenced by previous interaction between the participants.

The exchange milieu within this thesis is FMs, and the researched participants were producers and consumers who attended FMs. The primary object of exchange between them was food[116], which was viewed by both sets of participants as being of an intrinsically high quality, often described as superior to that which is available through other retail outlets. Indeed, many consumers stated that it was the intrinsic quality of the produce available at FMs that ensured their continued attendance. Nevertheless, it is unmistakeable that the direct human contact made possible at FMs was seen as crucial by both producers and consumers to facilitating the exchange process between them.

[114] See Chapter Three (Sections 3.2 and 3.3) for references.
[115] See Chapter Three (Section 3.3) for references.

From the consumers' perspective, it seems likely that the initial indicator of quality was that the produce was being sold at a FM. This is manifest in comments that implied many consumers assumed the produce at FMs was traditionally produced and organic in some way, accentuated by an understanding that it was also local. This endorses Holloway and Kneafsey (2000), who considered that to some extent consumers make positive assumptions about the quality of the produce at FMs by virtue of the consumption context itself. Similarly, Tregear *et al.* (1998) suggested that the consumption context can help to 'authenticate' particular exchange processes, such as the localness of production in this instance. In Granovetterian terms, FMs positive quality image can be likened to a generally recognised good reputation which FMs have gained from their positive media profile. Likewise, it is possible (in fact likely) that consumers may have had a particular producer recommended to them by a trusted friend, although there is no data within this study to directly support this assertion. However, there is certainly evidence of the development of relationships of trust between producers and consumers as a result of on-going interaction.

From the producers' perspective, the opportunity to explain or extol the benefits of their produce directly to the person who was going to consume it, was seen as a vital benefit of FMs. For example, producers provided consumers with tasters or samples of the produce, explained their production methods, and answered any questions the consumer may have about the produce. In addition to directly promoting their produce there was a widespread perception that it was important to establish a good rapport with their customers, thereby engendering trust in themselves, and subsequently their produce.

Consumers almost invariably appreciated the opportunity to directly relate to the producers of the produce on sale at FMs. Although this was generally recognised as not providing a guarantee as to the quality of the produce bought, it enabled them to make a more *personally informed* judgment. It is apparent that this judgement was based on two principal elements. Firstly, the producer could be questioned about the produce itself, including the production methods employed. Secondly, the integrity of the producer themselves could be assessed by talking to them and appraising them as a

[116] Although 50% of the FMs within the FMMS allowed some locally produced crafts, food was invariably the principal produce on sale, and as stated within Chapter Four (Section 4.7) the focus of this

person. However, it is the latter element that appears to be of more significance for most consumers in informing their purchasing decisions, to the extent that they often buy produce from those producers they like and trust as *people.* This is typified by the following: "I would trust the beef man, he is a thoroughly nice man. The chicken man is new, and I don't know him" (FG filter 11, Swiss Cottage). A number of consumers also talked of crossing a threshold of trust with producers and their produce over time, which is not then constantly re-evaluated. This observation is supported by producer comments that consumers often initially ask questions about them and the produce they sell, but after a while their interaction becomes more conversational than interrogative.

The importance of these ongoing relations to facilitating the exchange process at FMs is most clearly exemplified in relation to producer and consumer comments concerning organically *certified* produce. Organic certification can be equated to an institutional guarantee of produce quality, and for certain producers and consumers this was certainly important and seen to add another layer of quality assurance. But more usually, the opportunity for direct, and ongoing, interaction between producers and consumers was seen as a better enabler of trust in the quality of the objects to be exchanged between them. To many producers, organic certification was simply another marketing label that cost a lot of money and did not necessarily contribute to the quality of the produce on offer. Correspondingly, consumers often equated certified organic produce in supermarkets with an over-priced niche product, rather than as identifying quality *per se.* Even amongst those producers at FMs who were certified as organic, there was a perception that this was less necessary at FMs than at other retail outlets due to the possibility of direct interaction with the end consumers.

Despite the mutually recognised intrinsic quality of the produce on sale at FMs, there is little doubt that the social embeddedness of the exchange process, principally in the form of an ongoing relationship, had an important role to play in facilitating the exchange process at FMs. This is further clarified by the frequent comments made by consumers about buying their produce at supermarkets (generally in a negative way compared with FMs), where the lack of human interaction was highlighted and the relative inability to form their own judgment as to the produce's quality. In the context of buying from a supermarket, quality within the exchange process (or market) is

research is on food, and therefore crafts were not considered in any detail.

arbitrated by an institution[117] (albeit a socially constructed one), rather than on the basis of ongoing social relations, as would appear to be the case at FMs.

7.2.2 Local embeddedness

In addition to the social embeddedness of economic transactions, Chapter Three explained that there is an assumption being made by certain consumers that foods with a high 'natural' content are of a better quality than more processed foods, which are perceived to be prone to "malign human interference" (Murdoch *et al.* 2000: 108). Likewise, the ability to link food to identifiable localities of production, or perhaps even a location that is immediately local to the point of consumption, is seen as facilitating transparency within its provision and contributing to its overall quality assessment (Banks and Bristow 1999; Murdoch and Miele 1999; Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000b; Murdoch *et al.* 2000). Within the context of FMs, the NAFM criteria (see Appendix A) and the NAFM certification scheme (see Chapter Two, Section 2.5.2), suggest that 'local' is usually defined as 30 miles from the FM in question, although there is a degree of flexibility involved. Within the case studies of this thesis, the Wiltshire and Stroud FMs allowed producers to travel 25-30 miles to the markets, with some flexibility up to 50 miles, whereas at the London markets the restriction was 100 miles from the M25 motorway (perhaps up to 115 miles from the FMs themselves).

To some extent it would appear that the difference in the market radii between the London FMs and those in Wiltshire and Stroud had *an* impact on the significance of the local embeddedness of produce at the markets. At the London FMs, the localness of production was seen as important to consumers in facilitating the supply of freshly harvested produce. Furthermore, there was an appreciation of eating produce that was

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[117] This is not to suggest that consumers cannot also build up a relationship of trust with supermarkets as an institutional arbiter of quality, simply that FMs facilitate an alternative option for consumers. In fact, following the 1990 Food Safety Act, supermarkets (or the large corporate retailers) have clearly become increasingly important institutional arbiters of quality within the agro-food system. The 1990 Act was the result of EU pressure and domestic concerns over food hygiene, following the succession of food scares in the late 1980s (Harrison *et al.*, 1997). It shifted responsibility for food quality control away from the public environmental health inspectorate, towards retailers, who had to show 'due diligence' and that they had taken 'all reasonable precautions' "in the manufacture, transportation, storage and preparation of foodstuffs" sold in their stores (Marsden and Wrigley 1996: 40; Flynn and Marsden 1992; Flynn *et al.* 1994; Doel 1996). In essence, these regulatory changes exemplify a change from public interest regulation (where the state effectively controlled quality within the food chain), towards private interest regulation (where corporate retailers both define and control quality, as a means of retaining their

locally in season, as this contributed to its freshness and taste, and there was a general despair at the 'lunacy' of importing fresh produce that could be grown in the UK. Comparisons were frequently made to the year-round availability of produce in supermarkets, which was perceived as having sacrificed taste and freshness for convenience and keeping properties. Additionally, the seasonality of produce (principally vegetables and fruit) was seen as contributing to the authenticity of FMs as an exchange context, based on locally embedded production. Local was generally taken to mean that the produce was from the UK, and from relatively smaller producers to whose place of production consumers could relate. Similar sentiments were expressed in Wiltshire and Stroud, although there was also commonly an interest in supporting local farmers and contributing to the local community. Local in this context was more immediate, sometimes to the extent that consumers knew the actual place of production from personal experience. Buying food at a FM was occasionally likened to buying food from a neighbour, which further enabled a sense of direct connection for consumers, with some consumers feeling that producers may then have a sense of 'local responsibility' for the produce they are selling.

Correspondingly, although the primary motivation of producers in this study for attending FMs was to make more money, a number from both the Stroud and Wiltshire FMs were concerned to sell at their most local FMs, providing this still allowed them to make sufficient profits. Their intention was usually to enable consumers to have a more direct physical connection with the production of their food, and to try and reduce the distance food travels between its production and eventual consumption. For several of these producers, selling 'local food for local people' was an integral part of FMs, and indeed some were critical of those producers who travel 100 miles or so (from Wiltshire for example) to the London FMs, as the intimate bond between the produce and its location of production was seen to be broken. A number of the producers selling at the London FMs were in fact quite local to the markets, and most were concerned to reduce the distance food travels as much as possible. However, the main consideration when choosing which markets to sell at was that they would provide the best financial returns, with distance concerns being limited to what was logistically achievable for them. Clearly, the sheer size of London determines that more producers will be needed to

competitive advantage) (Marsden and Wrigley 1995; Marsden *et al.* 1997; 1998). See also (Morris 2000; Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000a).

supply its potential needs, and also that they are likely to have to travel further to reach the markets.

Producers emphasised that the localness of the food's production to its point-of-sale at a FM enabled them to pick their produce at its prime and ensure its absolute freshness. This was perceived to be a result of the geographical distances involved, but also the directness between production and end sale, compared to the more complicated systems involved with wholesalers and supermarkets. The consumers similarly recognised these benefits, for example: "I like buying straight from the producer, and...the fact that it hasn't been stored for months...and that the fruit...has been allowed to get ripe on the tree, and...is picked just before it is sold (Elizabeth, Swiss Cottage FG). The direct interaction at FMs also provided an opportunity for producers to highlight the natural and traditional nature of their production process, for instance: "the meat has been born and bred on the farm...we are nice to our pigs...we don't put antibiotics in the food" (Producer 4, Wiltshire). Actually, most of the consumers assumed traditional methods of production were used by the producers: "I know the food is not all organic, but it is certainly using more traditional methods of production" (FG filter 114, Stroud). Linked to this, consumers often enjoyed the option of buying some of their produce at FMs in a more obviously 'natural state': "I just love having that stalk of Brussels sprouts...rather than just a bag at the bottom of the fridge" (Meg, Warminster FG).

From this evaluation of the research data it is evident that the exchange process at FMs was facilitated through being deeply embedded, in both social, but also local relations. This provided a transparency of provision for consumers and enabled a build up of trust in the object of exchange, through the on-going interaction between them and the producers. Nevertheless, Hinrichs (2000) cautions that sentimental assumptions about face-to-face interaction need to be tempered, if the relevance of marketing outlets such as FMs is to be better understood. She does not deny that the relationship between producers and consumers at FMs is based upon "proximity [and] familiarity" (*ibid.*: 298), but she stresses that the social connections made possible at FMs do not preclude the importance of price, and that the local and social embeddedness of the exchange process needs to be balanced by an acknowledgement that it may be serving highly instrumental ends.

Certainly, the principal producer motivation identified within this research (for attending FMs) was the pursuit of improved commercial gains. For the consumers, price was generally not the overriding issue, although they did expect to get good value for their money, which the 'superior' produce at FMs was seen to represent. Many producers were aware that part of the appeal of FMs for consumers came from buying direct from the producer, and that the produce was of a local origin. Therefore, they often made a point of making this clear to consumers when talking to them, because it was felt to be in their commercial interests to do so. The producers were also conscious that consumers were looking for a congenial interaction with them, and that again it was in their commercial interests to provide it. Analogously, a number of consumers appear to suspend their consciousness of the commercial realities at FMs, in order to create an aura of personal exchange. In this sense, the embeddedness of the transactions within this study are an important component of the marketability of FMs. This indicates that the exchange process is to some extent being clothed in an aura of tradition, or at least what people perceive to be tradition. This resonates with Sassatelli and Scott (2001), who suggest that the trust-building measures of 'AS' do not necessarily need to relate to the underlying realities, and Hinrichs (2000: 299) who propounds that "embeddedness itself...becomes some of the 'value-added' in the FM experience". Hinrichs concludes, therefore, that FMs are still fundamentally based upon commodity exchange, even if it has been ameliorated by closer social ties.

7.2.3 'Regard'

However, the data within this research indicate that although a commodity relationship is certainly present at FMs, facilitated by the mutual expediency[118] of social and local embeddedness, there is also evidence of gift exchange. Curry (1999) describes this as being concerned with the "creation and maintenance of personal relationships", and Offer (1997) in a seminal paper, developed the idea of gift exchange through the notion of the economy of 'regard'. Offer postulated that where there is face-to-face interaction (as there is at FMs), it is inevitable that the exchange process will incorporate more than simply the exchange of goods for money, with the gift exchange containing both "the gains from trade, and the satisfactions of regard" (*ibid.*: 452). He identified 'regard' as

[118] Between producers and consumers.

being expressed through such interaction as friendship, sociability, respect and attention, which although difficult to quantify, is valued by the participants.

Within this study producers clearly appreciated the social interaction with other producers, as well as the consumers, for its own sake, irrespective of any commercial benefits. This is evidenced by the job satisfaction expressed by most of the producers, as well as the sense of enjoyment and 'buzz' experienced through selling within the vibrant atmosphere of a FM. Some producers also felt worthy and valued at FMs, rather than being an insignificant cog within a food production system whose legitimacy was under intense scrutiny. Similarly, producers were often proud to be able to sell their produce to its best effect, and to receive direct feedback from (hopefully) satisfied consumers. The following quotes are illustrative of some of these points:

> "I can't really explain that one, it's strange, but I like selling what I produce…We know it's good quality and it is a personal pride factor I suppose really" (Producer 78, London).
>
> "I do enjoy FMs…I like selling to people…It gives you a worthwhile feeling when people come back and say how much they enjoyed what they bought from you last time, and can they have some more…You do feel worthy, valued" (Producer 58, London).

Consumers too, almost invariably enjoyed the experience of shopping at FMs, most particularly due to its conviviality. It was seen as being a human way of shopping, and "a little whisper of society again" (FG Filter 11, Swiss Cottage), which added to the overall value of the produce bought, in comparison with the "soulless" (Paula, Stroud FG) and "zombie-like experience" (Rachel, Devizes FG) of shopping in supermarkets. The relationships forged by consumers with the producers at FMs, varied considerably in the degree of intimacy involved. In some cases, consumers felt that producers almost became personal friends over a period of time, but more usually it was described as a friendly relationship, based at the very least on mutual recognition. However, whatever the degree of intimacy, there was widespread agreement amongst consumers that this personal contact was "an integral joy of the FM experience" (FG filter 37, Warminster), besides its benefits as a means of quality evaluation.

Critically, 'regard' must be communicated, such as through engaging in friendly conversation or giving someone a wave, and there is an intrinsic requirement for it to be reciprocated. This allows for the development of the relationships identified above, but in some instances it led consumers within this study to feel trapped by the intimacy of shopping at FMs, in that they did not always feel like being chatty and friendly. In these cases, the consumers would rather just buy the produce at FMs in an anonymous fashion, much as they do in supermarkets, where the shopping process simply entails the commercial exchange of goods for money. Offer (1997: 455) describes this as "economis[ing] on [the] love" which is inherent within 'regard', and its obligations of reciprocity. The "excessive intimacy" (*ibid.*: 455) of 'regard' is also evident in some consumers' reticence to complain about unsatisfactory produce at FMs, for fear of somehow impugning the integrity of the producer themselves.

Unequivocally, 'regard' was an important benefit of FMs for both the producers and consumers within this study despite being unquantified[119] (and despite occasional problems with excessive intimacy). However, within commercial situations 'regard' can become 'pseudo-regard' if it is not seen to be individualised, and hence authenticated (Offer, 1997). For instance, if a consumer sensed that a producer was not interested in them as an individual, merely as 'another' possibility to increase the sales of their produce, then the producer's friendliness could be perceived as 'pseudo-regard', and essentially a bribe. There was certainly some evidence of this amongst the producers, who perceived that the consumers were looking for a more personal relationship, and therefore it was in their commercial interests to ensure its provision. Consumers were often aware of these issues, but tended to accentuate the positive aspects of the human interaction at FMs, whilst relegating the commercial realities to the background. Likewise, most of the producers genuinely enjoyed the human-level interaction for its own sake, rather than simply for the commercial advantages it offered:

> "[The relationship is] very personal in some respects...Obviously there is a buyer and a seller attitude, but you can have banter with them and you get to know them" (Producer 78, London).

However, despite the non-commercial benefits associated with 'regard', it can also facilitate the commercial exchange process because participants do not want to lose the benefits of 'regard' itself. As Offer (1997: 454) states, "regard provides a powerful

[119] It is likely that 'regard' will remain unquantifiable because it is difficult to establish indicators, and yet there is little doubt that it has a real value for the participants concerned (Offer, 1997).

incentive for trust...[which] economises on the 'transaction costs' of monitoring, compliance, and enforcement"[120]. This tendency was manifest in the data through the build up of loyalty between producers and consumers: "regular consumers do become a friend I think really...that of course develops into a loyalty" (Producer 15, Stroud).

Nevertheless, most of the benefits of 'regard' between the producers and consumers within this research had no apparent economic rationale and were essentially taking place "within [a] market but outside the norms of capitalist evaluation" (Lee 2000: 138)..."through a form of mutually recognised reciprocity" (*ibid.*: 139). For example, part of the reason for attending FMs for many producers and consumers, was to deliberately support an exchange context that was more human-scale and locally orientated, and which contributed to a sense of community and identity. Lee (2000) identifies this as 'regard of the economy', rather than Offer's 'economy of regard', in that it specifically describes sub-capitalist norms of evaluation. These are those aspects of the exchange process that may not make any sense within a purely economic evaluation of FMs, and yet were undoubtedly of value to the participants concerned within this study.

7.3 An appraisal of the alterity of Farmers' Markets

7.3.1 Introduction

It was argued within Chapter Three that 'AS' within the agro-food system are underlain by the associational or physical embedding (or re-embedding) of production and consumption processes. It is certainly perspicuous within Section 7.2 above, that the exchange process at FMs (for the participants within this study) was heavily influenced by its diversely embedded nature. However, Section 3.3 (Chapter Three) noted that the structure of a particular 'AS' is often contested, with the end result being determined by the way in which embeddedness has been utilised. Table 3.1 (Chapter Three) suggested that there are three principal ways in which this might happen, through the creation of alterity, valorisation, or appropriation. These categories are not mutually exclusive, nor are they intended to be a value judgement, but they do provide a framework within

[120] Hence the 'economy of regard', which appears in the title of Offer's seminal article.

which to understand the format and potential significance of an 'AS'. Due to its critical nature, Table 3.1 is reproduced here for the convenience of the reader.

Table 3.1 The utilisation of 'embeddedness' within the agro-food system

	Embeddedness	
Alterity	**Valorisation**	**Appropriation**
The *manner* in which certain actors within the food chain are intent on creating a system of food production and distribution that is not based exclusively on the commodity relationship and profit maximisation.	The *manner* in which the 'value' of the natural, social and local embeddedness of production can enable comparative commercial advantage in the market exchange process.	The *manner* in which those actors operating at the globalised level extract commercial value from systems that were originally set up to circumvent their domination of food production and consumption.
The *purpose* is to incorporate social, environmental, equity and health issues into the production and consumption of food (as well as the economic), in order to more broadly address the issue of sustainable food production.	The *purpose* is to enable those areas marginalised by globalisation to remain economically viable by making use of their endogenous resources.	The *purpose* is to enable the maximisation of commercial profit by accessing emerging niche markets through incorporating the embeddedness of production processes, and in some cases subsequently globalising it[121].

As explained within Chapter Two, FMs emerged in the UK in 1997 as a reaction (or 'AS') to the problems associated with the disembedding tendencies of the 'conventional' agro-food system, and the changing dynamics of rural areas. The 'AS' employed by the instigators of FMs within the UK, was to embed (or re-embed) the production and consumption of food at FMs within local and social relationships, in order to achieve a wide range of benefits (See Table 2.2, Chapter Two). These benefits are both economic and non-economic in their emphasis, reflecting the frequent involvement of local authority officers with an interest in Local Agenda 21 issues (Tutt and Morris 1998; LUC *et al.* 2001). Indeed, one respondent in the FMMS[122] suggested that FMs have "hit all the LA21 buttons" (FMMS 16, Somerset). Concomitantly, as described within Chapter Two (Section 2.5.2), the development of FMs in the UK has been guided by the two underlying tenets[123] originally envisaged by the early instigators

[121] As will be suggested under Section 7.3.2 (following), a producer who gives the impression of selling their own produce and yet is actually buying-in produce to sell on, is also effectively appropriating the embeddedness of FMs.

[122] FMMS (Farmers' Market Manager Survey) reported under Chapter Four (Section 4.7).

[123] 1. The produce should come from within a predetermined radius of the FM (usually 20-50 miles).
2. The vendor should have been directly involved in the production process in some way.

(in particular at the Bath FM), and subsequently by the NAFM criteria and certification scheme.

Within this vision of FMs there was a deliberate attempt to create alterity within the agro-food system, through the utilisation of embeddedness in particular ways. The resultant configuration of the 'AS' was intended to disengage from the 'conventional' agro-food system, with its emphasis on profit maximisation and domination by large corporations. Commercial profitability was still imperative, but other elements such as the social, cultural and environmental connections between the production and consumption of food, were also considered to be important. Indeed, FMs in the UK have been described as "an alternative space which offers a challenge to the dominance of the supermarket-productivist agriculture nexus" (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000: 293). In this respect, there are clear linkages to the wider literature on 'modes of connectivity' within the agro-food system, and the plurality of discourses and exchange logics that determine the format of an 'AS' (e.g. Kloppenburg *et al.* 1996; Thorne 1996; Lee 1996; Whatmore and Thorne 1997; Tovey 1997; Pacione 1997; Nygard and Storstad 1998; O'Doherty *et al.* 1999; Raynolds 2000).

However, it is apparent from the literature review and the FMMS that there are pressures on this configuration of FMs and its underlying utilisation of embeddedness. The debate centres around the 'authenticity' or 'integrity' of FMs (which is seen to be represented by the NAFM criteria and certification scheme), versus the 'variety' of produce available at FMs, and hence their 'commercial' viability as a market outlet. Proponents of retaining the 'integrity' of FMs argue that it is this which determines the alterity of FMs, and enables them to deliver their wide ranging benefits. The counter argument is that this format overly restricts the range of producers who may sell at FMs, and the produce available, and fails to provide the level of regularity and convenience consumers are used to at supermarkets. This means that many markets struggle to remain commercially viable as a retail outlet, in which case they may be unable to deliver any benefits at all.

The high profile, and relative economic success, of FMs is also leading to policy pressures to increase their scope to contribute to the economic development of rural areas, such as through increasing their numbers and capacity to include more producers

(DETR 2000; DEFRA 2002a; NFU 2002). In addition, there are signs that various actors are seeking to appropriate the popularity of 'local food' (or its local embeddedness), which will necessarily have an impact on FMs through taking potential produce and producers away from them. For example, the supermarket chain ASDA[124] have identified a £160 million sales opportunity for local products, and their intention is to sell local produce in all their stores (ASDA, 2000). However, as suggested by Young and Morris (1997), when discussing Quality Assurance Schemes (QAS), ASDA's main aim is not to shorten the food supply chain, but to access speciality foods that give them a market advantage. Waitrose's *Locally Produced* scheme goes some way to addressing this aspect, in sourcing its supplies from within 30 miles of the branch concerned and specifically encouraging smaller producers (Waitrose, 2003)[125]. The involvement of large retail chains enables the valorisation of local production through providing high capacity outlets, yet at the same time draws money away from the local economy, and fails to deliver many of the wider benefits espoused for FMs. Whilst this may not be so extreme as the 'conventionalisation' of organic food production talked about by Buck *et al.* (1997) and others, it still significantly alters the relationship between the food producers and end consumers, compared to that at FMs.

In order to assess the significance of FMs, and their potential role and durability within the UK agro-food system, it is therefore crucial to examine the underlying embeddedness of FMs through the eyes of the producers and consumers who attend them[126]. This is with a view to appraising what constitutes their alterity, and to assess the degree of flexibility that exists within this alterity. Section 7.3.2 now looks at this from the producer perspective, followed by the consumer perspective in 7.3.3.

7.3.2 The producer perspective on the alterity of Farmers' Markets

In practical terms, the foremost motivation for producers' attendance at FMs was the ability to access a profitable retail outlet, and to obtain a full retail price for their produce. Underlying this opportunity was the direct contact with the end consumers,

[124] Part of the Wal-Mart group since July 1999.
[125] Another similar scheme is Somerfield's *Local Life*, which identifies food products in its stores that are either local to the store concerned, or come from within a recognised regional boundary such as Wales, or the West Country (Somerfield, 2003).
[126] In that as identified under Chapter Two (Section 2.4), it is the producers and consumers at FMs, and the relationship between them, that reifies FMs.

which enabled them to cut out the 'middleman', regain control of their produce and to promote it to its best effect, build up a relationship of trust with consumers, and to utilise more traditional production methods that are not necessarily aimed at yield maximisation, or storage properties. Coupled with this was the localness of production, which was seen primarily as allowing certain produce (e.g. eggs, vegetables and fruit) to be fresher than was available at other food retail outlets. Many producers also felt that some consumers were specifically looking for local produce, and appreciated the opportunity to buy their food direct from the producer. As such, these elements were seen as important to retaining FMs distinctiveness as a retail outlet, and to providing a commercial advantage for those selling there.

However, as shown within Chapter Five (Section 5.5), there was some debate about how much flexibility there should be in the implementation of the underlying tenets of FMs as envisaged by the NAFM. The debate again centred around the 'integrity' of FMs versus their 'commercial' viability, as outlined in Section 7.3.1 above. From the producer perspective this entailed two main elements: firstly, the market radius; and secondly, the vendor's connection with the produce on sale. In the first case, although some producers were concerned to sell at the most local profitable market they could, a degree of flexibility was generally acceptable. The imposed radius of 100 miles from the M25 motorway was seen as reasonable by the producers selling at the London markets, with several commenting that at the very least it was all UK produce. In the second case, there was a widespread consensus that the vendor should have been directly involved in the production process in some way, as this was the key component distinguishing FMs from other outlets. Nevertheless, there was some debate over the use of employees at FMs, as well as the degree of food processing that should be allowed (see Chapter Five, Section 5.5 for details). Basically, this concerned balancing the economic viability of the markets, with the retention of their unique identity. The following quotes are indicative of these points:

> "I think it is crucial that they stay as FMs, for farmers to sell their products" (Producer 48, London).
>
> "I'm very much against things like olives coming in, where the basic raw material is not even grown in this country" (Producer 11, Wiltshire).
>
> "I think they can widen their scope, but it's got to be a producer...or a local manufacturer...If they start just letting people in that can sell anything, then they will disappear very quickly" (Producer 35, Stroud).

In essence, the arguments above are concerned to ensure that FMs continue to provide a distinctive marketing channel for the producers concerned, in which they can valorise the embeddedness of their production and achieve comparative commercial advantage. Therefore, although most producers were amenable to a degree of flexibility within the regulation of FMs, there was almost unanimous agreement that bought-in goods should not be allowed, or else FMs would lose their identity and could even "degenerate into car boot sales" (Producer 74, London). However, there were misgivings amongst the producers that some people might in fact be buying-in produce, which raises a number of important issues. Firstly, buying-in goods for resale was not allowed at any of the case study markets[127] and therefore their presence would threaten the integrity of those FMs. Secondly, it is a matter of *personal* integrity, which as highlighted in this chapter and Chapters Five and Six, is at the core of FMs embeddedness. If the vendor admits to the consumer that the produce has been bought-in, then the consumer can make up their own mind on that basis as to whether or not to buy the food, much as they might in a local butcher. However, if the vendor claims that the bought-in produce is their own, then they are guilty of malfeasance and are effectively appropriating the benefits of selling in the context of FMs, without adhering to its underlying tenets or assumptions.

So far this section has considered the importance to producers of retaining the alterity of FMs in order to protect an outlet that allows for the valorisation of their production. However, there were also non-commercial motives that indicate an intention (whether explicit or implicit) to create, or support, alterity within the agro-food system. For example, the radius restriction at FMs was often seen as allowing more direct connections to be made between the production and consumption of food. A number of producers also clearly appreciated the opportunity to provide a legitimacy for their produce, at a time when food production methods were being widely questioned. Many producers were vehemently opposed to selling through supermarkets, not just because of their structural incompatibility in commercial terms, but also due to their operational ethos, with its exclusive focus on profit maximisation and minimal cognisance of the resultant consequences for their suppliers.

[127] Although a small number of FMs in the FMMS did allow bought-in goods for re-sale, to increase the variety of produce on offer.

On a more personal level, the social interaction at FMs was a welcome change for many producers, who otherwise led a fairly lonely existence. It also enabled a sense of pride, and of feeling valued for what they contribute to society (in addition to receiving a 'fair' price for their produce), rather than just working hard with minimal recognition (and 'unfair' prices). These were elements that were considered under Section 7.2.3 above as the benefits of regard, and they are the direct result of the alterity of FMs. Overlaying this interaction was the vibrancy and convivial atmosphere of the markets themselves, which further contributed to the overall enjoyment of selling at FMs for the producers.

7.3.3 The consumer perspective on the alterity of Farmers' Markets

Pragmatically, the consumers invariably highlighted that they continue to shop at FMs due to the intrinsically high quality of the produce available. Inherent within their evaluation of the produce's quality were many aspects that relate to the alterity of FMs as a food retail outlet. For instance, that the produce at a FM is sometimes available in a more natural state and is particularly fresh, ripe and seasonal (especially the fruit and vegetables). Also that it is likely to have been produced in a more traditional manner, and there is a chance to directly question the actual producer. Similarly, at some of the FMs, consumers felt that in being geographically local to the markets producers would additionally have a sense of 'local responsibility' for their produce. Habitually these evaluative options were positively compared to supermarkets, which were acknowledged as providing year-round produce availability and convenience, but in the process a degree of quality and spontaneity was forfeited.

Underpinning the consumers' ability to assess the produce quality at FMs in this way were the underlying tenets of FMs (see Chapter Two, Section 2.5.2), which effectively enabled transparency within the provision of their food, and empowered consumers to make a more personally informed judgement about the quality of the produce on offer. Nevertheless, some consumers reflected that perhaps it did not necessarily have to be the actual producer who was the vendor, as long as they were knowledgeable about the produce they were selling. There were also several comparisons made with local independent shops (such as butchers), where it was also seen as possible to build up a personal relationship, and to have an equivalent confidence in the produce being sold. Similarly, the localness of production did not ensure producer responsibility for a number of consumers, and in these cases the localness of production was valued principally in terms of permitting certain produce to be particularly fresh.

Apart from the ability to access high quality produce, consumers also valued the convivial and vibrant atmosphere that was generated at FMs, which was often likened to the markets in countries like Italy and France. There was almost universal agreement that it was a thoroughly enjoyable way to buy food, which turned a chore into more of a leisure pursuit. The critical component of this was the social engagement with the producers, as well as other consumers, in comparison to what was expressed as the anonymity of shopping at supermarkets[128].

However, in addition to the enjoyment and evaluative benefits of FMs, many consumers also had clear political motivations for attending FMs, that directly sought to encourage alterity within the agro-food system. This was variously stated, but included a desire to support the local economy and community, as well as smaller and local producers who were perceived as being unfairly treated by the large retailers (which was occasionally likened to buying 'fair-trade' produce). Likewise there was a willingness to ensure the continuance of an alternative retail outlet that helped to avoid the unnecessary importation of food. There was also an intention occasionally to more specifically recognise the human endeavours of the producers concerned, and to acknowledge the effort they have made to produce what they, as consumers, wanted. This latter point clearly connects with the producers' comments about feeling worthy and valued at FMs:

> "If you are buying directly from the people who produce the food...it stops them being kind of faceless individuals [and] gives us the opportunity to treat them as people...who have actually toiled to produce the things that we need" (Susan, Stroud FG).

For many consumers it was important to retain, or regain, the ability to make their own assessment of the quality of the produce they were buying (rather than relying on the institutional or uniform standards of supermarkets, for example), which was enabled by shopping at FMs. Indeed, a number of consumers felt that by shopping at FMs they were making a definite political statement of choice, that signalled their desire for something different from what is more generally available in supermarkets:

> "I think it is a way of making sure we maintain choice...and by choosing to shop there [at FMs] we are saying this is the kind of food, this is the kind of shopping that we want. We don't just want the soulless mass-produced supermarket produce" (Paula, Stroud FG).

There are clear indications, therefore, of reflexive consumers at FMs, who are seeking to make a more individualised assessment of the risks attached to the produce they are buying, as suggested by numerous authors (e.g. Almas 1999; DuPuis 2000; Sassatelli and Scott 2001; Goodman and DuPuis 2002). In the process they are sending a signal to other actors within the food system, that may in turn influence their actions. It seems likely, for example, that the *Waitrose Locally Produced* scheme mentioned under Section 7.3.1 above, is indicative of this process, and perhaps even specifically relates to the popularity of FMs. Similarly, the Curry Report (DEFRA 2002a: 43) exhorted producers "to build on the public's enthusiasm for locally-produced food". However, DuPuis (2000: 288) cautions that a consumer's actions will not be truly political, unless they seek to "challenge the commodity system" and actively contribute towards the creation of alterity within the agro-food system.

7.4 The alterity of Farmers' Markets

For producers, the alterity of FMs was seen as crucial to retaining a retail outlet at which they have a comparative marketing advantage for their produce, whereas for consumers it provided them with the opportunity to make an individualised assessment of the produce available, which they deemed to be of a high quality. Nevertheless, although these were the two most important practical benefits of the alterity of FMs identified in Sections 7.3. above, there were clearly wide ranging ethical and social advantages as well. Underpinning this alterity, was the variously embedded nature of the exchange process between the producers and consumers, which in turn was enabled by the founding tenets of FMs in the UK, and subsequent NAFM amendments (see Chapter Two, Section 2.5.2). In effect, these aimed to embed (or re-embed) production within specific localities (local embeddedness) and to permit direct contact and interaction

[128] Although supermarkets were frequently acknowledged as being convenient and where they buy most of their grocery needs.

between the producers and consumers (social embeddedness and regard). Yet many of the elements of FMs' alterity are available at other retail outlets, for example:

- locally produced food may be sold in supermarkets, farm shops, or local shops, wherein the end consumer can be made aware of the produce's local origins;
- ongoing social relations that engender trust between the vendor and the consumer can also develop in outlets such as local greengrocers or butchers (the latter were most frequently mentioned during this research);
- there are a wide range of food festivals, pannier markets, covered markets, WI markets, and street markets in the UK (Chubb, 1998), all of which create a market atmosphere in which to buy food; and
- food may be purchased direct from the producer via mail order, through the Internet, or from a farm stall or shop.

So what is it that is distinctive about FMs, and constitutes their alterity? It is argued here that it is the *combination* of local embeddedness, social embeddedness and regard, together with the producer selling their own produce directly to the end consumer, all of which takes place within the milieu of a vibrant market atmosphere. Moreover, as Goodman and DuPuis (2002: 9) propound, the eventual format of an 'AS' is "mutually constitut[ed]" by both production and consumption processes, which necessitates an understanding of the interaction between producers and consumers within particular contexts. This thesis has done this by examining the relations between producers and consumers at FMs, which has elicited notable evidence of the mutual constitution of alterity, albeit often for different reasons.

As mentioned above, the primary producer motivation for ensuring the alterity of FMs was to benefit their businesses. On this basis, most of them deliberately sought to flaunt elements of this alterity in order to satisfy what they perceived the consumers wanted. This was principally through developing an ongoing relationship with them and endeavouring to provide total transparency within their food provision. This producer assessment of their requirements was broadly corroborated by the consumers themselves, who distinguished the importance of the intrinsic quality of the produce available, which was in large part seen to be assured by their direct relationship to its production. However, it is also apparent that some consumers were deliberately intent on supporting local and smaller farmers, because they were seen as providing a valuable alternative and maintaining choice within the agro-food system. Price was not the overriding influence for most consumers, who felt that FMs represented good value for money and that the prices were 'fair' for the quality of produce on offer (direct comparisons were sometimes made with 'fair-trade' produce). Correspondingly, many producers appreciated that the more equitable trading relationships made possible at FMs enabled them to survive in business (see also Renard 1999; Raynolds 2000).

The above points are certainly indicative of reciprocal endeavour, but it is in social terms that the mutually constituted nature of FMs is most noticeable, and in particular the frequent contrasts made between FMs and supermarkets. From the producer standpoint this often entailed a commercial comparison, and yet the elements deliberated under 'regard' (such as feeling valued and worthy) are important considerations in this context, as are the expressions of enjoyment and pride. Consumer comparisons partly contemplated intrinsic produce quality, but more emphatically were concerned with supporting an exchange context that was "completely different qualitatively" (Penny, Stroud FG) from supermarkets. This was expressed in terms of being at a human-level and community orientated (rather than anonymous and profit orientated), as well as taking place in a convivial atmosphere.

Manifestly, the interaction between producers and consumers is at the core of FMs, so that FMs can be said to "occupy social spaces in which formal market transactions are conditioned by local community norms, values and culture" (Lyson *et al.* 1995: 108). It is also reasonable to postulate that FMs (to some extent at least) represent the purposive re-embedding[129] of the exchange process for food in localised social relationships (Thorne, 1996), as a societal response to the disembedding tendencies of the 'conventional' agro-food system (Sommer 1989; McGrath *et al.* 1993). This is in much the same way that Polanyi (1957) posited the idea of a 'double movement', as a response to the anti-social tendencies of the emerging capitalist economy during the 19th century (see also Jessop 1999).

[129] Although local authorities have often been instrumental in setting up FMs, it is the relationship between producers and consumers that reifies FMs, and will ultimately determine their format. See also Chapter Two, Section 2.5.

Nevertheless, it is essential to understand how *actively* consumers are engaging with the alterity of FMs to invoke real change within the agro-food system, or whether in fact they would be satisfied with a 'McDonaldized imitation' (DuPuis 2000 after Ritzer, 1998; Goodman and DuPuis 2002). For example, how important is it that the vendor is the actual producer of the food being sold, or would consumers would be just as happy to buy 'local' food from a supermarket, provided it was perceived to be intrinsically of an equal quality. Lockie *et al.* (2002), in researching consumer motivations for buying organic food, argue that the degree of political engagement by consumers with the underlying ethos of an 'AS' is crucial to determining its future production structure. However, in relation to this thesis, FMs are an 'AS' that is based upon an exchange context, rather than simply a production process[130]. As argued above, this context is defined by both producers *and* consumers and the direct relationship between them, which is encompassed by the composite alterity of FMs. Therefore, in order to elicit FMs potential role and durability within the UK agro-food system, this alterity is further examined within Conventions Theory (CT), In so doing, this allows for the interpretation of different types of embeddedness (Murdoch *et al.*, 2000) which, as shown above, underpin the alterity of FMs.

7.5 Understanding the alterity of Farmers' Markets within Conventions Theory

7.5.1 Introduction

CT enables an explication of how local level actors negotiate particular networks of food[131] provision, and at its centre are 'conventions', which are mutually accepted "practices, routines, [and] agreements" that may be formally, or informally agreed (Salais and Storper 1992: 171). These conventions help to define product quality, which in turn has an influence on how economic activity is coordinated and becomes stabilised into particular networks. Quality within this context specifically incorporates

[130] This is not to deny that the attitudes and political actions of both producers and consumers can have an impact on the production of organic food.
[131] Food provision in this context, although CT is concerned with the organisation of economic activity generally.

heterogeneous and socially constructed exchange logics, that might appear illogical when assessed from a purely neoclassical economic perspective.

As shown in Chapter Three, Salais and Storper (1992) and Storper (1997) modify the concept of conventions in suggesting that despite the potentially wide range of resultant networks that could emerge, they are in reality likely to be limited to four ideal 'worlds of production' (WoP), or 'action frameworks', each of which "must pass a test of economic coherence" (Salais and Storper 1992: 171). These WoP are the result of 'bundles of conventions' coalescing to provide a framework within which product exchange can take place on the basis of mutually recognised expectations and values. However, although conventions are based on commonly held values, they are open to continuous negotiation as actors seek to fashion networks to suit their own particular agenda. There is flexibility within these WoP, but potentially pressures for change in the underlying conventions can result in incompatible expectations, and the exigency for a fundamental reappraisal of the production and exchange process.

7.5.2 The underlying conventions at Farmers' Markets

As identified in Chapter Three, there are five principal conventions referred to within the literature on CT, as it pertains to the agro-food system[132]. Of particular relevance to an understanding of the alterity of FMs are the civic convention and the domestic convention. Within the civic convention, quality is assessed in terms of the general societal benefits accruing from the economic activity involved. Amongst the producers within this study, this is evidenced by those who valued the ethos of 'local food for local people' as a means of connecting consumers to the production of their food, as well as reducing the unnecessary transportation of food. Likewise, many of the consumers were concerned to reduce the wasteful importation of food, and to help support their local economy and smaller local producers. There was also often a sense of contributing towards the local community, through generating an environment of positive social interaction.

[132] These five conventions are reproduced here for the convenience of the reader. "*Commercial* conventions, which include evaluations by price and the commercial quality of goods; *domestic* conventions, which are largely based on trust and involve goods which can draw upon attachments to place and traditional modes of production; *industrial* conventions, in which goods are evaluated according to standards of efficiency and reliability; *public* conventions, such as the recognition consumers give to

The domestic convention evaluates quality on the basis of trust, which is generated through having tight linkages between the producer and consumer (Salais and Storper, 1992), as well as making direct connections to a localised production context and traditional production methods. The premises of this convention accord very closely, therefore, with the underlying tenets of FMs and to the predominant producer and consumer responses in this research. Indeed, the primary consumer assessment of produce quality was through building up trust in the producers themselves over time, which enabled a more personally informed judgment to be made. This was enhanced for some consumers by the food being locally produced, which was perceived as bestowing it with a more distinctive identity and further increasing the transparency of provision. In addition, although production methods were seldom discussed by consumers, there was a widespread supposition that more traditional methods had usually been employed. Correspondingly, the producers highly valued the opportunity at FMs to personally promote their produce, and to engender trust in themselves and their produce. It also enabled them to highlight their production methods and locality of production. This was partly for their own job satisfaction, but also because they were often conscious that consumers were evaluating their produce in this way.

It is apparent that the domestic and civic conventions are germane to an appreciation of how the economic activity at FMs is coordinated between the producers and consumers, and yet they fail to incorporate the benefits of 'regard'. This is a significant omission in that these benefits are clearly of notable importance to both producers and consumers in their overall evaluation of FMs as an exchange context, as revealed in this research. As such, it is proposed that in order to fully understand the exchange logics underpinning FMs, it is necessary to consider the idea of a *regard* convention, which specifically recognises the intrinsic value of face-to-face interaction between the producer and consumer of a good, in addition to the benefits of its local and social embeddedness (which fall within the domestic convention). This proposal resonates with that of Murdoch *et al.* (2000), who, in discussing the ability of CT to incorporate nature within its framework of quality evaluation, suggest the possibility of adding an *ecological* convention. This would more specifically acknowledge the value of nature in

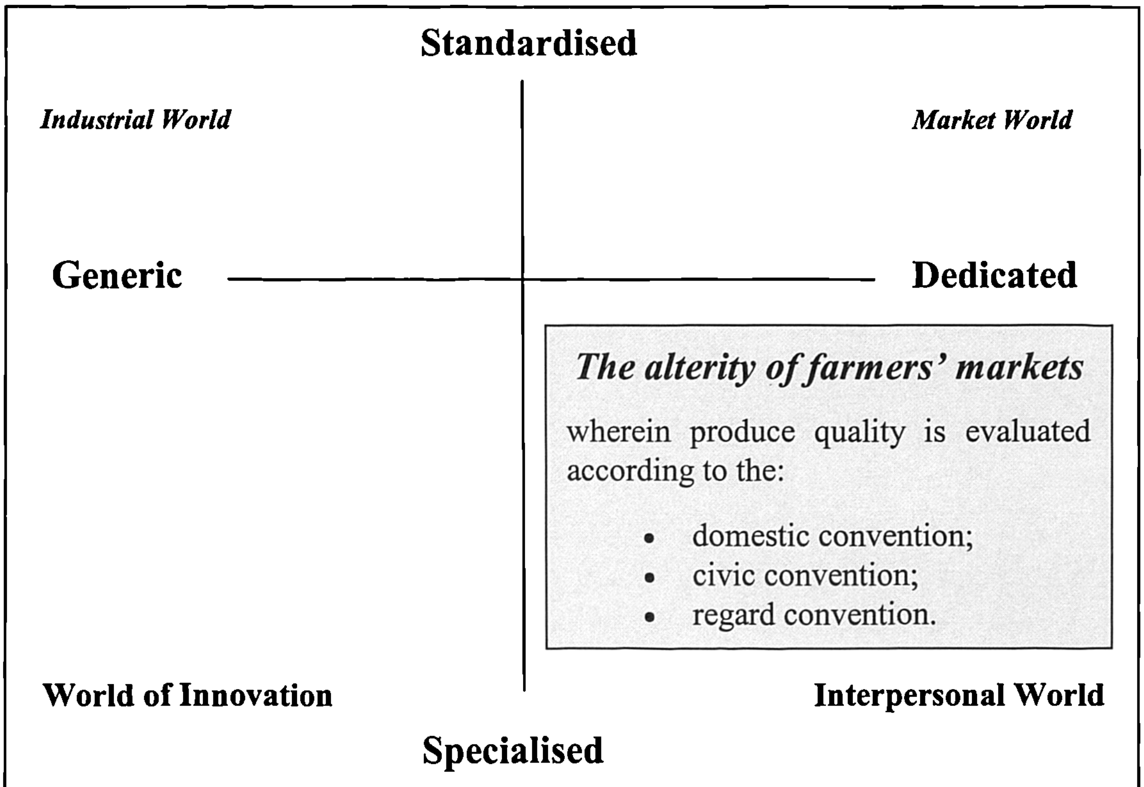
trademarks, brands, and packaging; and *civic* conventions, which refer to the worth of certain goods in terms of their general social benefits" (Murdoch *et al.* 2000: 114) – originally quoted within Section 3.6.2.

determining the 'quality' of a particular product, over and above its more general relevance within the domestic and civic conventions.

The *regard* convention comprises those elements discussed under Section 7.2.3, which as Offer (1997) postulates, are inevitable where there are face-to-face relations. They are the benefits of FMs that accrue to both producers and consumers, in addition to their value as a medium for the commercial exchange of goods for money. Amongst the producers, this is ostensible through the prevalent expressions of enjoyment, pride, job satisfaction and worth, which they experience when selling at FMs. For consumers, it is evidenced in the value they place on being able to buy their food in a congenial human-level context, and to relate the production of their food to individual people. This was often seen as adding to the overall value and identity of the produce being purchased, beyond those aspects that would be pertinent to the domestic convention. For both producers and consumers, these attributes of FMs were frequently and positively compared to their experiences of buying or selling produce in other exchange contexts. It is argued, therefore, that an assessment of FMs on the basis that they are founded upon three conventions (domestic, civic and regard) of produce quality evaluation, can allow for a more complete explication of their significance within the UK agro-food system.

However, as suggested within Section 3.6.2 (Chapter Three) and Section 7.5.1, whatever the range of possibilities, all networks of food provision are likely to fall within one of four WoP (as proposed by Salais and Storper (1992) and Storper (1997)), which are a composite of complementary conventions. In the case of FMs, this was identified as being the Interpersonal WoP, with its emphasis on producing specialist goods for a dedicated consumer profile. The produce at FMs is specialist in that it involves small-scale and individualistic production methods, which aim primarily to compete on quality rather than price. Correspondingly, the consumers of this output can be identified as specifically demanding this type of produce, in an exchange context that allows for a personally dedicated explanation of the specialist production processes involved. Within this WoP, the ongoing evaluation of produce quality is based upon the three conventions identified above, which in turn are inextricably linked to the alterity of FMs (see Figure 7.1). As explained in Section 7.4, this alterity is the result of a combination of factors which are perpetuated by the mutually accepted interaction between the producers and consumers.

Figure 7.1 The alterity of Farmers' Markets within the Interpersonal World of Production



Adapted from: Salais and Storper (1992: 172); Storper 1997; Murdoch and Miele (1999: 472); Murdoch *et al.* (2000: 120).

Nevertheless, despite the undoubted alterity of FMs and their mutually constituted nature, in a world dominated by market forces and economic evaluations, many FMs are struggling to maintain their 'economic coherence' (after Salais and Storper, 1992). This is exemplified by the debate surrounding their 'integrity' verses their commercial viability (see Section 7.3.1), and there are clearly pressures on FMs to dilute or modify one or more of their elements of alterity. Within CT, these pressures can be examined in terms of the conventions involved, which can be envisaged as having only so much elasticity before their mutually recognised expectations breakdown, with the resulting inconsonance leading inevitably to change in the underlying convention(s), and potentially the WoP. This process is well illustrated by Murdoch and Miele (1999), who demonstrate how food production systems can adapt to actual, or perceived changes in demand patterns and move between WoP in the process (see Appendix C for details).

Potentially, the pressures on FMs identified within this study could move the exchange process into another WoP. For example, if bought-in produce was to be allowed at FMs from anywhere in the world, the relevance of the regard convention would be greatly diminished, and the produce may well then be evaluated within the Market WoP. Similarly, if the origin of the produce at FMs was unclear and the vendor knew nothing about it other than its price, then again the evaluation could move to the Market WoP, or perhaps even the Industrial WoP (assuming the underlying conventions were successfully renegotiated). In either case, the produce has become less specialised and dedicated, with the conventions of quality evaluation becoming similar to those in a large retail outlet.

However, as discussed within Section 7.3.1, FMs were set up in the UK with the deliberate intention to create alterity within the agro-food system. This alterity was based on two underlying tenets, which basically ensured the local and social embeddedness of the production process, as well as leading inevitably to the benefits of regard. Certainly, there is inherent flexibility within these tenets, but for FMs to retain their distinctiveness as an outlet they must logically remain within the Interpersonal WoP and be evaluated according to the three conventions above. If not, they risk losing their identity and replicating patterns within the conventional agro-food system (see also Thorne 1996; Goodman 2000), at which point they can no longer be considered as an 'AS' that has the capability to deliver a wide range of benefits[133].

The concept of WoP is useful in enabling the visualisation of the relative position of FMs within the wider agro-food system, but it fails to unravel the intricacies of produce evaluation at FMs themselves[134]. WoP primarily describe product-centred systems of negotiation, whereas within FMs the focus is on the relationship between producers and consumers, which of course involves product evaluation, but critically entails other elements as well, principally human interaction and the benefits of regard.

[133] See Table 2.2, Chapter Two.

[134] An analysis within WoP could usefully be applied to the questions being asked by Lockie *et al.* (2002), in allowing for a depiction of how consumer engagement with the underlying ethos of organic food production can have an impact on the production process itself, and hence the WoP. However, where an 'AS' involves the deliberate and direct (re-) connection of producers and consumers, as at FMs, there is a need to impugn the concept of a WoP.

7.5.3 A 'bubble of Farmers' Market alterity'

The notion of a 'bubble of FM alterity' is therefore posited as a means of better understanding the complex exchange logics underpinning FMs, rather than a WoP (see Figure 7.2). Within this bubble[135], produce quality is evaluated within the domestic, civic and regard conventions, on the basis that the exchange process is both locally and socially embedded in a specific context, that allows for face-to-face interaction between the producer and consumer. An examination of the characteristics of the producer-consumer relations at FMs within a 'bubble of FM alterity' can, therefore, enable a more subtle assessment of the degree of elasticity that exists within their structure, before the bubble bursts[136] and the diversity of beneficial outcomes[137] enabled within this bubble become dissipated or lost. There is no relationship as such between WoP and the 'bubble of FM alterity', rather they can be seen as complementary concepts, both set within the overarching framework of CT. The former can provide the context for FMs within the wider UK agro-food system, while the latter can elucidate the pressures on their underlying integrity, and their potential durability as an exchange context.

As mentioned within this chapter, there are various pressures on FMs that are likely to have an impact on the alterity of FMs, including: agencies seeking to increase the valorisation of local food assets; market forces, with their emphasis on the economic evaluation of FMs; maintenance of the economic viability of individual FMs; and the appropriation of the popularity of 'local food'. However, these pressures can be understood as external to the relationship between the producers and consumers at FMs, although they will certainly have an influence on it. The tensions specifically identified within the empirical data of this research are from *within* their relationship, and in essence concern the interpretation of the underlying tenets of FMs. These are, the proximity of the food's production to the point of sale at the markets, and the relationship of the vendor to the production of the produce on sale (see Figure 7.2). This is not to suggest that the producers and consumers at FMs will necessarily dictate the future strategies applied to FMs, but ultimately the success of their format depends on both producer and consumer support, and critical to this is their mutual negotiation of the conventions of exchange.

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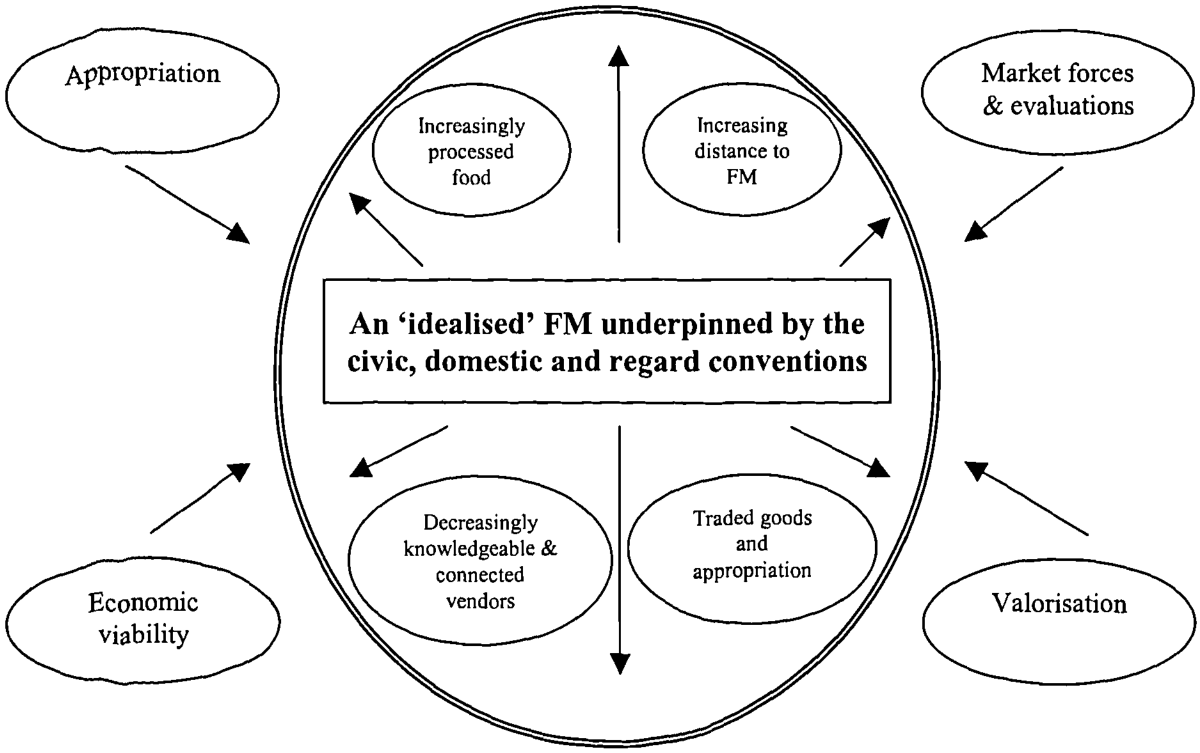
[135] The metaphor of a bubble has been deliberately used in order to express a sense of integrity. It is not intended to be indicative of fragility, necessarily, but to convey the characteristics of flexibility and elasticity, which a more hard-edged object (such as a square) would be less able to achieve.
[136] Although in temporal terms this 'burst' may be protracted, signified by a gradual loss of support for FMs within the media and the wider consuming public.
[137] See Table 2.2, Chapter Two.

Figure 7.2 The Farmers' Market bubble of alterity, showing external pressures and internal tensions



In order to clarify this process of negotiation, each of the underlying conventions within the bubble is now assessed against an idealised FM[138] in terms of the tensions identified within the data, to gauge the elasticity within FMs' bubble of alterity. This idealised FM would entail local producers (say, from within 20 miles of the FM) selling their own primary produce (or where processing is involved, it should have been done by the producer selling the produce, using only ingredients from the same holding) to local consumers (say, within 20 miles of the FM). Within this scenario, the local embeddedness of the produce is maximised, together with its social embeddedness and the potential for regard, and quality evaluation is set firmly within the civic, domestic and regard conventions (see Figure 7.2).

7.5.3.1 The civic convention

Civic conventions are concerned to evaluate the worth of something in terms of its benefits to society as a whole. Amongst the producers, this was evident in the intention to permit a more direct connection for consumers with the production of their food, and

[138] Based on the analysis of the data within this research, coupled with a review of the literature on FMs.

to provide an overall legitimacy for the produce on sale. Certain producers also valued the opportunity to reintegrate their production within the local community, although this was qualified by the need to be commercially successful. Other producers were less concerned with these aspects of FMs, except in so far as they gave them a commercial edge. Nevertheless, there was a widespread desire to reduce the unnecessary importation and transport of food, and FMs were seen as enabling this by providing a marketing advantage for smaller and local producers. Similar sentiments were expressed by the consumers, some of whom felt that buying produce at FMs facilitated a more equitable trading relationship between themselves and the producers (often in comparison with supermarkets), as well as a sense of connection with, and responsibility for, the production of the food they were buying. Indeed, certain consumers felt that their attendance at FMs was a political statement about retaining choice within the agro-food system, as well as directly contributing to the vibrancy of their local community and economy.

However, despite the identification of these aspects above, the producer and consumer responses varied considerably, making it problematic to ascertain the degree of elasticity involved. Suffice it to say, it seems likely that for the majority of producers, FMs were viewed principally as a marketing niche. Conversely, for a number of consumers the wider societal benefits were clearly of value to them. In this respect, the produce should at the very least have come from within the UK, and in the case of many of the consumers attending the Stroud and Wiltshire FMs, from a personally recognised vicinity. More generally, the vendor should have been directly involved within the production process, in order to ensure the economic benefits remained at that level and consumers could feel directly connected with the produce on offer.

7.5.3.2 The domestic convention

The domestic convention is at the heart of quality evaluation at FMs, and is based upon the build-up of trust and on being able to make direct connections with the place and nature of production. Basically, this convention is concerned with the intrinsic qualities of the produce, as assured by the social and local embeddedness of the exchange context (see sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.2). This depends upon the ongoing social relations between the producer and consumer as a means of generating trust, which is heightened when the place of production is also local to the point of sale. It is within this convention that there are the most tensions, although the result of their negotiation will certainly have an impact on the other two conventions being discussed here.

What came across very strongly from both the producers and consumers, was the recognition that FMs provided the opportunity to evaluate quality in a different manner from most other retail outlets, which essentially entailed taking back some responsibility and control. From the producers' perspective, this involved actively engaging with the consumers and promoting what was special about their produce. For consumers, it concerned being able to make a more personally informed judgement about the quality of the produce on offer.

As mentioned, the proximity of production to the markets was of some relevance to producers within the civic convention, but was of much greater significance to them in terms of ensuring the freshness and ripeness of the produce on offer within the domestic convention. This was also true for consumers, who often expressed that this was the principal quality advantage of the produce at FMs. Coupled with the localness of production was its directness to the point of sale, which again was seen by both producers and consumers to contribute to its intrinsic quality. Producers also highlighted their efforts to achieve the very best quality produce they could, using more traditional varieties and breeds that did not necessarily maximise their output, which was made possible by the more equitable prices available at FMs. For their part, consumers were generally supportive of this approach, perceiving the produce to represent good value for money.

For some consumers attending the Stroud and Wiltshire FMs, the localness of production was also important to enabling complete transparency within the food's provision, particularly where they were familiar with the actual farm, or place of production. However, more generally it was in ensuring the produce's freshness that the localness of its production was most valued within the domestic convention. This is clearly demonstrated within the London FGs, where consumers were often thrilled with the produce freshness and quality, but were only concerned that the produce was from an identifiable UK location. Even amongst some of the consumers at the Stroud and Wiltshire FMs, provided the producer of a particular product was the most local available (and at least from within the UK), there was support for their attendance. To some extent the distance travelled to the FMs is self-determining, in that as a number of producers who attend the London FMs suggested, it has to be logistically possible for them within the day.

However, despite the relevance of localness to the domestic convention, it was the direct relationship between producers and consumers that was most crucial, in that it enabled the build-up of trust through ongoing relationships. For many consumers, the opportunity to be able to talk to the *actual* producer of their food was seen to be an exceptional opportunity at FMs, and one they valued highly. The vendor was then seen to be directly responsible for the produce they were selling, as well as knowing all about how it had been produced. A well informed employee was usually viewed as an acceptable replacement, provided they regularly sold at the market to allow for the build-up of a rapport. These points were widely recognised by the producers, some of whom were emphatic that ideally FMs should be restricted to the producers themselves, in that employees diluted the connection between the production process and the end consumers. There were also concerns that employees (of other producers) sometimes appeared unknowledgeable about the produce they were selling, which was seen as diminishing the distinctiveness of FMs as a retail outlet, and therefore threatened their livelihood. Not surprisingly, those producers interviewed who did use employees on their stalls argued it was a permissible compromise that allowed them to sell at more FMs. They invariably insisted that all their employees had been involved in the production process at some stage, and could answer any questions that may be asked by consumers.

Also relevant to the domestic convention was the debate about the degree of processing that should be allowed for the produce on sale at FMs. From the producers' perspective, provided the processing was carried out by the producer themselves, and utilised primary ingredients largely available from their holding, this was seen as acceptable, and even desirable[139]. However, extensively processed goods (where the source of the raw ingredients may be unknown and/or imported) were viewed as being little different from traded goods, which were seen to have no place at FMs in that they fundamentally

[139] In that it enabled value to be added to the produce sold, and increased the variety of produce available at the FMs. This standpoint is supported by the London Farmers' Market Ltd. rules (LFM, 2001).

break the connection between the producers and consumers. They were often described as the 'thin end of the wedge', which could lead to the gradual disintegration of FMs as a suitable marketing niche for smaller primary producers.

Nevertheless, several producers acknowledged that processed food did increase the variety of produce on offer at FMs, and in many cases consumers certainly did appreciate the originality and 'home-made' quality of produce such as pickles and jams. That said, the consumer responses indicate that whilst processed goods added to the overall food offer, they were principally interested in fresh, primary, or on-farm processed foods[140]. This is apparent in the constant references to the produce being fresher at FMs, or that more traditional breeds and production methods had been used: "the FM for me is about fresh produce, not about manufactured" (Michael, Swiss Cottage)[141]. It seems reasonable to posit, therefore, that in terms of the elasticity within the domestic convention, it is a case of "balancing...the authenticity [of FMs]...against the needs of the public, or at least the perceived needs of the public" (Producer 11, Wiltshire). In other words, processed goods should be allowed at FMs because they can contribute to the diversity of produce available, but be tightly controlled to make certain that direct linkages are maintained to the ingredients (as far as reasonably possible)[142]. This allows for an unmediated interaction between the producers and consumers of the food. It also helps to safeguard the benefits of FMs for smaller primary producers, and retains a high degree of transparency in terms of the produce's constituents.

Manifestly, there is considerable flexibility within the domestic convention, but the one inviolable component is that no traded goods should be allowed, and there should be as much transparency as possible within the food provision. As such, both the producers and consumers felt that FMs should be regulated to ensure the directness of the relationship between them, as well as to the produce on offer. Otherwise there were concerns that unscrupulous producers could effectively appropriate the benefits of FMs,

[140] For example, this included: cheese; minimally processed meats such as mince; vegetables; top and bottom fruit; fish; game; and apple juice.

[141] Although not falling within the domestic convention, this impression is endorsed by many consumers' intention to support smaller and local farmers, for whom FMs provide a particular advantage.

[142] For example, the LFM rules stipulate that all the meat in processed foods, such as sausages, should have been raised by the producer, although minor ingredients may be purchased. With baked goods, the ingredients may be purchased, but should be local where possible. With preserves, chutneys and pickles, ingredients may also be purchased, but the major ingredients should be from within 100 miles of the M25, and where possible, from the FM itself (LFM, 2001).

and mislead consumers into thinking they were making an informed judgement about what they were buying, when in fact they were the victim of malfeasance (after Granovetter, 1985).

7.5.3.3 The regard convention

As explained in Sections 7.2.3 and 7.5.2, the regard convention evaluates those elements of FMs that result from the face-to-face interaction between producers and consumers, but which are not specifically related to the commercial exchange process itself. For consumers, the intrinsic quality of the produce was the primary reason for their continued attendance at FMs, and yet the human-level relationship they had with the producers added a sense of participation and fulfilment. It was almost as if they were conscious of actively contributing to a different type of exchange context, wherein their interaction with the producers was an opportunity to treat them as people, and to obtain a reciprocal acknowledgement. In this respect, frequent comparisons were made with shopping in supermarkets, which were described as being impersonal and disconnected. Similarly, the producers valued FMs principally as a profitable commercial outlet, which was facilitated by the direct contact made possible with the consumers. However, in addition, they clearly appreciated the human interaction with consumers because it allowed them to feel esteemed as individuals, rather than just being treated as an anonymous supplier as they might be when selling to a wholesaler, for example.

Many consumers recognised that it was possible to build up a relationship of trust with a local shopkeeper, in which there would also be an element of regard, likewise with a producer's employee at a FM. But what was special about FMs for many consumers was that they were often able to recognise and reward the efforts of the producer themselves, and to feel part of a cooperative venture. From the producer perspective, most experienced a profound sense of pride and satisfaction in selling their own produce directly to the people who were going to consume it, and in receiving direct feedback from them. This is not to deny that employees might also feel a sense of pride and satisfaction in the produce they are selling, but it is unlikely to be as intense as that experienced by the producer themselves. It is apparent, therefore, that although there is a degree of flexibility within the regard convention, the maximum opportunity for the benefits of regard to be part of the quality evaluation at FMs, is when it is the *actual* producer selling their own produce directly to the consumer.

The overall atmosphere of the market itself was also an important component of the regard convention, in imparting a sense of conviviality and social intercourse between the producers and consumers. This appeared to heighten the sense of mutual endeavour, and certainly contributed to the overall aura of the personalised and human-level nature of FMs. To some extent, this may mean that value was attributed as a result of the producers deliberately pandering to the consumers' perceived requirements in this respect, or through consumers suspending their understanding of the commercial realities. Yet it is undeniable that genuine value was also attributed to this aspect of the exchange process, by both the producers and consumers.

Ostensibly, the evaluation of quality at FMs within the civic, domestic and regard conventions is maximised when it is the actual producer selling their own relatively unprocessed food to consumers who can directly relate to the place of production (much as suggested within the concept of an 'idealised' FM). However, it is also clear that there is a degree of flexibility within each of the conventions, which allows markets to increase the variety of produce on offer, whilst still retaining the overall integrity of FMs' 'bubble of alterity'. Essentially, this is through extending the radius from within which producers must come, allowing knowledgeable employees who have been involved in the production process to sell at the markets, and the admission of processed foods to a certain extent. Nevertheless, this flexibility needs to be managed with care, or there could be a breach of the bubble. For example, if all the vendors at a particular market were employees rather than the producers themselves, then there would be a substantial, and perhaps critical cumulative reduction of quality evaluation within the domestic and regard conventions. Similarly, if none of the producers were from within the immediately identifiable vicinity[143], this would diminish the evaluation of the produce within the civic and domestic conventions. Furthermore, there was considerable concern amongst many of the producers that extensively processed foods could undermine the distinctiveness of FMs, and potentially burst the bubble of their alterity.

It would appear, therefore, that there are few absolutes when seeking to define the flexibility within the underlying conventions of FMs' alterity, which means that enlightened individual management becomes vital to their prosperous continuance. The implications of this will be considered further within the conclusions of Chapter Eight.

7.6 Summary

Chapter Seven has examined the characteristics of producer-consumer relations at FMs through the notions of social and local embeddedness, and regard. This has provided an in-depth illustration of the complex exchange logics operating within a concrete 'AS' to the 'conventional' agro-food system in the UK. It is apparent that although there was still a strong commercial imperative operating at FMs, the reconfiguration of the relationship between producers and consumers had led to alterity within the agro-food system, and a qualitatively different exchange context. Social, cultural and ethical impulses were important in determining the value ascribed to produce, rather than simply its price, or indeed its intrinsic qualities. The nature of this alterity was assessed from both the producer and consumer perspectives, and it proved to be a composite of the deeply embedded production process, coupled with the actual producer selling their own produce in a vibrant market atmosphere. However, there were clearly tensions impacting on this alterity, from both within the relationship between producers and consumers, and from without. This thesis has focussed on the internal tensions, in that ultimately it is the relationship between the producers and consumers that will determine the successful format of FMs.

The identified alterity of FMs was then assessed within CT, in order to understand its mutually constituted nature. Within CT, quality is evaluated according to a series of negotiated underlying conventions, which in the case of FMs were the civic and domestic conventions. Nevertheless, due to the paramount importance of the direct producer-consumer interface in this context (as opposed to CT's premise as a theory of production organisation), it was necessary to propose an additional convention of

[143] This point in less applicable at large city FMs, such as London, where the immediate locality of production within both the civic and domestic conventions was less of an issue for consumers, than for those consumers attending the markets in Stroud and Wiltshire.

'regard', which could specifically incorporate the quality parameters associated with this conjunction.

Analyses of the agro-food system within CT have frequently incorporated the adaptation of WoP, as proposed by Salais and Storper (1992) and Storper (1997)[144]. However, whilst this certainly provides a useful framework to envisage FMs in relation to the wider agro-food system, it fails to elucidate the subtleties of produce evaluation *within* FMs. As such, the concept of a 'bubble of FM alterity' was introduced, which although it has a degree of elasticity, can become overstretched and potentially burst. At this point, the wide range of benefits heralded for FMs within Table 2.2 (Chapter Two) might then become dissipated or lost. Careful management of individual markets, which balances the practicalities of variety and viability with the integrity of their 'bubble of alterity', is therefore vital, and will vary from area to area. For example, there were noticeable differences in the requirements of the London FMs, from those in Wiltshire and Stroud.

The following, and final chapter will now draw out some conclusions from this thesis, reflect on the research process, and highlight some possible areas of related future research.

[144] For example, Murdoch and Miele (1999) and Murdoch *et al.* (2000).

Chapter 8
CONCLUSIONS, REFLECTIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDAS

8.1 Introduction

Research into the agro-food system has tended to be from a macro-level perspective, with little cognisance given to local level contingencies. However, the emergence of 'AS' in response to growing pressures within the 'conventional' UK agro-food system has necessitated a more micro-level research perspective that can help elucidate the growing complexities involved. Of central importance to these 'AS' is the reconnection of the production and consumption of food through various processes of embeddedness. The corollary of this reconnection is that the relationship between producers and consumers is being reconfigured, which this thesis has examined through the portal of FMs.

There have a been a wide range of studies undertaken on FMs in the UK, although they have usually involved a largely quantitative methodology and tended to lack rigour and critical analysis. They have also been policy oriented rather than intent on a theoretical understanding of the relationship between producers and consumers. Holloway and Kneafsey (2000) provided some initial theoretical ideas but with only minimal empirical data. Hinrichs (2000) also usefully explored the underlying embeddedness of FMs[145], but again failed to elicit the essence of the relations involved, most particularly with respect to 'regard'. The originality of this thesis has been to examine critically the characteristics of the relations between producers and consumers at FMs, through an in-depth analysis of rigorously described qualitative data. This has enabled a better understanding of the reconfiguration of producer-consumer relations within the context of an 'AS', and elicited the potential role and durability of FMs within the UK agro-food system. In developing the concept of a 'bubble of alterity' and a 'regard

[145] Although writing about FMs in the USA, this is still a very pertinent paper.

convention' within CT, it has also provided a theoretical framework which can facilitate an intellection of the wider significance of 'AS'.

This final chapter now brings together the conclusions of this research before reflecting on the research process and suggesting some possible areas of future research. It is structured as follows:

Section 8.2	The reconfiguration of producer-consumer relations at FMs.
Section 8.3	The potential role and durability of FMs.
Section 8.4	A theoretical framework with which to understand the wider significance of 'AS'.
Section 8.5	Some reflections on the research process.
Section 8.6	Possible areas for related future research.

8.2 The reconfiguration of producer-consumer relations at Farmers' Markets

As described within Chapters Two and Three, the 'conventional' agro-food system is typified by the disconnection of the processes of food production and consumption, and hence producers and consumers. Products are standardised and generic, very often the raw ingredients for industrialised processes and the emphasis is on economic rationality. Food quality is assessed on the basis of 'uniform standards', which has enabled TNCs to 'act at a distance'. However, within 'AS' (and in this case FMs), there has been a deliberate attempt to reconnect producers and consumers and to provide specialised produce for a more dedicated clientele, wherein the produce's quality attributes are variously embedded within local, social and cultural contexts.

The producers within this study clearly valued the opportunity to sell their produce directly to the end consumer at FMs, in that it enabled them to retain complete control over it and to ensure that it was sold to its best effect. By cutting out the 'middleman' they also received a full retail price for their produce. Additionally, it allowed them to provide a legitimacy for their production methods and to enlighten consumers as to what was distinctive and special about their produce. These aspects of the direct relationship with consumers at FMs are largely commercial. However, the obvious enjoyment, pride and sense of feeling worthy and personally valued are clearly aspects of the relationship that extend beyond the mere commercial. The resolve of some producers to re-localise their production within their own communities is also indicative of a deliberate attempt to change the relationship between the production and consumption of their food.

For their part, many of the consumers were explicit in wanting to support the producers selling at the FMs and to ensure that they received an equitable return for their hard work. There was a definite desire to support the producers as individuals, and to personally recognise the effort that they had made to produce something special for them. Price was certainly still a factor, but not to the exclusion of everything else. The food produce being exchanged between the producers and consumers at the FMs was not standardised and generic, but dedicated and specialised. Likewise, its quality evaluation was not on the basis of 'uniform standards', but as a result of the unmediated relationship between the producer of the food being sold and the end consumer.

Despite some variations between the case studies, most of the consumers felt empowered to make a more personally informed judgement about the quality of the produce on offer at FMs through having a direct relationship with the actual producer. This was seen as allowing for a high degree of product traceability, as well as engendering trust in the producer's integrity as a human being and subsequently their produce. For some, this tendency was heightened when the producer was also from a locally identifiable location, and there was often an ethical impulse to reduce the unnecessary transportation of food. The direct and often localised relationship between the producers and consumers at the FMs had created an alternative medium for produce evaluation, which is exemplified by many of the producers' and consumers' sceptical attitude towards organic certification. Although there was some support for organic certification, it was more commonly seen as a marketing ploy which added little to produce quality evaluation, particularly in the context of FMs. Both the producers and consumers supported regulations that required basic hygiene standards to be met, but otherwise the direct human interchange was seen as enabling consumers to make their own assessment of the produce available. Produce quality promotion and evaluation within this study was clearly highly individualised.

In conjunction with the evaluative benefits of the physical reconnection of producers and consumers at FMs, there were obvious social benefits. These have been mentioned with respect to the producers, but were also an important element of FMs' appeal to the consumers. The human-level banter with the producers in a convivial market atmosphere and a sense of contributing towards an exchange context that was qualitatively different, meant that consumers felt fulfilled by their experience of shopping at FMs. This was often stated in relation to supermarkets, which were frequently described as being anonymous and soulless.

The relations between producers and consumers at FMs have clearly been extensively reconfigured when compared to those within the 'conventional' agro-food system. Underlying this reconfiguration is the deliberately enabled human-level interaction, which variously impacts on the relations between them. Principally this is in terms of trust and quality evaluation, as well as the individuals concerned (both producers and consumers) (re) gaining power within the food system. Crucially, this thesis has also identified the significance of 'regard' within this context, which needs to be acknowledged when assessing the overall value of other 'AS' that similarly involve face-to-face interaction.

8.3 The potential role and durability of Farmers' Markets

The extent to which the producers depended on FMs for their livelihoods varied enormously within this research, accounting for between 1% and 100% of their turnover. Certainly to some of them, FMs did provide a vital alternative retail outlet that enabled them to stay in business. To many others, however, they were more of a useful adjunct than a necessary replacement. Underlying the producers' continued attendance at FMs were the greater margins available to them and the opportunity to add value to their primary produce. It also provided many of the smaller producers with a viable market for their produce, who might otherwise have been effectively excluded from the agro-food marketing system. The producers invariably enjoyed their experience of selling at the markets, but this was understood as a welcome by-product, rather than as central to their evaluation of FMs as a retail outlet. Likewise, a number of producers had political motivations for wanting to sell directly to consumers, but again this was as a secondary consideration to commercial profitability. It is not surprising, therefore, that the arguments expressed by producers for upholding the integrity of the FMs were overwhelmingly aimed at maintaining an outlet that gave them (principally smaller primary producers, or those who selectively processed their primary goods) a marketing advantage.

Amongst the consumers, the relative infrequency of FMs inevitably restricted their relevance as a food retail outlet, with the weekly and bi-monthly markets certainly having a larger impact that the monthly markets. In some cases, FMs were recognised as being a substitute for local independent food shops that had closed down. However, more generally they were acknowledged as providing an enjoyable place to buy food, that allowed consumers to replace *some* of the produce they would otherwise buy at supermarkets. On a practical level it is apparent that FMs are an adjunct within most consumers' shopping patterns, rather than a replacement, and yet there was a sense that for many they represented a profoundly different way of buying their food provisions. FMs were viewed by many consumers as a marketplace for intrinsically high quality food, but also as having a strong leisure element. In addition, there was often an inclination to support a particular mode of food production and distribution, which was believed to be delivered within the forum of FMs.

In essence, the producers and consumers within this research were basing their evaluations on the composite alterity of FMs[146], which defines their distinctiveness as an exchange context. Its maintenance is therefore crucial to retaining the identity of FMs and satisfying the mutual needs of those who attend them. There is undoubtedly flexibility within this alterity, which this thesis judges is well served by the NAFM criteria (see Appendix A) and the NAFM certification scheme (NAFM, 2002c)[147]. Provided these are sensitively implemented, they empower managers to ensure the commercial viability of their markets while protecting the essence of FMs' alterity. This

[146] The alterity of FMs identified within this thesis is based on a *combination* of local embeddedness, social embeddedness and regard, together with the producer selling their own produce directly to the end consumer. All of which takes place within the milieu of a vibrant market atmosphere.

[147] James Pavitt, the NAFM co-ordinator, feels that the certification scheme has proved to be a great success. Membership of NAFM has generally been about 50% of the total of FMs that have been in operation, however over the last six months this has risen to 250 out of a total of 450 markets. Pavitt believes this is essentially because NAFM is now seen as having something more tangible to offer. As at 13th February 2003, 45 FMs had been certified, with a further 70 markets in the process of being certified. However, the NAFM is expensive to administer, meaning that it is not commercially self-financing. As such, the association has recently undergone an independent and comprehensive review of its future funding strategy, which as at February 2003 had not been resolved (Pavitt, 2003).

necessitates conceiving of the tenets of the producer only rule and strict market radius as guiding principles, rather than dogmatic rules.

These conclusions have a number of important policy implications:

- Where markets are struggling to survive commercially the temptation may be to overly slacken the guidelines, to the extent of allowing traded goods at the market to increase the variety available. This may prolong the life of the individual market in the short term, but runs the risk of damaging the ability of FMs to deliver the benefits enabled by the alternative strategies underpinning their alterity. The positive image of FMs depends on their alterity - without it they are little different from any other street market.
- A market frequency of once a month fails to generate the same degree of engagement as those markets that are held weekly or bi-monthly. In order to increase the number of markets and/or their frequency, encouragement and training needs to be given to potential producers to ensure they can supply produce that is suitable for sale at FMs[148]. However, exhortations to increase the quantitative capacity of FMs need to be tempered by the requirement that they retain their alterity. This may mean that prospectively there are relatively fewer markets, but each will then be able to maintain their integrity and ability to make a broad based contribution to society.
- It is clear from this study that ensuring the alterity of FMs is critical to their success, from both a producer and consumer perspective. The NAFM certification scheme (NAFM 2002c) has provision for random market inspections to ensure compliance with their criteria and therefore goes some way to ensuring their alterity. However, it is expensive to implement, both for the individual markets concerned and for the NAFM itself. Consideration should therefore be given to providing public financial support to the NAFM and its certification scheme.
- FMs are incapable of handling large quantities of produce due to their inherent structures. As such, most producers must either continue to sell through conventional commodity channels, or develop/access an 'AS' that can handle the volumes of produce they have to sell. To some extent FMs can act as a shop

[148] For example, London Farmers' Markets (LFM) provide advice on what to grow and how to market produce at FMs. This includes growing produce that is not commercially available in other outlets, and enthusing consumers about the produce available from their stall (LFM, 2000).

window for producers, whereby consumers can be made aware of other larger capacity outlets where their produce is also available. Similarly, there is the potential for greater synergy between local food shops and FMs, whereby the latter can deliberately promote product availability in the former. However, more generally, FMs should be seen as one component of a wider (alternative) strategy of reconnection within the agro-food system, rather than as a panacea for the problems identified in Chapters One and Two.

- FMs are a food retail outlet in themselves, but in addition they can provide a focus for the mobilisation of locally identifiable food production, which is enhanced by their high (and generally very positive) media profile. Their perceived popularity may also influence the actions of mainstream actors such as the large supermarkets (e.g. the Waitrose *Locally Produced* scheme (Waitrose, 2003)), in a manner that is disproportionate to their level of turnover. As suggested by a number of authors (e.g. Tovey 1997; Raynolds 2000; Goodman and DuPuis 2002), it may be that the true significance of 'AS' such as FMs is in challenging the established relationships within the 'conventional' agro-food system. However, for this to be the case, DuPuis (2000) and Goodman and DuPuis (2002) argue that consumers' actions must be political, whereby they are not simply satisfied with a 'McDonaldized imitation' (after Ritzer 1998: 177). The evidence from this thesis indicates that many of the consumers were reflexive and politically engaging with the alterity of FMs, and would not be satisfied with an imitation. This is principally because they were actively seeking to take a greater degree of responsibility for the assessment of the produce they were buying, within an exchange context that was more sociable and personal than was otherwise available. For example, consumers were clearly aware of the difference between buying locally identifiable food in a supermarket, compared to buying it directly from the producer at a FM. This is not to suggest that all the consumers were actively relating to the FMs in this way, nor that the reflexive consumers will not also buy locally identifiable produce in a supermarket. But what it does signal is that the purposive reconnection of producers and consumers at FMs has created alterity within the agro-food system, and that FMs are dependent upon the maintenance of this alterity for their successful continuance.

FMs should be viewed as an adjunct within the agro-food system, that is necessarily restricted in terms of which producers can sell through them and the level of practical convenience they can offer consumers. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that they do deliver a range of economic, social and environmental benefits, which have a part to play in improving the sustainability of food production, distribution and consumption within the UK agro-food system. This thesis, in examining the characteristics of the relations between producers and consumers, has elicited a more an in-depth and rigorous understanding of the role and durability of FMs than was previously available.

8.4 A theoretical framework with which to understand the wider significance of 'alternative strategies'

As described in Chapter Three, the 'conventional' UK agro-food system has been understood within meta-narratives, which have been underlain by a neoclassical market logic. The research emphasis has been at the macro-level and from the production end of the food chain, with values being ascribed on the basis of industrial and commercial imperatives. However, with the increasing emergence of 'AS' from the early 1990s there has been a growing need for a theoretical framework that can incorporate the local level perspective, as well as the self-evident complexity of value constructions. In focusing on the localised and concrete exchange context of FMs, this thesis has sought to develop a theoretical framework which can address these issues.

This framework is underpinned by various notions of embeddedness which can specifically recognise the role of social, cultural, and environmental relationships within economic exchange processes. This makes it particularly apposite to an understanding of 'AS' which are based upon diversely embedding (or re-embedding) the production and consumption of food, within specific social and spatial relationships. Within a neoclassical market logic there is an exclusive focus on economic rationality, whereas an embeddedness approach can encapsulate a plurality of rationalities, which may not necessarily make sense from within a neoclassical market paradigm. In particular, the perspective of Granovetter (1985) was adopted in this thesis, with its emphasis on networks of ongoing social relations.

An embeddedness approach does not deny the significance of a commodity relationship within its framework. Indeed, it is clear from the findings of this study (and Hinrichs

(2000)) that this logic is a vital component of the exchange at FMs, albeit modified by their deeply embedded nature. However, it is also apparent that the producer and consumer expressions of enjoyment, satisfaction, pride, worthiness, mutual recognition and respect were not being fully understood within this analysis. Therefore, in order to elicit a more complete intellection of what determines the essence of FMs as an 'AS', this thesis incorporated the notion of 'regard' within its theoretical framework. Originally developed by Offer (1997), the perspective of 'regard' permits an insightful analysis of those elements that are intrinsic to face-to-face interaction and yet outside the economic exchange process. In this sense, 'regard' can be seen as a complementary approach to embeddedness (or perhaps even an extension), where 'AS' entail direct contact between producers and consumers (as at FMs). Recent adaptations of the notion of 'regard' argue that it can be expanded to include exchange contexts that involve the sharing of knowledge about a mutual interest (Lee, 2000), or shared ethical values (Sage, 2003), which suggests a wider potential for its use.

Having analysed the micro-level data on FMs through the joint notions of 'regard' and embeddedness, they were subsequently set within Conventions Theory (CT) in order to relate them to the wider agro-food system. CT enables a broader understanding of how economic activity is coordinated into particular networks, including the variable utilisation of embeddedness. Conventions of quality are at its core, and yet none of the existing conventions adequately encompassed those aspects of quality evaluation identified within the notion of 'regard'. As such, this thesis developed the idea of a *regard convention* that could address this deficiency.

The concept of Worlds of Production (WoP) within CT, as proposed by Salais and Storper (1992) and Storper (1997), enabled FMs to be envisaged in relation to the wider agro-food system. However, it failed to reveal the subtleties of quality evaluation *within* FMs, or their essence as an 'AS'. It was identified within this research that FMs as an 'AS' are composed of a number of elements, which together constitute their alterity[149]. Each of these components was shown to have a degree of flexibility, and the notion of a 'bubble of FM alterity' was proposed as a means of better understanding the complex exchange logics and inherent flexibility within the structure of FMs. The integrity of this bubble was manifestly critical to the longevity of FMs as an 'AS', and yet despite a degree of elasticity could be breached. Should this happen, FMs would then lose their distinctive identity (or alterity) and consequently their ability to deliver a wide range of potential benefits.

The theoretical framework described above may appear eclectic, but it is argued that it enables a nuanced theoretical perspective on complex exchange contexts, while allowing local level analyses to be related to the broader level. The notions of embeddedness and 'regard' provide a window on the micro-level, which can then be set within the modified framework of CT. The latter facilitates the interpretation of the former through assessing the negotiation and stabilisation of particular networks of food provision. The adaptation of CT within WoP depicts the relationship between different elements of the agro-food system. The notion of a 'bubble of alterity' can conceptualise the integrity of a particular 'AS'. This overall theoretical framework can, therefore, help to assess the potential of 'AS' within the UK agro-food system to increase their quantitative significance, before their essential integrity is undermined.

8.5 Some reflections on the research process

One of the principal benefits of conducting a doctoral thesis is that it allows the participants the luxury of exploring a topic they are interested in over a protracted period of time. However, by the same token it can complicate the research process where the subject matter is evolving rapidly, which has certainly been the case in this instance.

At the start of the research project (October 1999) there was only a minimal literature on FMs in the UK, mainly because they had only been running since September 1997. The initial intention, therefore, was to divide the thesis into two main phases: the first phase was to establish a detailed background for the development of FMs in the UK, followed by a second phase that would examine the relationship between producers and consumers at a case study level. The FM manager survey (FMMS) was intended to address phase one and hence a detailed interview schedule was drawn up (see Appendix

[149] The alterity of FMs identified within this thesis is based on a *combination* of local embeddedness, social embeddedness and regard, together with the producer selling their own produce directly to the end consumer. All of which takes place within the milieu of a vibrant market atmosphere.

D), which was conducted between December 2000 and January 2001. This undeniably provided a wealth of useful data, but by the time it was written up in March 2001 there had been a number of other studies undertaken, which covered many of the elements involved. Principal amongst these was the report on FMs in South East England carried out on behalf of the Countryside Agency which was published at the end of January 2001 (LUC *et al.* 2001). This provided an analysis of 18 FMs as well as a review of the burgeoning market level reports that had been emerging at that time. Whilst not invalidating the FMMS (indeed largely corroborating it), it did mean that much of the data resulting from the survey were no longer so originally informative. However, as set out in Chapter Four, it did still serve a useful purpose in providing a UK-level perspective on FMs that facilitated the selection of the case studies, and contributed to the triangulation of the case study data.

From the perspective of a Ph.D. thesis being a training zone for academic research, the FMMS also provided a useful and stimulating exercise that involved the collection and subsequent analysis of *quantitative* data. However, in terms of the overall study these data became less central to the thesis, which is reflected in the space given to their presentation. It also became clear that an in-depth *qualitative* examination of producer-consumer relations at FMs was still missing from the research that had been conducted on FMs, with analyses of producer and consumer responses being reported in largely quantitative terms. The intention always had been to give a greater emphasis to this aspect of FMs, but the inflection of the thesis now became almost exclusively qualitative. This has enabled a deeper analysis of the resultant case study data, as well as the development of a theoretical framework which can contribute to a wider understanding of the significance of 'AS' within the UK agro-food system.

Nevertheless, due to the qualitative nature of this research, care is needed when drawing wider inferences from it. As described in Chapter Four, the case studies were chosen on the basis that they were 'representative' or 'typical' of FMs within the UK, but they definitely did not constitute a valid sample in statistical terms. The 'generalisability' of these results is therefore limited, but due to the 'thick description' of the research process it is possible to assess their 'transferability' with a degree of confidence.

8.6 Possible areas for related future research

This thesis has provided a valuable insight into the potential role and durability of FMs as an 'AS' within the UK agro-food system, through an examination of the relations between producers and consumers who attend them. Furthermore, in developing a theoretical framework that incorporates embeddedness and 'regard' within the framework of a modified CT, it has provided a useful tool with which to understand the dynamics of other 'AS', particularly those that involve social interaction at their core, rather than predominantly production-centred issues. As such, possible future research opportunities related to this project fall logically within two main areas: firstly, studies that might utilise the theoretical framework described above; and secondly, those which consider further the significance and role of FMs within the UK agro-food system.

In the first case, LETS are 'AS' that are often under pressure to maintain their commercial vibrancy by perhaps allowing in retail businesses. In the process they risk replicating the exchange relationships of the mainstream economy, which they were usually established with the specific intention of avoiding (see Thorne 1996; Lee 1996; O'Doherty *et al.* 1999). Their analysis through the theoretical framework described above could usefully inform our understanding of the degree of flexibility there is within their structures, before they begin to lose the essence of their alterity. Similarly, the fair-trade movement is an 'AS' that is founded upon social interactions, although the produce is marketed largely through conventional channels. There are pressures to increase the quantity of fair-trade produce available, which risks its re-absorption within conventional exchange processes (see Renard 1999; 2003; Raynolds 2000). In this case, the theoretical framework generated within this thesis could enable an intellection of the elasticity within the relationship between the producers and consumers concerned, before the integrity of fair-trade as an 'AS' is breached.

As established within this study, several consumers equated FMs with fair-trade produce which is endorsed by the recent pronouncement of Harriet Lamb[150] (Executive Director of the Fairtrade Foundation), who stated that "while our priority is to assist producers in

[150] This statement was made as part of a press announcement for a one-year pilot project that combines organic and fair-trade certification, for both British and imported goods. Within the same announcement, Patrick Holden of the Soil Association stated that "this groundbreaking pilot scheme will enable consumers to use their purchasing power to keep farmers on the land and promote ethical trading practices throughout the food chain" (Soil Association 2003: 2).

the South who suffer most from the problems of world trade, we recognise that many of these problems are shared by farmers in developed countries as well" (Soil Association 2003: 1). James Pavitt (the NAFM co-ordinator) said he hoped that it would be possible to find a way of allowing for fair-trade produce to be sold at FMs along the lines of "provenance branding for fairly traded produce with a local heritage identity" (Pavitt, 2003).

In the USA, FMs have been expressly targeted as a means of improving access to fresh produce for those on low incomes, most notably since the USDA established its Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) in 1992, which by 2001 had federal funding of $20 million (USDA, 2002). There has also been research into how FMs can be successful in low income areas, for example through linking markets in more lucrative areas with those in poorer areas and effectively subsidising one with another (Fisher, 1999). It is apparent that over 70% of consumers who attend FMs in the UK are from social classes A, B, or C1[151], signifying that lower income consumers are not benefiting from them as much as they might. This is partly because the produce at FMs is often specialised and of a relatively high quality, and is therefore more expensive than the cheapest alternatives in a supermarket. Fisher (1999) suggests that there is a fundamental tension between farmers obtaining a fair price for their product and the ability of low income consumers to pay for it, meaning that it is unrealistic to expect FMs in low income areas to survive without some form of subsidy. However, in the UK, although improving the diets of lower income groups has been identified as a benefit of FMs[152], it is apparent that little attempt has been made to make specific linkages. At the time of the FMMS, none of the managers interviewed had any such scheme in place, although in April 2002, LFM introduced a food voucher scheme at Bow in London which ceased after four markets when the whole FM closed down due to lack of overall support (LFM, 2002). The Riverside Community Market Association (RCMA) in Cardiff has also quite recently sought to address food poverty within its local area, through deliberately seeking to extend the remit of their FM from a "niche food event" to one that more specifically seeks to raise awareness about healthy eating, and to involve ethnic minority communities in the markets (RCMA 2002: 1). The

[151] I.e. professional, or management class (LUC *et al.* 2001). See Section 4.4.2.2 (Chapter Two).
[152] See Table 2.2 (Chapter Two).

whole feasibility of this role for FMs is ripe for exploration, including assimilating any lessons that can be learnt from the USA experience.

FMs represent one element of the SFSCs identified by Marsden *et al.* (2000), namely those involving face-to-face interaction[153]. Essentially, they are concerned to re-localise the food chain and to enable the direct reconnection of producers and consumers. However, as Morgan and Morley (2002) argue, food re-localisation is not about restricting access to imported produce, but about making better use of the advantages that local food has to offer. They talk about locally sourced food providing a 'multiple dividend' which includes "healthier diets, local markets for local producers, lower food miles as well as a better understanding between producers and consumers" (*ibid.*: i). FMs are clearly an important part of this and to some extent the role of local independent shops has been looked at in this thesis. However, there is scope to further explore the relationship between local shops and FMs, and indeed other locally based food outlets.

The dominance of supermarkets within the UK food sector means that their involvement within a more localised food system also warrants research. Indeed, they can be seen as "the gatekeepers to the modern agriculture and food system", and their practices highly significant to the overall functioning of the UK agro-food system (IIED 2003: 1). Most of the supermarkets now have a policy of purchasing from local suppliers, but how this is done varies considerably between the companies involved and needs to be better understood. Selling locally sourced produce through supermarkets has the potential to expand its quantitative impact[154], but the question then becomes, will 'conventional' food purchasing patterns simply be replicated to the detriment of local producers and the overall aims of food re-localisation (see Morgan and Morley 2002; and Section 7.3.1 (Chapter Seven)). Research could usefully compare the respective impacts of a number of supermarket local sourcing schemes on the local economy, community, and producers, as well as relating these findings to more specifically locally-oriented initiatives such as FMs[155].

[153] See Section 2.3.3.2 (Chapter Two) for details.
[154] In Marsden *et al.* (2000)s SFSC terms consumers are made aware of the produce's local origins, or its *spatial proximity*.

One methodological approach that could prove expedient to understanding the nature of these inter-related issues is Actor Network Theory (ANT), which was briefly introduced within Section 3.6, Chapter Three (see Appendix B for more details). Although CT was considered more appropriate for the purposes of this thesis, ANT can facilitate an explication of how complex and apparently unrelated components can form into a given network of food provision. ANT makes no *a priori* distinctions between the various components of a network, whereby they are assessed from within the processes of their formation rather than being explained from without. It can, therefore, incorporate such disparate entities as power differentials between actors; institutional regulations; diverse structural capacities; geographical and socio-economic variations; seasonal fluctuations in supply; local demographics; nutritional quality; equity; risk assessment; commercial viability; environmental sustainability; connectivity; and consumer preferences, all within the same framework of evaluation.

This thesis has, therefore, performed a number of useful functions. Firstly, it has contributed to current academic understandings of the reconfiguration of relationships within the UK agro-food system, resulting from the emergence of 'AS'. It has done this through an in-depth and rigorous examination of a micro-level exchange context, together with the development of a theoretical framework for the further analysis of 'AS'. Secondly, it has helped to inform the policy context with respect to an entity within the agro-food system that has received considerable interest from policy makers. Finally, it has provided a foundation of knowledge for the author himself, in an area of research that is fizzing with excitement and opportunity.

[155] The New Economics Foundation programme *Plugging the Leaks*, has done this to a limited extent (NEF, 2001).

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THE APPENDICES

Appendix A
The NAFM criteria and their interpretation

The National Association of Farmers' Markets Criteria

1. *Locally produced.* Only produce from the defined local area shall be eligible.
2. *Own produce.* All produce sold must be grown, reared, caught, brewed, pickled, baked, smoked or processed by the stallholder.
3. *Principal producer.* The stall must be attended by the principal producer or a representative directly involved in the production process.
4. *Policy and information.* Information should be available to customers at each market about the rules of the market and the production methods of the producers. The market should also publicise the availability of this information.
5. *Other rules.* Markets may establish other criteria in addition to the above provided they do not conflict with them.

Guidance notes on the interpretation of the five criteria.

1. *Locally produced.* Generally 'local' is defined as a 30 mile radius from the market. However this may need to be modified in the case of large cities (e.g. London has a 100 mile radius from the M25); in coastal areas where the radius needs to be adjusted to include an equivalent area of land; or where remote areas might otherwise be excluded from all markets. Priority should normally be given to those producers closest to the market.

2. *Own produce.* Primary produce should have been grown or finished on the producer's land. Processed foods should have been made within the defined radius, using locally sourced ingredients where possible.

3. *Principal producer.* This criterion is to enable there to be a direct relationship between the producer and consumer. Producer cooperatives, community associations and the WI may be agreed as the principal producers on a case by case basis.

4. *Policy and information.* This should include information about the market's policy on sourcing locally produced food and the encouragement of sustainable methods of production. Additionally, all markets should operate in accordance with any relevant legislation, such as alcohol licensing and environmental health regulations.

5. *Other criteria.* The prime aim of the market should be to provide a stimulating environment in which producers and consumers are brought together.

Source: NAFM (2000b)

Appendix B
A brief review of Actor Network Theory

ANT was developed by Callon and Latour in the 1980s (see Callon 1986; 1991; Latour 1986; Callon and Latour 1992), as a means of understanding how scientific, technological, natural and social components can form into an interdependent and coherent network, through a process known as the 'sociology of translation'. Since then, ANT has been increasingly adopted to understand change within the agro-food system, and the contingent nature of network formation (e.g. Busch and Juska 1997; Whatmore and Thorne 1997; Murdoch 1997; 1998; Fitzsimmons and Goodman 1998; Goodman 1999; 2001; Selman and Wragg 1999; Lockie and Kitto 2000). A network is formed through the consolidation of its component parts, and networks differ in their stability and irreversibility. There is a tendency when networks are functioning properly for the actions of the network to appear as a simple entity, that hides the complexity of the network behind it (e.g. a television, the human body, or the 'conventional' agro-food system) (Law, 1992). In ANT terms, these networks are said to be 'black boxed'. Thus, within macro-level accounts, globalised food networks have been seen as somehow inexorable, whereby there were minimal 'spaces of negotiation'[156] available to create alternative modes of ordering and connectivity (Whatmore and Thorne 1997; Murdoch 1998). However, as shown above, the BSE crisis has opened up the 'black box' of the 'conventional' agro-food network to scrutiny. What had been taken for granted is now being reappraised.

Of central importance to the use of ANT within agro-food research is that it makes no *a priori* distinctions between the various components of a network. It therefore allows for the breakdown of modernist ontological dualisms, such as those between nature and society, structure and agency, production and consumption, and macro and micro-level perspectives (Lockie and Kitto, 2000). ANT is concerned with contingencies and stabilisation, and the economy is recognised "as an extremely complex web of linkages" (Murdoch 1995: 746). Power is understood as the effect of network building, rather than the cause of a particular action, which necessitates following actors as they build

[156] Murdoch (1998: 367) refers to 'spaces of prescription' and 'spaces of negotiation' within networks, where the former refers to stable networks that are not open to resistance and change, and the latter refers to networks that are less stable, and are more open to their constituent actors "(re)negotiat[ing] the terms of their incorporation". Significantly, there can be spaces of both prescription and negotiation within the same network - in other words, networks can be a hybrid of the two (Murdoch, 1997a).

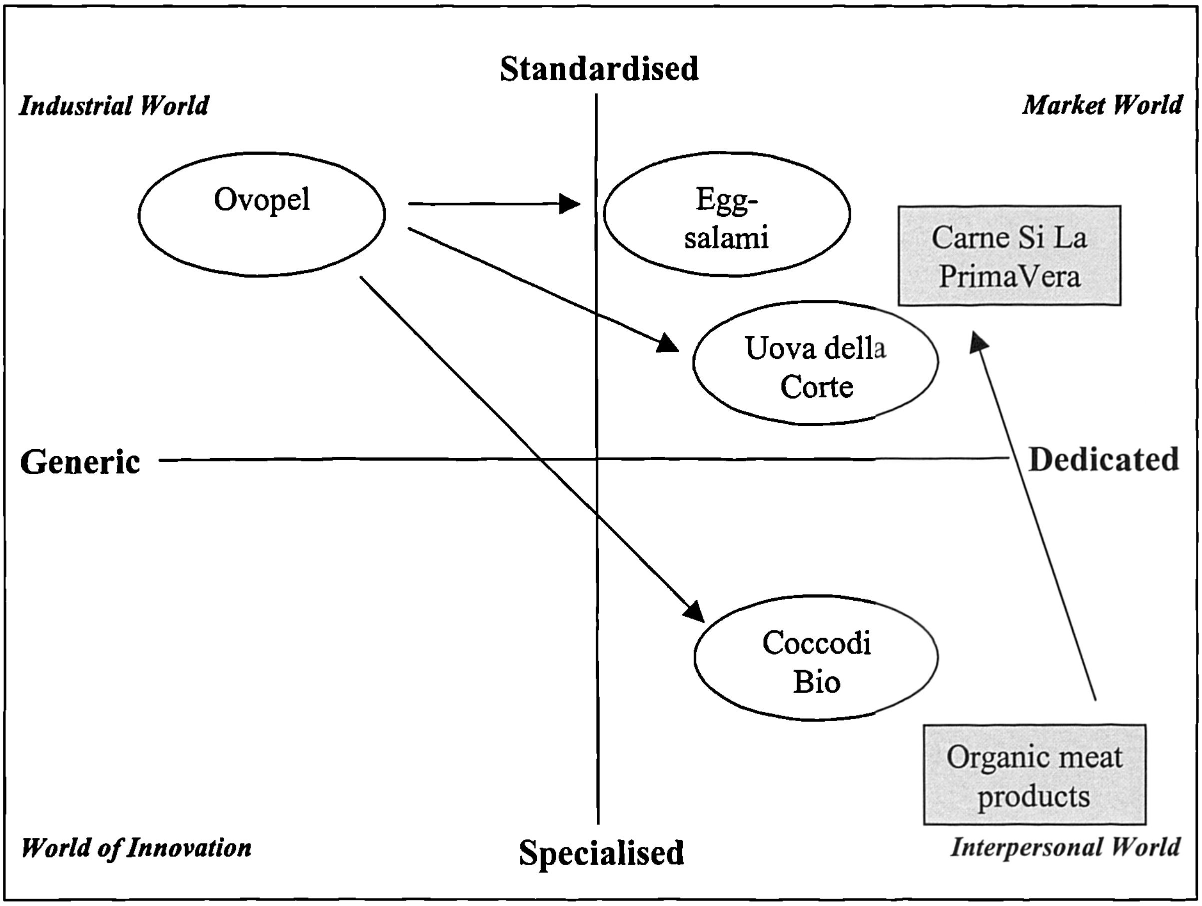
networks through negotiation. ANT allows for the active inclusion of nature, rather than just acknowledging it in terms of agricultural exceptionalism, which Goodman (2001) argues facilitates an examination of the emerging bio-politicisation of food networks. Goodman and DuPuis (2002: 9) also propose that ANT, through its adoption of a symmetrical perspective, allows for an understanding of production and consumption as being "mutually constitutive", rather than seeing the consumption end of the food chain as the largely passive recipient of macro-level production processes. However, there are concerns that whilst ANT may be methodologically strong in allowing new insights into the modern agro-food system, it is largely descriptive and fails to allow for theoretical explanation (e.g. Marsden 2000; Lockie and Kitto 2000; Buttel 2001).

Appendix C
Changing 'Worlds of Production'

Murdoch and Miele (1999) in researching food production-consumption processes in central Italy, use CT in order to understand how two types of food producer have moved between different worlds of production, in response to changing, and increasingly complex, demand patterns. In the first case, they chart how a large egg producer (Ovopel) sought to complement its standardised-generic eggs, by diversifying into more dedicated products, in three principal ways. Firstly, by producing an egg-salami, which though retaining its standardised features, was dedicated specifically to the convenience needs of the catering trade. Secondly, by setting up a production system of 'free range' eggs (Uova della Corte), which were heralded as being 'animal friendly' and 'natural', to positively differentiate them from mass-produced eggs. Thirdly, by introducing a range of organic produce (Coccodi Bio), which was again promoted as being 'animal friendly' and 'natural'. The egg-salami can be understood as a partial move from the Industrial World to the Market World, entailing minimal changes to the conventions of production; Uova della Corte starts to incorporate civic conventions, and shows a more emphatic shift to the Market World; whilst Coccodi Bio, in more vigorously incorporating civic conventions, represents a shift to the Interpersonal World (see Figure A.1).

The second case involved co-operatives of a large number of small-scale organic meat producers, who were frustrated that the existing retail infrastructure was insufficient to handle the perceived growth in demand for their produce. As such, they set up a chain of organic supermarkets (NaturaSi) and subsequently organic butcher's shops (Carne Si), as well as consolidating the various organic meat products of the region into one product (La Prima Vera). In the process, these specialised producers, in responding to growing demands, standardised their production and therefore increasingly included industrial and commercial conventions into their structures, whilst reducing the significance of the previous domestic and civil conventions (see Figure A.1).

Figure A.1 Changing 'worlds of production'



Adapted from Murdoch and Miele (1999).

What these two case studies show is the way in which food production systems can adapt to actual, or perceived changes in demand patterns, whereby producers may end up in the same world of production, but from very different start points. Clearly this illustration is important in itself, but also in terms of demonstrating how CT can provide an analytical framework within which to understand the growing complexity of food provision.

Appendix D
Farmers' Market managers telephone interview schedule

Questionnaire number: **Non-response:** ☐

Market name & locality:..Number...................
County name:..Number:..................

Contact name:...

Position:...
Employer:..
Telephone number:...
Email
number:..

Date of interview:..............................
Time start:.......................Time finish:......................Time to complete:................

Section A: Background information.

A1. **When was the FM first held?** *(month & year)*..........................[.........] *(months)*

A2. **Is the market still going?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

A3. **If the market has failed, then why?** *(tick as many as appropriate)*

☐ Wrong location ☐ Not enough suppliers
☐ Too close to supermarkets ☐ Not enough consumers
☐ Competition from other FMs ☐ Other *(please specify)*

....
....

A4. **How many markets have been held so far?**

☐ Pannier market

☐ Proposed ☐ Pilot(s) only ☐ Special event(s)

☐ <5 ☐ 5-10 ☐ 11-20 ☐ >20

A5. **How frequently is the market held?**

☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly
☐ Twice monthly ☐ Quarterly
☐ Seasonal ☐ Other *(please specify)*..

A6. **Why?**...

A7. **On what day of the week is the market held?**

☐ Mon. ☐ Tues. ☐ Wed. ☐ Thurs. ☐ Fri. ☐ Sat. ☐ Sun. ☐ Other.

A8. **Why?**...
....

***A9.* What is the market venue?**...

***A10.* Why is it held here?**..

....

***A11.* What is the average turnover per market?**

☐ < £500	☐ £2001-5000	☐ Unknown
☐ £501-1000	☐ £5001-10000	
☐ £1001-2000	☐ >£10000	

***A12.* What has been the trend in *market turnover* over the last 12 months?**

☐ Increasing	☐ Decreasing	☐ Variable
☐ Stable	☐ Unknown	

***A13.* What is the average number of *stallholders* per market?**

☐ <10	☐ 31-40
☐ 10-20	☐ >40
☐ 21-30	☐ Unknown

***A14.* What has been the trend in *stallholder* nos. over the last 12 months?**

☐ Increasing	☐ Variable
☐ Decreasing	☐ Unknown
☐ Stable	☐ Seasonal

***A15.* What is the average number of *consumers* per market?**

☐ <250	☐ 1001-2000
☐ 251-500	☐ 2000-4000
☐ 501-1000	☐ >4000
☐ Unknown	

***A16.* What has been the trend in *consumer* nos. over the last 12 months?**

☐ Increasing	☐ Variable
☐ Decreasing	☐ Unknown
☐ Stable	☐ Seasonal

***A17.* What % of the stalls are certified organic producers?**

☐ None ☐ <10% ☐ 10-20% ☐ 21-30% ☐ 31-50% ☐ >50%

☐ Unknown

***A18.* Are craft stalls allowed?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

***A19.* Please explain why**..

....

***A20.* What % of the stalls are crafts?**

☐ None ☐ <10% ☐ 10-20% ☐ 21-30% ☐ 31-50% ☐ >50%

***A21.* Is stall space available for community/non-profit organisations?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

***A22.* Please explain why**..

....

Section B: The setting up and management of the market.

B1. **Which individual(s) or organisation(s) were originally involved in setting up this market?** *(tick as many as appropriate)*

☐ LA	☐ Private limited company	☐ RDA
☐ Community organisations	☐ Not-for-profit company	☐ WDA
☐ Local environmental groups	☐ Producers	☐ MAFF
☐ Health organisations	☐ Consumers	☐ NFU
☐ Local traders/C of C	☐ Supermarket	☐ ADAS
☐ Town council/town centre	☐ Regional food agencies	☐ Mkt. Op.

☐ Other *(please specify)*..

....

....

B2. **What were the principal reasons/aims for setting up this FM?**

....

....

....

....

B3. **Have these reasons/aims changed subsequently?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

B4. **If yes, then how?** ....

....

B5. **And why?** ....

....

....

B6. **Was the market set up as part of a LA21 programme?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

B7. **Did the market receive start-up funding?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

B8. **If yes, then from whom?** ☐ LA ☐ RDA ☐ WDA
☐ EU funding ☐ Other *(please specify)*

....

....

B9. **Is the market self-financing now?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

B10. **Is the aim of the market to be self-financing?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

B11. **If not, then why not?**..

....

B12. **Who continues to subsidise the market?**..

....

B13. **Is there a food voucher scheme at the market?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

B14. **If so, then who provides the funding?**...

....

B15. **Who runs the market on an on-going basis?** *(tick as many as appropriate)*

☐ Private limited company
☐ Not-for-profit company
☐ Producers
☐ Community/env. organisations
☐ Local chamber of commerce
☐ Consumers
☐ LA – markets department
☐ LA – LA21 officer
☐ LA - other
☐ Manager/organiser
☐ Management committee
☐ Town council/town centre manager
☐ Other *(please specify)*..

B16. **Is the market co-ordinated with other FMs** ☐ Yes ☐ No

B17. **If yes, then how?**
☐ Through a regional or local association of FMs
☐ Through the local authority
☐ By informal liaison between local markets
☐ By a private company
☐ Other *(please specify)*..

B18. **If no, then why not?**...
....

B19. **Is the market co-ordinated with other local food links schemes?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

B20. **If yes, then how?** ....

B21. **If no, then why not?**...
....

B22. **Is the market a member of the NAFM?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

B23. **If yes, then why?**...

B24. **If no, then why not?**...

B25. **Must stallholders come from within a given radius of the mkt.?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

B26. **If yes, what is the radius (in miles)?**

☐ <20 ☐ 20-30 ☐ 31-40 ☐ 41-50 ☐ 51-100 ☐ 101-200
☐ County limit ☐ UK limit ☐ No restriction ☐ Region/Island

B27. **Where an insufficient market product balance is available within that radius, can it be extended?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

B28. **If yes, then up to what distance?**

☐ <50 ☐ 50-100 ☐ 101-200 ☐ County limit
☐ Discretionary – on a case-by-case basis ☐ UK limit ☐ No restriction
☐ Other *(please specify)*..

B29. **Does the localness of production cause a problem in terms of *seasonal production*?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

B30. **If yes, then how is this addressed?**...
....

B31. **Is any bought-in produce allowed?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

B32. **If yes, then what?** ....

....

B33. **And why?** ....

....

B34. **Who is allowed to sell produce at the market?** *(tick as many as appropriate)*

☐ The producer/family member
☐ An employee directly involved in production
☐ Producer co-operatives
☐ Shared stalls
☐ No restrictions
☐ Other *(please specify)*.................................

....

B35. **Who is responsible for policing and enforcing market regulations?**

☐ Market manager/organiser
☐ LA EHO/TSO
☐ Management committee
☐ LA – LA21 officer
☐ Town council/town centre manager
☐ LA markets department
☐ Stallholders/ stallholder trust
☐ Other *(please specify)*.................................

....

B36. **Who drew up the regulations for this market?**

☐ NAFM guidelines used
☐ Regional Association of FMs
☐ Management/steering committee
☐ Market organiser/manager
☐ LA – LA21 officer/dept.
☐ Private limited company
☐ LA markets department
☐ NFU
☐ LA – other
☐ Town council/town centre manager (or city)
☐ Stallholders
☐ Other *(please specify)*.................................

....

B37. **Who retains ultimate control of the market?** *(tick as many as appropriate)*

☐ LA - other
☐ Private limited company
☐ RDA
☐ LA markets department
☐ Not-for-profit company
☐ WDA
☐ Community organisations
☐ Local chamber of commerce
☐ MAFF
☐ Local environmental groups
☐ Producers
☐ NFU
☐ Consumers
☐ Management/steering committee
☐ Local town steering group
☐ Town council/town centre manager (or city)
☐ Other *(please specify)*..

....

B38. **If there is a management/steering committee, who is represented on it?** *(tick as many as appropriate)*

☐ LA
☐ Private limited company
☐ Health organisations
☐ Community organisations
☐ Chamber of commerce
☐ Producers
☐ Local environmental groups
☐ NFU
☐ Consumers
☐ The local town
☐ Town council/town centre manager (or city)
☐ Other *(please specify)*..

....

Section C: Market success indicators and future viability.

C1. **What do you consider are the principal achievements of the market?**

....
....
....
....
....
....
....

C2. **On a scale of 1 to 5** (*where 5 is the most important and 1 the least important*) **how important would you rate the following to the success of the market:**

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The presence of organic food	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The presence of value-added speciality food products	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

☐ Additional comments...
....
....

C3. **What do you consider are the main pressures on the future viability of this market?**

....
....
....
....
....
....
....

C4. **What do you consider can be done to counter these pressures?**

....
....
....
....
....
....
....

C5. **What do you consider is the long-term role of this market?**

....
....
....
....
....
....

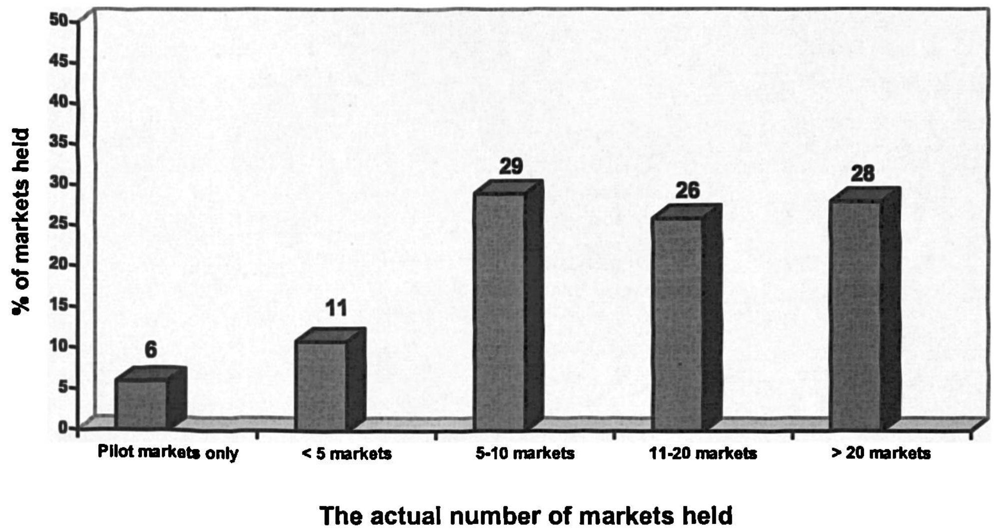
C6. **If not answered under C5, is the market seen as:**

☐ part of a larger co-ordinated network of FMs? ☐ an end-point in itself?
☐ part of a wider integrated local food system?

Appendix E
Farmers' Market managers survey data to help justify the selection of case studies

As described under Section 4.2, the resultant FM manager survey data came from a completed survey of 159 markets, of which it transpired 28 were not actually running (7 were proposed markets; 2 were pannier markets; 11 were one-off markets only; and 8 had failed). Minimal data were available for these markets, and it was decided to omit them from the analysis, resulting in an effective final sample of 131 markets, or 42% of the original NAFM sampling frame of 311.

Figure A.2 The actual number of markets that had been held in each location, since they were originally created



At the time of this survey (December 2000 to January 2001), many FMs had only been running for a short time. It was felt that resultant data from these markets could be skewed by the initial hype and enthusiasm surrounding new markets, as evidenced in numerous media profiles (such as those identified within Chapter 2, Section 2.5). It was decided, therefore, to identify those FMs that were considered to be well established at that time (having held a minimum of 11 markets) as potential case studies.

Figure A.3 The frequency with which the FMs are held

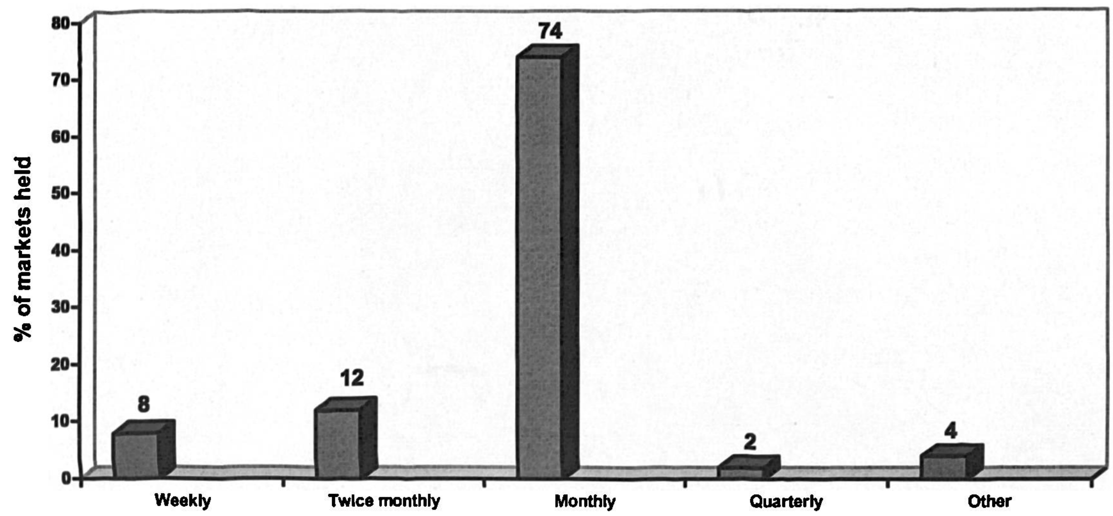


Figure A.4 The radius restriction on stallholders who may come to the FMs

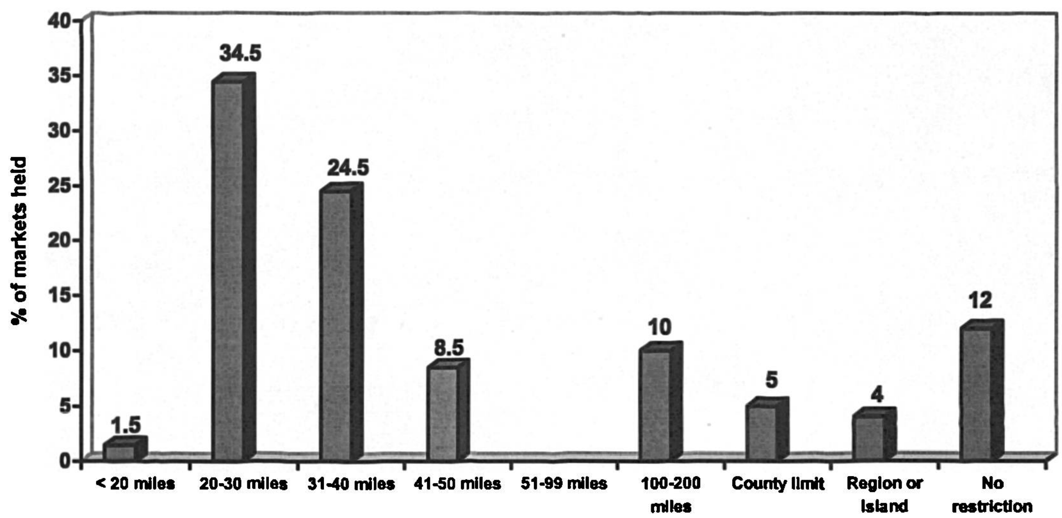


Figure A.5 The principal actors involved in the establishment of individual FMs

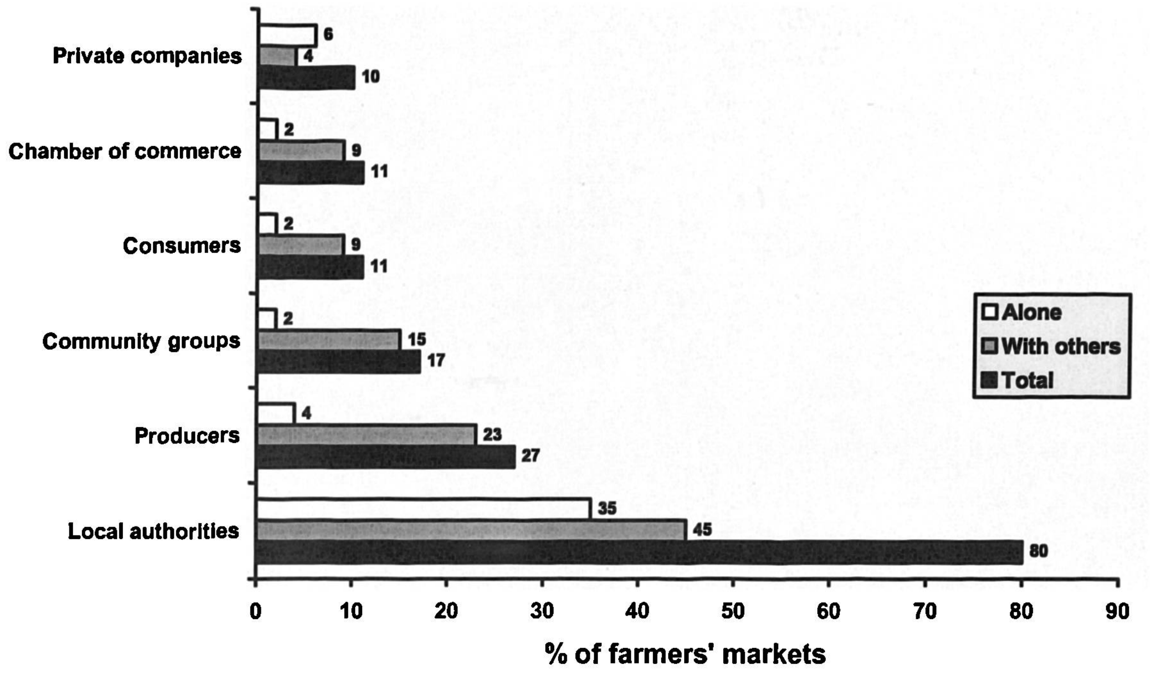


Table A.1 The principal management objectives of individual FMs

- To support the local farming community.
- To assist in town centre regeneration.
- To benefit consumers and the wider local community.
- To enable the promotion of sustainable development issues, and in particular to highlight the connections between the production and consumption of food.

Figure A.6 The average number of stalls per FM held

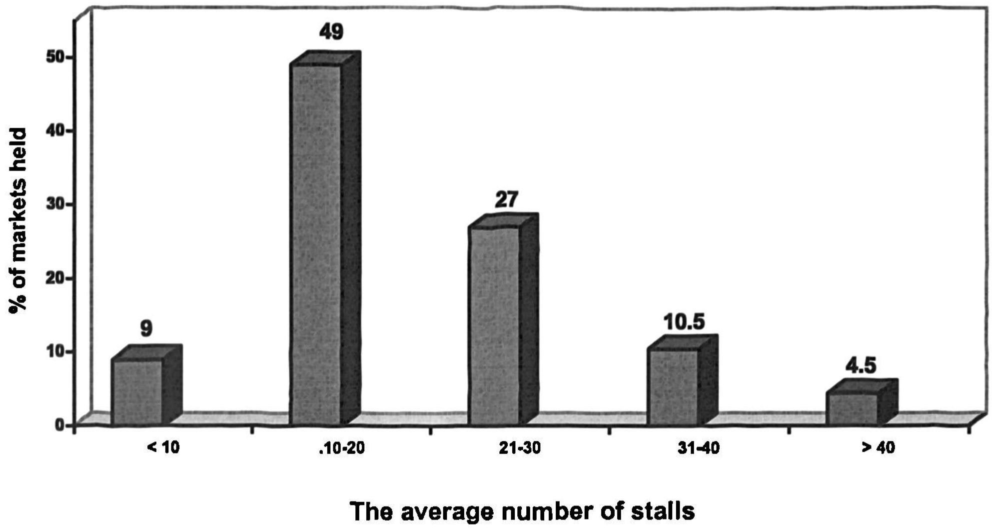
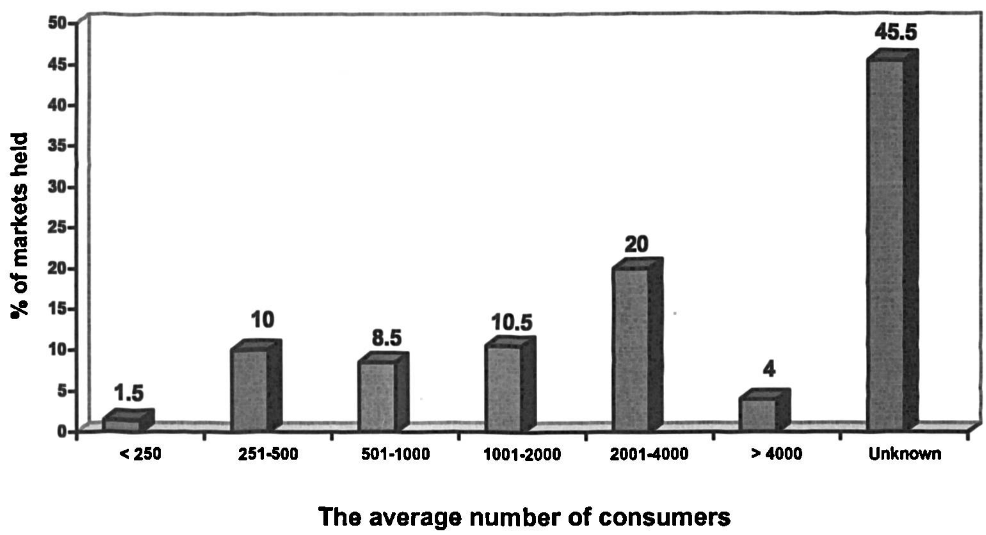
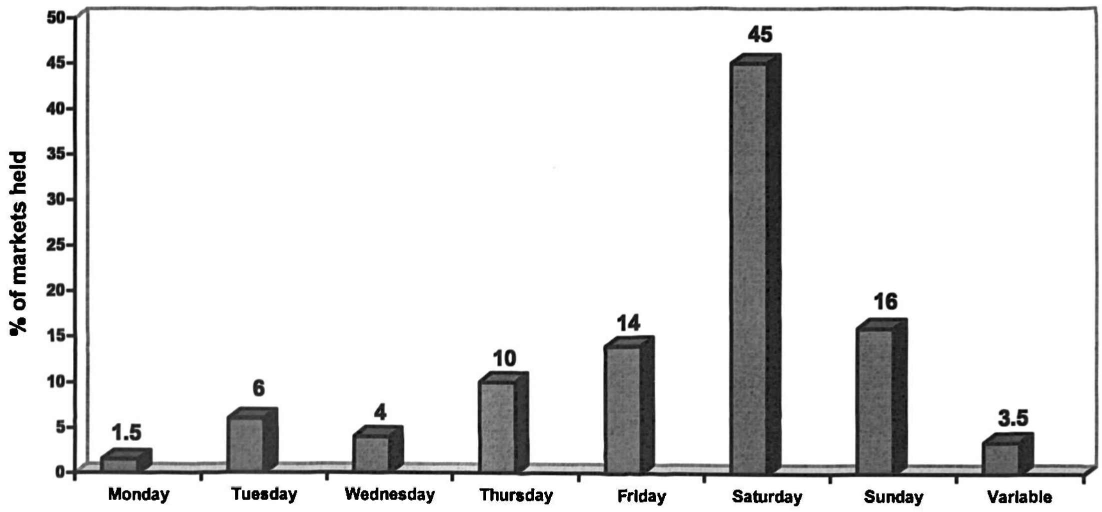


Figure A.7 The average number of consumers per market



It is important to note that nearly half the market managers did not know how many consumers they get coming to their markets. In many cases this was because the FMs are held in an area which also serves as a thoroughfare. Nevertheless, the figures obtained do give an indication of the broad 'types' of FMs in terms of consumer attendance.

Figure A.8 The day on which the FMs are held



Appendix F
Producer telephone interview schedule

Introduction. My name is James Kirwan and I am a Ph.D. student at the Countryside and Community Research Unit, Cheltenham & Gloucester College of Higher Education. My research is seeking to understand the importance of FMs, and critical to that is an understanding of how both producers and consumers relate to them, and I would therefore like to tap into your experiences and opinions about FMs.

Our conversation is being tape-recorded so as not to miss any comments, but I would like to stress that no names will be included in any reports and your comments are entirely confidential.

The themes for discussion:

Background information.

Prompts:
- Approx. what is the total area of land that you farm in acres/ha?
- What agricultural enterprises do you have on your holding?
- Approx. what % of your total agricultural turnover does each enterprise generate?
- What produce do you sell at FMs?
- What % of your income is from agricultural enterprises; non-agricultural sources?
- How many people work on the holding – f/t, p/t, family member?
- How many people are involved in growing for; selling at FMs?
- What is your position on the holding – principal farmer, partner, family member?
- How many years have you been in farming/agriculture/food production?
- Have you ever worked outside farming/agriculture/ food production?
- What is your age group – 20s, 30s etc.?

If selling processed foods. (cheese, yoghurt, pies etc.)

Prompts:
- What % of the primary ingredients are produced by you?
- Where do you source your ingredients from?
- What % of your ingredients are locally grown?
- Are you responsible for processing the food?
- What are your reasons for selling processed food – value added; spare labour capacity?

What are your reasons for selling at FMs?

Prompts:
- When did you start selling at FMs?
- What prompted you to sell at FMs (direct contact, regaining control, value added, stepping stone, enjoyment/social)?
- How important is the opportunity to interact with other producers?
- Where did you sell before FMs?
- How many FMs do you go to per month, and where?
- If you sell at more than one market, do you have different reasons for selling at each market and if so, what (convenient, returns, atmosphere)?
- How far have you come to this market?
- How far will you go to a market?

What part do FMs have to play in your overall food marketing strategy?

Prompts:
- What produce do you sell at FMs (from background section)? What is the reasoning behind selling this produce, rather than all the produce at FMs?
- What % of your income (approximately) do you get from selling at FMs?
- Would you like this to be different? I.e. a greater or lesser %.
- Have you gained other marketing outlets since going to FMs?
- Do FMs really provide you with an alternative marketing outlet, or are they more of a promotional tool/stepping stone?
- Have you changed your food marketing strategy since coming to FMs?
- Have you diversified your product range?
- What other outlets do you sell your produce through, and why? (Supermarkets, local shops, box schemes, farms shops, the Internet, marketing co-ops, B&B, restaurants).
- Do you make a distinction between different marketing outlets?
- Do you enjoy selling at FMs, or would you rather sell through other outlets and move on from FMs?
- Ideally, how would you wish to market your food produce, and why?

On what basis do you promote the quality of your produce at FMs?

Prompts:
- Through official certification such as organic or QAS, such as FABL?
- Through explaining the nature of the production process to the consumer – 'natural'; 'artisanal'.
- Is the direct contact with the consumer a form of quality certification?
- How important is it that it is local produce?
- Do you think that consumers decide on the quality of your produce through its associations (such as its local origins; the fact that it is sold at a FM; or as a result of talking to you); or by assessing the quality of the produce itself/looking at the label?
- How do you promote yourself and your produce at the FM?
- How do you think this might change when selling the same produce through another outlet, where direct contact is no longer possible?

How would you describe your relationship with your consumers and the FMs you sell at?

Prompts:

- What is the relationship that you build up with consumers at FMs based upon?
- Do you feel a sense of loyalty to regular consumers, and if so, what does this entail? (Regular attendance; preferential prices, or simply a friendly smile).
- Do you feel a sense of loyalty to the FM, and if so, what does this entail? (Regular attendance).
- If you sell at more than one market, is the relationship different at each market?
- Do customers quiz you about production methods, prices, quality etc.?
- Do you find that customers are prepared to complain about produce if they are not satisfied; and if so, how do you handle that?
- Has the direct feedback from consumers led you to consider altering your husbandry practices?
- How important is the direct contact with the consumer – to you personally; & in terms of building up trust in your produce / explaining your production methods?

Reflective and general attitude to FMs.

Prompts:

- What do you see as the current and future purpose of FMs as far as your business is concerned?
- What are the main positives and negatives about selling at FMs?
- Do you think that FMs, and the producers at FMs should be regulated in any particular way, and if so how?

Appendix G
Producer letter of introduction

CHELTENHAM
&
GLOUCESTER
College of Higher Education

CHELTENHAM
LANDSCAPE DESIGN
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Frin o e Ha
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ax 0 42 z

August 2001

Direct line: 01291 690 313
Email:jkirwan@chelt.ac.uk

Dear Farmers' Market stallholder,

Research on Farmers' Markets.

I am a researcher at the Countryside and Community Research Unit, Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education, where I am investigating Farmers' Markets for my Ph.D. At a time when the farming industry and rural areas are suffering from a combination of pressures, such as the BSE crisis, the 'Foot and Mouth' epidemic, falling prices and squeezed margins, Farmers' Markets are being promoted by a wide range of organisations (such as the NFU, National Trust, Countryside Agency, and local authorities) as a means of helping to overcome these problems.

The aim of my research is to try and better understand the requirements and intentions of producers selling at Farmers' Markets, and your views, experiences and opinions are a key element of this. Ideally, I should like to conduct personal interviews with each stallholder, but I appreciate that time is short at the markets themselves, and that concerns over Foot and Mouth may preclude me from coming onto farm holdings. I am therefore conducting the interviews by telephone and should be most grateful for your participation. The interview will last about 40 minutes and would be arranged to suit your time schedule.

The results of this survey will help to identify actions that can be taken to ensure the development and future sustainability of Farmers' Markets. Please be assured that all interviews will be treated in the strictest confidence and that under no circumstances will individuals be identified within the research.

May I thank you in advance for your help with my work.

Yours sincerely

James Kirwan
Ph.D. researcher

Appendix H – Producer interviewee details

Case study area	Producer number	Produce Varieties	Farm Size (ha)	Age Group	Approx % farm income from FMs	Time in food production	Time going to FMs	FMs / month	Organically certified
Wiltshire	Producer 01	Vegetables	20-50	40s	51-75%	>25 years	>2 years	11-20	No
	Producer 02	Eggs (free-range); meat (chicken)	20-50	30s	51-75%	<5 years	>2 years	11-20	No
	Producer 03	Fish (fresh trout)	None	50s	26-50%	>25 years	>2 years	>20	No
	Producer 04	Meat (pork) – rare breed	<10	50s	76-99%	>25 years	<6 months	5-10	No
	Producer 05	Meat (beef & lamb)	76-100	40s	76-99%	>25 years	>2 years	5-10	Yes
	Producer 06	Fish (fresh; smoked; pate; soups)	None	40s	26-50%	5-10 years	>2 years	>20	Yes
	Producer 09	Smoked fish, meat & game	None	40s	10-25%	11-25 years	<6 months	11-20	No
	Producer 11	Apple juice and cider	None	50s	76-99%	>25 years	>2 years	11-20	No
	Producer 41	Meat (pork & beef); pies	101-200	50s	1%	>25 years	>2 years	5-10	No
	Producer 42	Cheese (cow & sheep)	20-50	30s	76-99%	5-10 years	1-2 years	5-10	No
	Producer 45	Meat (pork & beef); sausages	<10	40s	10-25%	>25 years	1-2 years	<5	No
	Producer 80	Vegetables	>500	30s	1%	>25 years	<6 months	<5	Yes
Stroud	Producer 13	Game products	None	30s	76-99%	11-25 years	1-2 years	<5	No
	Producer 14	Cheese (goat)	None	50s	10-25%	11-25 years	>2 years	5-10	No
	Producer 15	Cheese (cow)	20-50	40s	51-75%	11-25 years	>2 years	5-10	No
	Producer 17	Meat (pork & bacon)	51-75	30s	10-25%	>25 years	>2 years	5-10	No
	Producer 20	Honey	None	50s	51-75%	<5 years	1-2 years	5-10	No
	Producer 22	Eggs (free range)	<10	50s	<10%	>25 years	>2 years	<5	No
	Producer 26	Meat (beef)	201-500	40s	<10%	>25 years	1-2 years	<5	No
	Producer 29	Preserves & stews	None	30s	26-50%	<5 years	>2 years	<5	No
	Producer 30	Apple juice & Perry	None	40s	51-75%	11-25 years	>2 years	5-10	No
	Producer 31	Vegetables	20-50	40s	<10%	>25 years	1-2 years	Seasonal	Yes
	Producer 32	Vegetables	51-75	40s	26-50%	11-25 years	1-2 years	5-10	No
	Producer 35	Soft fruit	76-100	60s	<10%	>25 years	>2 years	Seasonal	Yes
	Producer 36	Vegetables (LETS surplus)	<10	-	-	-	-	-	No
London	Producer 48	Cheese (goat); quiches	<10	40s	100%	>25 years	>2 years	11-20	No
	Producer 58	Vegetables; herbs	<10	50s	51-75%	>25 years	>2 years	5-10	No
	Producer 61	Game & poultry (turkey)	None	50s	100%	>25 years	1-2 years	11-20	No
	Producer 66	Fish (Crab; lobster; shrimp)	None	60s	<10%	>25 years	>2 years	5-10	No
	Producer 67	Vegetables; fruit & fruit juice	201-500	30s	51-75%	>25 years	>2 years	>20	No
	Producer 69	Meat (lamb)	51-75	60s	100%	11-25 years	>2 years	5-10	No
	Producer 71	Cider; brandy	51-75	50s	<10%	>25 years	>2 years	11-20	No
	Producer 72	Vegetables (Tomatoes)	20-50	40s	<10%	5-10 years	6-12 months	>20	Yes
	Producer 74	Vegetables	20-50	50s	51-75%	>25 years	>2 years	>20	No
	Producer 75	Bread; cakes	None	50s	10-25%	11-25 years	>2 years	11-20	Yes
	Producer 77	Eggs	<10	50s	26-50%	>25 years	1-2 years	<5	Yes
	Producer 78	Meat (beef, pork & lamb)	51-75	40s	100%	>25 years	>2 years	11-20	No
Pilot	Producer pilot 1	Vegetables; meat (pork)	<10	40s	10-25%	5-10 years	>2 years	<5	Yes
	Producer pilot 2	Meat (lamb); eggs; sheepskin	51-75	50s	<10%	>25 years	>2 years	<5	Yes
	Producer pilot 3	Dairy (yoghurt)	>500	30s	<10%	11-25 years	>2 years	<5	No

Appendix I
Consumer focus group interview schedule

Introduction. Good evening and welcome. Thank you for taking the time to join this discussion on FMs. My name is James Kirwan and I am a Ph.D. student at the Countryside and Community Research Unit, Cheltenham & Gloucester College of Higher Education. My research is seeking to understand the importance of FMs, and critical to that is an understanding of how consumers relate to them, and I would therefore like to tap into your experiences and opinions about FMs. I'm sure that there will be different points of view, and I am interested in hearing what all of you have to say, so please feel free to share your point of view even if this is different from what others have said. There are no right or wrong answers, and both negative and positive comments are useful. My job is to guide the conversation and because I am keen to hear from all of you, I may interrupt at some stage people who are talking a lot, and call on others who aren't saying so much. Our conversation is being tape-recorded so as not to miss any comments, but I would like to stress that no names will be included in any reports and your comments are entirely confidential. Please excuse the informality of using first names, but this also facilitates confidentiality.

Ok, let's begin. By way of an introduction can each of you just say who you are, and briefly explain what your reasons are for shopping at [...] FM and indeed FMs in general. ...if I might start with you...

The themes for discussion:

By way of an introduction, can you briefly say what your reasons are for shopping at [...] FM, and indeed FMs in general. (5 minutes)

Prompts:
- Have recent food scares such as BSE, FMD caused you to question the food you eat?
- For leisure, or for buying food?
- Access to fresh quality local produce?
- Supporting farmers?
- Environmental issues?
- Lack of local alternatives?
- Curiosity / something different?

How do you assess the quality of food at FMs? (15 minutes)

Prompts:
- Because it is local; sold at a FM; you can talk to the producer; looking at the label?
- How important is the direct contact with the producer? Do you feel able to influence what the producer grows & build up a relationship of trust?
- How important is it that the produce is local?
- What about organic food? What about fair-trade foods?
- How good is the quality of food produce at FMs compared to other food outlets?
- Do you ascribe quality differently in different networks?
- If you do have a problem, how easy is it to complain?
- Do you think that FMs should be regulated in any way, and if so, how?

How important is it that you are actually buying the food produce at the FM itself, rather than from some other outlet? (15 minutes)

Prompts:
- What is it that is special or different about FMs?
- How important is the local element?
- How important is the direct contact element? How would you describe the relationship you have with the producers? What is that relationship based upon? Do you expect a special deal? Do you feel a sense of loyalty to certain producers? If so, please explain.
- The social/festive atmosphere of the markets?
- Do you feel more in control of the food you buy?
- If you go to more than one FM, do you notice any difference between the markets you attend?
- Do you make a distinction between different types of food outlet? E.g. if you can buy one of the producers' products through mail order, the Internet, a local shop, the local supermarket – would it make any difference?

What part do FMs have to play in your overall food purchasing decisions? (15 minutes)

Prompts:
- What % of your food do you buy from FMs?
- Would you like this to be different? I.e. a greater % of your food from FMs.
- What type of produce do you buy at FMs?
- Do you think that FMs do provide a real alternative?
- Where else do you buy your food from? Supermarkets, local shops, CSA, box schemes, farm shops.
- Has shopping at the FM altered your shopping habits? Do you now seek out local food in other outlets, even if you have not met the producer at a FM?
- Do you see FMs as a shop window?

How would you compare buying food at a FM, to buying food from other food outlets? (5 minutes)

Prompts:
- Compared, for example, to other street markets, supermarkets, farm shops.
- Fun, social etc?
- Makes food shopping a pleasure?
- But what about the downsides to FMs – lack of convenience; limited scale; relative infrequency; seasonality?
- Do you feel they allow for a transparency of provision?

To summarise then. We have looked at why you go to FMs; how you judge the quality of produce at FMs; the importance of the FM itself; as well as the significance of FMs to the way you buy your food. Does this fairly summarise what we have said? Is there anything else anyone would like to add? (5 minutes)

Appendix J
Consumer focus group filter interview schedule

Questionnaire Number...

Market Name..

Time and date...

1. How long have you been going to FMs?

2. How often do you go to FMs usually?

3. How many different FMs do you go to?

4. How far will you travel to a FM?

5. How far have you travelled to this FM?

6. What produce do you buy at FMs, and how do you rate the quality?

7. How would you describe the relationship you have with the producers?

8. What prompted you to go to FMs in the first place?

9. Why is it that you continue to go to FMs? (or if new to FMs, will you continue coming?)

10. What is your overall impression of FMs?

11. Are you aware of what the regulations are concerning who can sell at the markets, and what they can sell?

My research is concerned with the future development of FMs, which very much includes consumers as well as producers. I wonder therefore whether you would be interested in taking part in a more detailed discussion about FMs. It would be in a relaxed atmosphere, with the objective of allowing people to freely express their views about FMs. I would stress that all responses will be treated in the strictest confidence and that under no circumstances will individuals be identified within the research. If an FG possible give them a copy of the letter and ask for their:

NAME:..

TELEPHONE NUMBER:...................................

NOTES:

Socio-economic data

This is of course optional, but it does help to build up a more accurate picture of the people that are using FMs, and therefore facilitate an understanding of how they should be developed.

Gender:

Male. ☐ Female. ☐

Age Group: (show cue card)

1. < 25 ☐
2. 25-45 ☐
3. 46-65 ☐
4. > 65 ☐

Employment status:

1. Working full-time ☐
2. Working part-time ☐
3. Looking for work ☐
4. Looking after family ☐
5. Student ☐
6. Retired ☐
7. Self-employed ☐

What is (or was) the occupation of the chief wage earner in your house?

Total annual household income: (show cue card)

1. < £10,000 ☐
2. £10,000-£20,000 ☐
3. £20,001-£40,000 ☐
4. > £40,000 ☐

Appendix K
Consumer letter of introduction

CHELTENHAM
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August 2001

Direct line: 01291 690 313
Email:jkirwan@chelt.ac.uk

Dear Farmers' Market customer,

Research on Farmers' Markets.

I am a researcher at the Countryside and Community Research Unit, Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education, where I am investigating Farmers' Markets for my Ph.D. At a time when the farming industry and rural areas are suffering from a combination of pressures, and the way in which our food is produced and distributed is being re-evaluated, Farmers' Markets are receiving considerable attention as a means of addressing some of these issues. Farmers' Markets are about *both* producers and consumers, and therefore your opinions are very important in understanding their future role and direction. To this end, I am convening a focus group that will be held on:

It will be a small group of about six people. The idea will be to create a relaxed atmosphere in which people will feel able to express their views freely about Farmers' Markets. There will be tea, coffee and biscuits available, and as a thank you for attending I will be bringing a hamper of goodies from the Farmers' Market, for which you will be able to draw lots.

The aim of this research is to try and better understand the experiences and expectations of Farmers' Market customers, so that actions can be taken to ensure their development and future sustainability. Please be assured that all responses will be treated in the strictest confidence and that under no circumstances will individuals be identified within the research.

May I thank you in advance for your help with my work. If for some reason you won't be able to attend, please call me on my direct line as soon as possible, so that I can try and invite someone else.

Yours sincerely

James Kirwan
Ph.D. researcher