

**ROOTING OCCUPATION IN NATURE AND COMMUNITY: THE LIVED
EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNITY BASED ECOLOGICAL FARMERS**

by

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DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY
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Abstract

A phenomenological study was undertaken to explore the lived experience of community based farmers using ecological farming practices. These farmers support and are supported by their local communities through marketing their products directly to eaters and use farming practices that mimic and seek to enhance the vitality of natural systems and cycles on their farms. Farmers' experiences are characterised by hard work for little pay, engaging the fullness of human capacity, living in harmony, spirituality, and a socio-political awareness of food and farms in society. Farmers' experiences contribute to the development of concepts of doing, being, belonging and becoming, and have implications for concepts of occupational justice and occupational ecology. Further study of other forms of occupation that promote engagement in dialogue with the natural world is encouraged in order to develop these concepts and help to integrate theories of justice, ecology, and occupation.

List of Abbreviations Used

Abbreviation	Definition
CINAHL	Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature
CSA	Community Supported Agriculture/Community Share Agriculture
NFU	National Farmers Union
SEP	Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
WHO	World Health Organisation
WWOOF	Willing Workers On Organic Farms/World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Increasingly, occupational science finds itself concerned with the politics of human occupation and injustices that arise from the socio-political contexts of occupation (Kronenberg, Pollard, & Sakellariou, 2011; Kronenberg, Simo-Algado & Pollard, 2005; Pollard, Sakellariou, & Kronenberg, 2008). A small part of this dialogue includes a growing recognition of the need to develop greater sensitivity to and awareness of the place of the natural environment in occupation and vice versa. With some exceptions (Hudson & Aoyama, 2008, 2011; Wilcock, 2006; Wilcock & Whiteford, 2003), awareness of the natural world and its relationship with forms of occupation, particularly in the developed world, is woefully lacking in this field.

Food procurement, preparation, and consumption are among the most basic of daily survival occupations. Although for many urban dwellers the relationship between food and the natural environment is deeply obscured, ultimately our nourishment, and therefore our survival, is unavoidably dependent on the natural environment. Interest in local food and re-connecting with food, farms, and farmers is flourishing in popular culture (Elton, 2010; Kingsolver, 2007) and offers potential for urban dwelling consumers to become more conscious of how estranged their relationship with the natural world has become. Investigating the experiences of farmers who use ecological growing methods and market directly to local consumers provides an opportunity to explore the experience of being occupied in dialogue with the natural world and how occupation binds us to each other.

Political sensitivity and justice concerns, as they relate to opportunities for occupational engagement, are increasingly entering the occupational science dialogue. Part of this dialogue is a growing recognition of the need to develop greater sensitivity to and awareness of the place of the natural environment in occupation and vice versa (Hudson & Aoyama, 2008, 2011; Simo-Algado & Cardona, 2005; Wilcock, 2006). Environmental factors, including political, social, cultural, and the built physical environment, are recognized as a critical determinant of occupation, especially at individual levels (Townsend & Polatajko, 2007) but there is inadequate recognition and exploration of how natural ecosystems and natural environments shape and are shaped by occupation at group, social, and cultural levels (Petrini, 2005; Wilcock, 2006). For instance, a CINAHL search using keywords “occupation” and “natural environment” identified only one article (Manuel, 2003). Using keywords “occupation” and “nature” elicited 204 results but only 7 were related to engagement in the natural world. The others used the word “nature” in the context of referring to “the nature of” other topics. There is a lack of awareness and recognition of the connection between occupation and the natural environment (Wilcock & Whiteford, 2003).

Simo-Algado and Cardona (2005) proposed the term “occupational ecology” to describe the impact of human occupation on the natural environment and characterize occupation as “the dialogue between human being and environment” (p. 346). Traditional models of human occupation have been criticised for being too individually oriented (Iwama, 2005) and reductionist in portraying person, environment, and occupation as separable (Dickie, Cutchin, & Humphry, 2006). In contrast to traditional models, transpersonal or transactional models seek to represent wholes rather than parts,

showing that “what we would typically see as separate from each other are really *part* of each other” (Dickie et al, 2006, p. 88).

Alternative models of agriculture are characterised by this more holistic perspective. In these models, agriculture practices are used to integrate and connect all the elements of the farm system, including farmers, customers, and the community (Berry, 2009). Although a range of terms is used to refer to alternative agricultural practices, this paper will refer to *community based farmers using ecological farming practices*. This term encompasses two main characteristics. For one, community based farmers, for the purpose of this paper, are those who market their wares directly to members of the local community and the term is intended to reflect the situatedness of these farmers in their communities. Secondly, the use of ecological farming practices, which may or may not include organic certification, refers to the conscious and deliberate use of farming practices that are intended to mimic and enhance the vitality of natural cycles and processes on their farms.

Community based farmers using ecological farming practices have been referred to a severely endangered group (Berry, 1995). The population involved in farming in general in Canada has been steadily and precipitously declining, as a figure of both absolute numbers and population percentage. In 1931, the farm population was about 32% of the total population of the country. By 2006, the farm population was about 2% of the total population of the country (Statistics Canada, 2008b; 2009). Closer analysis of the data reveals further disturbing trends. Large farms with gross incomes of over \$250,000 have increased 13.8 % since 2001 while those with gross incomes under that

amount have decreased by 10%. Along with this, average farm size has increased from 676 to 728 acres and over 15% of farms in 2006 had their headquarters in a census metropolitan area (Statistics Canada, 2008a). This points to the increasing concentration of agricultural resources in the hands of fewer, more corporate style stakeholders.

Although the percentage of the population directly engaged in farming has shrunk to the point of “statistical insignificance” (Berry, 1995, p. 9), we are all involved in farming “by proxy” as we can “eat only if land is farmed on [our] behalf by somebody somewhere in some fashion” (Berry, 2009, p. 69). Food-related occupations are perhaps the most basic human survival occupations and those which most inescapably tie us to the natural world. Historically, food and the landscape of its production were imbued with meaning and intimately tied to social and cultural systems (Pretty, 2002). Today, however, the day-to-day lives of those living in the industrialised world are dominated by various forms of technology that alienate people from these systems and from their intrinsic “nature” as ecosystem-based organisms.

Technology contributes to alienating people from our place in the complex webs of interactive relationships of the natural order (Berry 1995, 2009; Wilcock, 2006). Based on mass production, standardization, and homogenization (Lyson, 2004), this style of agriculture serves to further alienate humans and human activity from their place in the natural order with its emphasis on confinement, concentration, and separation (Berry, 2009), this last characteristic being key. In industrial agriculture, all the components of the system – animals, feed, nutrients, crops – are divided, grouped together with like elements, and separated from other elements, thus a disconnection occurs between the

various parts of the system. In this system, humans and human activity are viewed as separate from and acting upon the natural world, thus serving to further alienate people from the sources of their nourishment.

In contrast, alternative models of agriculture emphasise the multi-functionality of agriculture, incorporating principles of individual and collective health and well-being, ecological sensitivity, communal networks, and social justice (Lyson, 2004; Petrini, 2005; Pretty, 2002). In addition to producing food and providing a livelihood for the farm family, alternative models of agriculture embrace multiple functions of farming that contribute to public goods through ecological conservation (clean water, wildlife habitat, enhancement of genetic diversity, carbon sequestration, landscape quality) and building strong communities (Pretty, 2002). These models are in sharp contrast to conventional or modern approaches which are based on industrial principles mimicking the model of mass-production manufacturing (Lyson, 2004). Through directly engaging with the natural environment on a day to day basis, farmers who operate according to alternative models and principles both shape and are shaped by their interactions with natural ecosystems. Interactions with the natural environment, with others in the farming community, and with consumers are central to such farmers' way of life. Positioned as the direct link between consumers and the natural environment, such farmers are conjectured to have a unique perspective on and experience of the way in which interdependent relationships that connect us to each other and the world around us develop through occupation.

The author proposes that farmers who use ecological farming practices and market directly to end consumers are an example of a group living in more conscious awareness of being embedded in the natural world. The occupations of these farmers reflect a greater conscious awareness of being part of natural cycles, systems, and processes. A phenomenological study was undertaken by the author to explore the lived experience of a small group of these farmers with a view to informing occupational ecology as an emerging concept in occupational science. The study was guided by the question: *What is the lived experience of occupation among farmers who employ ecological and direct marketing practices?* Subquestions were based on subjective experiences of meaning derived from engagement in occupation as identified in the occupational science literature: doing, being, belonging, and becoming (Hammell, 2004, 2009; Rebeiro, Day, Semeniuk, O'Brien, Wilson, 2001; Wilcock, 1998, 2006). Subquestions were:

- i. How do farmers describe what they do in relation to their direct market farming? (doing)
- ii. How do farmers describe the meaning of what they do? (being)
- iii. How do farmers describe their evolution as farmers and through farming? (becoming)
- iv. How do farmers experience connection – to other farmers, non-farmers (consumers), and the natural environment? (belonging)

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Diverse bodies of literature were reviewed to provide a foundation from which to explore how the experiences of farmers can inform occupational science concepts. A range of sources was incorporated into this background information, including academic writing, popular journalistic writing, philosophical writing, and published personal accounts of farmers and those involved in local food movements. This range of sources is consistent with the purpose of this research, which is to use the lived experience of farmers to inform theoretical foundations of occupational science. Research-based sources provided important background and contextual information, philosophical and theoretical sources provided the conceptual framework, and published popular and personal accounts of farming and local food movements provided an introduction to the experiences of farmers. This section will open with a review of concepts in the occupational science literature that pertain to this investigation, including experiences of meaning of occupation, occupational justice, occupational ecology, and transactional perspectives on occupation. This will be followed by a review of the literature related to farming.

Experiences of Meaning of Occupation

Within occupational science, a conceptual framework of occupation based on subjective experiences of meaning is emerging (Fidler & Fidler, 1978; Hammell, 2004, 2009; Rebeiro et al., 2001; Wilcock, 1998, 2006). Dimensions of meaning of occupation as outlined in this framework include doing, being, belonging, and becoming and a balance among these is associated with well-being (Eklund & Leufstadius, 2007; Wilcock, van der Arend, Darling, Scholz, Riddall, Snigg & Stephens, 1998). While the

four dimensions may be individually described, it is impossible to experience any one dimension in isolation. The experience of any occupation will include elements of each dimension to greater or lesser degree.

Doing is the dimension most obviously associated with occupation. This dimension refers to the observable, purposeful, goal-directed activities in which people engage (Fidler & Fidler, 1978; Hammell, 2004). Doing is described as the way people learn about their potential and limitations and develop a sense of competence and intrinsic worth (Fidler & Fidler, 1978). It is how people express themselves and achieve gratification (Fidler & Fidler, 1978) and it provides structure to people's lives (Hammell, 2004). Wilcock (1998) notes that doing, as a foundation of social interaction and community, creates and shapes society and culture (Wilcock, 1998). Patterns of doing and opportunities for doing are in turn influenced by society and culture, which attributes differential value to types and ways of doing, such that there is reciprocal influence between these. The way ecological, direct marketing farmers "do" their farming is anticipated to reflect values and ideals associated with awareness and value on environmental sensitivity and stewardship and social connections.

Descriptions of the experience of "being" draw on philosophical and psychological theories (Wilcock, 1998) as well as qualitative research into the experience of occupation (e.g. Hammell, 2009; Rebeiro et al., 2001; Wilding, May, & Muir-Cochrane, 2005). Being is a much less quantifiable and observable quality than doing, referring to the experience of existing. Wilcock (1998) emphasises the qualities of being true to our essential nature and being able to bring these qualities to our relationships and our doing.

Hammell (2004) emphasises self-awareness and self-discovery as well as the restorative qualities of this dimension of experience (Hammell, 2009). The experience of being is not necessarily associated with goal-oriented or purposeful engagement (Hammell, 2009) but rather emphasises the satisfying experience of simply being. The self acceptance associated with being is fundamental and prerequisite to engaging in more active and inter-active forms of occupation (Rebeiro et al., 2001). In relation to the current study, farming is a career that allows people to “be” in the world in a different way from urban dwellers and typical office or factory workers. These farmers are anticipated to offer insight into ways of “being” in the world that reflect awareness of connection to the natural world.

Along with being, a sense of “belonging” is fundamental to human survival and critical for psycho-socio-emotional development. Having one’s true self be recognised, acknowledged, validated, accepted, and embraced provides the secure base from which infants and toddlers begin to develop a sense of competence as they explore their environments and their capabilities (Jonsson & Clinton, 2006), the foundation that provides confidence throughout the lifespan for taking risks and trying new things (Betz-Zall, 2006; McKanan, 2006), and the foundation for gaining or regaining a sense of oneself as competent, capable, and with potential to contribute when recovering from mental illness (Rebeiro et al, 2001; Strong, 1998). Social connectedness and the occupations associated with building social networks are powerful protective and health promoting factors (Bruhn & Wolf in Gladwell, 2008). Throughout much of history, an intimate connection to and sense of belonging to place and the natural environment has also been critical to survival as all of the necessities of life were procured from the

immediate natural environment which one's group inhabited. Communities, social groupings, and day to day cultural lifestyle habits were largely shaped by features and characteristics of the natural environment such as climate and geography such that human survival occupations evolved to be in harmony with the surrounding natural ecosystems (Bassett, Blanc-Pamard & Boutrais, 2007; Petrini, 2005; Trichopolou, Soukara & Vasilopoulou, 2007; Wilcock, 2006). Belonging is central to this writer's conceptualisation of occupation and occupational ecology. The form of people's engagement in occupation and development as occupational beings arises out of interdependent relationships with other people and the world around us. Farmers in this study are anticipated to experience an awareness of being embedded in the natural world and are anticipated to offer insight into the way occupation shapes and is shaped by interdependence among people and between people and the natural world.

Finally, the dimension of "becoming" prompts us to consider the constant processes of change and growth in our lives (Hammell, 2004; Wilcock, 1998), adding a future dimension to our being. Hope is an essential component of becoming, which refers to the experience of envisioning future selves and possibilities (Hammell, 2004). In this study, the way these farmers have experienced their farming occupations and their interactions with consumers and with the natural world as transformative will be explored. How has farming shaped their development? How has working in the natural world shaped and developed their sense of their place in the world?

These categories are emerging from and have been applied largely to populations defined by medical conditions. As occupational science concepts reportedly have

applicability beyond the context of health care service provision, there is a need to explore the usefulness of this framework with populations not defined by medical diagnoses. Understanding the experience and meaning of occupation for farmers, who link urban dwelling eaters to the natural world as the source of sustenance, can inform an understanding of how occupation connects us to each other and the world around us through a web of inter-dependent relationships. In particular, analysing occupational experiences independent of a medical framework may more readily encourage insight into social and political structures that influence health through differential selection of different forms of occupation.

Political and Justice Perspectives

Townsend and Wilcock (2004) argue that occupational therapy “exists as a profession to address occupational injustices”(p. 83) – although the primary populations of concern have been those whose barriers to engagement and participation have been associated with medical conditions – and encourage more explicitly embracing this professional foundation. With a more established history in other parts of the world (Pollard, Kronenberg, & Sakellariou, 2008), political and justice orientations are increasingly making their way into the more dominant English-speaking occupational therapy and occupational science dialogues (Kronenberg, Pollard, & Sakellariou, 2011; Kronenberg, Simo-Algado & Pollard, 2005; Pollard, Sakellariou, & Kronenberg, 2008) and occupational therapists are becoming involved in working with populations who experience occupational injustice as a result of social, political, and economic barriers.

Farming, food production, and food choices are intensely political (Imhoff & Baumgartner, 2006; Salatin, 2007) and, despite growing popular interest in the concept of local food, community based ecological farmers remain a severely endangered group (Berry, 1995). Community based ecological farmers have become an endangered species as a direct result of government policies and legislation, largely influenced by advocacy from food industry magnates and directly favouring corporate interests. The rural infrastructure upon which this style of farming relies has been dismantled by legislation and interpretation of policies that force small operators out of business and by the inefficiencies and inconsistencies fostered by a cumbersome system of bureaucratic oversight (Salatin, 2007).

This marginalisation is not purely the result of a natural progression within the farming industry but is rather

the successful outcome of a national purpose and national program. It is the result of great effort and of principles rigorously applied. It has been achieved with the help of expensive advice from university and government experts, by the tireless agitation and exertion of the agribusiness corporations... (Berry, 1995, p. 9).

The experience of these farmers then has potential to contribute useful insights to the creation of conditions of occupational injustice through political structures and to illuminate the presence of such injustices in western societies, which are generally assumed to be free from repressive political regimes.

Occupational Ecology

Throughout much of history, people and their occupations have existed as integrated with the surrounding natural environments in such a way that people, their

occupations, and natural ecosystems co-evolved symbiotically as a whole (Berard & Marchenay, 2006). Specialty cheeses for instance, rely on a combination of cows (or other lactating ruminants) bred for the specific micro-climate and vegetative conditions of a region, micro-organisms native to that region's flora, the particular conditions of the maturing process – which may be in caves or built structures – and the human practices of handling and processing the milk (Berard & Marchenay, 2006). Cheese making is an example of how a particular way of doing evolved in direct association with the conditions of a particular place over time. Terraced farming on steep mountainsides in Magoumaz, Northern Cameroon is another example of the symbiotic relationship among natural ecosystems and people's occupation (Basset, Blanc-Pamard, & Boutrais, 2007). In this case, the terracing illustrates how human occupation adapted to harmonize with the conditions of the landscape and in turn, shaped the landscape. In both examples, the doing is shaped by the conditions of the place and the doing, in turn shapes the place. Both doing and place evolve together over time.

It is only in the last several hundred years that humans and their occupations have been decoupled from natural environments and natural seasonal rhythms. The results of this decoupling have been environmental degradation at an alarming pace along with major negative health impacts (Wilcock, 2006) such that the current generation of Americans is anticipated to be the first with a shorter, rather than longer, life expectancy than its predecessor (Pollan, 2006).

Although technological advancement has afforded us a measure of comfort and protection from natural conditions, it has also served to alienate us from our occupations,

from our occupational natures, from the natural environment, and from each other (Berry, 2009; Persson & Erlandsson, 2002; Wilcock, 2006). In farming in particular, mechanisation has directly contributed to a shift in perspective from “husbandry” to “production”, alienating farmers from their natural position within the incomprehensibly complex natural rhythms, cycles, and systems of their farms and contributing to the destruction of once thriving farming communities (Berry, 2009). Technological and economic “development” has contributed to modern lifestyles characterised by separation and isolation “in which families and workers engage almost entirely in formal market transactions bereft of any social or cultural meaning” (Lyson, 2004, p. 12). The alienating qualities of modern lifestyles are particularly glaring when we consider the impact on traditional cultures and societies whose encounters with modern lifestyles have happened much more abruptly, such as the First Nations and Inuit (Thibeault, 2002). Regaining a sense of our place in and reliance on the natural environment will be critical to addressing the environmental impact of human occupation and modifying patterns of occupation to return these to a more balanced and healthful state (Louv, 2008; 2012).

A number of authors have contributed to the dialogue about how people relate to the natural world through occupation. Simo Algado and Cardona (2005) argue that “western societies, based on economic values imposed by capitalism” (p. 338) have lost sight of the sacred reality of life and the sacred inter-connectedness of all forms of life including people with the natural environment that surrounds them. They propose that occupation serves as the dialogue between human beings and the environment and they identify a need for this dialogue to be characterised by “veneration and respect” (p. 346). These authors define the term “occupational ecology” as “awareness of the ecological

genocide we are confronting, along with proactive measures, through human occupation, to restore the balance with the natural environment” (p. 346).

A number of authors have contributed to the discussion of the ecological considerations associated with occupation. Wilcock (2006) described the occupation-focused, eco-sustainable community development model as an approach for

the promotion of ecologically sustainable policies and community-wide action to maintain or re-establish healthy relationships between people, human societies, other living organisms, and their environments, habits, and modes of life through community consultation, deliberation, resource management, development, and participation in health-giving and ecologically sustainable occupations (p. 226).

This approach is an effort to provide a model for developing communities with more ecologically sustainable patterns of engagement and development.

Persson and Erlandsson (2002) note that “material wealth in many post-industrial countries has long since gone beyond the boundary of what is required for a good life [and] many people sense that their lifestyle is meaningless and health compromising” (p. 97). They argue that applying a paradigm of machine ethics to the world and to people has led to a world population at risk of self-destruction. Relating to the world as if to a machine emphasises control and manipulation and leads to competition and aggression. Applying the machine paradigm to people has led people to be pressured to act like machines: to maximise efficiency by doing multiple tasks simultaneously and to eschew rest time; to forgo natural rhythms of productive, active, restful, and social occupations that have long been associated with health (Wilcock, 2006). These authors discuss a contrasting eco-ethical framework in which the world is conceived as a sanctuary. This framework echoes the values expressed by Simo-Algado and Cardona, above, suggesting

that people are meant to relate to this sanctuary with reverence and responsibility and to “live simply so that others also can live” (p. 97).

Hudson and Aoyama (2008) make the connection between ecological endangerment and patterns of occupation. Forms and patterns of occupation are integrally linked to natural environments and both are endangered by modern lifestyle trends. These authors note that

bringing an occupational perspective to the problem of [environmental] conservation also raises the question of the extent to which human occupations should themselves be subject to conservation measures. Many traditional human occupations are disappearing before their role in the maintenance of human health and wellbeing has been fully documented.” (p. 546).

Key concepts presented by these authors include human occupation, inter-human and inter-species communities, ecological sensitivity, a stance of reverence and respect toward the natural world, sustainability, and harmonious equilibrium. In essence, these authors are arguing for humans to recognise their place within natural ecosystems and to consider and develop patterns of occupational engagement that restore harmony and balance to ecological systems and the humans within them. This would necessarily involve greater differentiation of occupational patterns among geographic regions to develop patterns of engagement that are in harmony with environments on local levels.

“Food is that common denominator we all share, a deep daily connection with the earth” (Baumgartner, 2006, p. 113). No simple occupation is more basic to survival than eating and therefore no complex occupation can be more basic to the survival of individuals, groups, communities, and the human population than food procurement. Food procurement, whether by hunting and gathering or through agriculture, inescapably

grounds us in the soil and in natural cycles of degeneration and regeneration. Agriculture is an occupation in which humans, their communities and occupations, and the natural environment can be directly linked and in which the interdependence of these can be made evident. Patterns of occupation related to food cultivation, procurement, preparation, and consumption have the potential to promote both human population and environmental health or to destroy both. There is growing interest in the development of small scale, local food systems that serve to re-establish connections among farmers, their occupations, the natural environment, and consumers (Elton, 2010; Halweil, 2004; Kingsolver, 2007; Lyson, 2004; McIlvaine,-Newsad, et al., 2008; Petrini, 2005; Smith & MacKinnon, 2007; Smithers, Lamarche & Joseph, 2008; Trauger, Sachs, Barbercheck, Brasier & Kiernan, 2010) and in supporting local agricultural initiatives (Berard & Marchenay, 2006). Agriculture is an occupation that warrants far greater attention from a discipline with a longstanding interest in the health impacts of human occupation and a nascent interest in the relationships among health, occupation, and the natural world because these occupations have such direct impact on human population health.

Transactional Perspectives on Occupation and Environment

Although all of the major models of occupation and occupational performance have included the performance environment in some fashion (Letts, Rigby, & Stewart, 2003; Townsend & Polatajko, 2007), the reductionist perspective that underlies these models has been the focus of criticism (Dickie et al., 2006; Iwama, 2005). Iwama (2005) argues these models do not capture the holistic worldview more typical of collective societies. Dickie et al. (2006) also identify the individualistic orientation of western models as

problematic, arguing that these have been insufficient to capture the interdependence and co-evolution among person, environment, and occupation on an individual level but also on a more collective, cultural level.

A transactional perspective implies a holistic orientation in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Indeed, in attempting to consider the parts separately from the whole, the parts lose their meaning; the character of the elements is fundamentally altered when viewed in isolation. In relation to occupation, Yerxa (2009) quotes Diamond's statement that "studying occupation without studying its context is like trying to understand human evolution without considering the impact of the environments in which it unfolded". An individual's experience of occupation is inseparable from the socio-temporal context in which that participation has evolved. Dickie et al (2006) argue for a focus on occupation as the transactional relation that unites and connects space, time, place, and living organisms. "The transactional view means that what we would typically see as separate from each other are really *part of each other*" (Dickie et al., 2006, p. 88, italics in original). These authors acknowledge that thinking about the full complexity of one's experience of and place in the world is difficult to grasp. English is a particularly awkward linguistic tool for shaping thinking and communicating about reality as a constant ebb and flow of interconnected energy and potential rather than a static, defined state (Ross, 1996).

An example of this complexity is articulated by Rowles (1991) who studied the experience of "being in place" among the young old and the old-old in a small rural Appalachian village. In his studies, people experienced an intimate connection with their

homes, their village, and the surrounding area. Rowles described the environment as an individual's lifeworld: "the culturally defined spatiotemporal setting or horizon of everyday life" (p. 266). Participants had developed an implicit awareness of their physical contexts that allowed them to negotiate space on a preconscious level. Through years of interacting with the environment and experiencing life in the same environment, the environment had become "a repository of meaning, a part of the self that is inextricably linked to self-identity" (p. 269). Rowles acknowledged the limitations of the conclusions he drew about the importance of "being in place" to identity and occupational patterns given that his sample was a small group in a particular location and may have been subject to cohort effects (Rowles, 1983). However, he proposed "a direct relationship between attachment to place and well-being" (p. 299) and with a bit of occupational imagination, one can quickly begin to conjecture about how, through occupation, and through spatio-temporal dimensions, "place and person become fused; each becomes an expression of the other" (Rowles, 1983, p. 307).

Farmers and Local Food Movements

Modern agriculture is based on industrial principles of mass-production (Lyson, 2004) and is a major contributor to social inequality and disadvantage, physical ill-health, and environmental damage (Lyson, 2004; Manning, 2006; Pretty, 2002). Industrial agriculture relies on divorcing production from the traditional social and communal networks in which farmers evolved (Lyson, 2004) and contributes to food insecurity by concentrating control over everybody's food resources in the hands of a fraction of individuals representing the interests of the most privileged classes of society (Lyson,

2004). With corporatisation and vertical integration comes increased farm size, increased prevalence of absentee landlords, and increased contract farming where farmers depend on contracts with multinational food processors. The result is that “we are faced with people who live on a production line” (Petrini, 2005, p. 170), having “no respect for [themselves] and for the role [they] might have as a producer of food” (Petrini, 2005, p. 171). Consumers are disconnected from producers who are themselves alienated from their labour and their role in production.

Petrini (2005) states that “agricultural production in many parts of the world is indistinguishable from industrial production before the advent of trade unions” (p. 136). The costs of pesticide production and use are difficult to quantify because they are so variable and because exposure is so widespread (Pretty, 2002, p. 59). The use of antibiotics in industrial livestock enterprises for prophylaxis and growth promotion is a major contributor to the development of antibiotic resistant bacterial strains, which leads to “the dire prospect of revisiting the pre-antibiotic era” (Pretty, 2002, p.65).

In addition to direct effects associated with industrial agricultural practices, indirect outcomes of this system are also life-threatening. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) (WHO, 2010), chronic lifestyle-related diseases are the leading cause of death and disability worldwide. Ironically, food has become “a major source of ill-health” (Pretty, 2002, p. 63). Food processors are not public health agents; they are corporations governed by boards of directors whose responsibility is to maximise profits for shareholders. As a result, these corporations actively and aggressively promote the fatty snack foods, sugar cereals, high processed “convenience” “foods”, and caffeinated

high sugar beverages that contribute to the epidemic of food and lifestyle related chronic diseases because they are a huge source of profit (Lyson, 2004).

Finally, the standardisation and homogenisation that characterise industrial agriculture are fundamentally incompatible with the diversity and interdependence on which natural eco-systems rely. Industrial agriculture is associated with a host of negative externalities including damage to the atmosphere, to water systems, to biodiversity and landscapes, to soil, and to human health. Efforts to quantify these in economic terms have led to estimates (in UK pounds) of almost 1.5 billion in the UK and nearly 13 billion for the US (Pretty, 2002). Although natural disasters such as earthquakes are not themselves man-made, often the scope and scale of devastation resulting from such natural disasters can be attributed to human activity. For instance, the scale of devastation following the tsunami in the Indian Ocean was largely the result of damage to coastal ecosystems resulting from human construction and agro-industrial activity (Petrini, 2005). The industrial system of agriculture, tied closely to neoclassical economics (Lyson, 2004) is a system that does not recognise social and environmental limits, without which free market capitalism will “destroy the very basis of the economy itself” (Barham, 2003, p. 130).

In contrast, alternative models of agriculture strive for a more holistic vision that includes the goals of making people healthier, promoting social justice, and preserving natural networks of life (Pretty 2002). Alternative models are characterised by striving for a net positive effect on natural, social, and human capital (Pretty, 2002). Alternative agricultural movements are described by a variety of terms including: *sustainable*

agriculture which is defined as “farming that makes the best use of nature’s goods and services while not damaging the environment” (Pretty, 2002, p. 56) and is based on principles of integrating natural processes, minimising the use of non-renewable inputs, and fostering self-reliance of farmers and communities; *civic agriculture* which emphasises the role of agricultural enterprises in contributing to the health and vitality of communities and is defined as “the embedding of local agricultural and food production in the community” (Lyson, 2004, p. 62); and principles of the *Slow Food* movement which advocates that our food supply should be good, clean, and fair, incorporating principles of taste and pleasure, ecological soundness, and justice (Petrini, 2005). Alternative agricultural movements are characterised overall by emphasising the interdependent relationships between people and the natural environment through their patterns of food cultivation, preparation, and consumption (Petrini, 2005; Pretty, 2002). Humans are recognised as being part of the natural ecosystems that produce our food, rather than separate from these (Pretty, 2002).

Food-related occupations, including eating, food preparation, and food production are inarguably the most basic and universal sustenance occupations and occupations associated with food are a critical and powerful symbol of culture, tradition, history, and identity (Trichopolou, et al., 2007). Farmers who use ecological methods and engage in marketing directly to the end consumer recognise the multi-functionality of agriculture and strive to reforge connections between eaters and the sources of their food. Their role contributes to the overall well being, economic stability, and civic engagement of their communities (Lyson, 2002). These small farms contribute to bio-diversity of plants, animals, culture, and traditions; more responsible land use; self-empowerment and

community responsibility; building connections across generations and between people and the earth (McIlvaine-Newsad, et al., 2008; Rosset, 2000). Small family farms are an important cultural symbol and values associated with private ownership and intergenerational transfer of land and knowledge is associated with more responsible land stewardship (Andreatta & Wickliffe, 2002) and continuity of identity (Neumann, Krahn, Krogman & Thomas, 2007).

Summary

The farmers of interest in this study represent a group whose self-sustaining occupations involve direct interaction and connection with the natural environment and are explicitly and purposefully cultivated in the context of inter-dependent human and inter-species relationships. This group serves as a link between the natural environment and urban dwellers, who typically have less day to day direct interaction with the natural environment and whose economic sustenance is derived from occupations that typically are not based on direct interactions with the natural environment. As such, farmers may be the most direct link that most urban dwellers have to the natural environment as the ultimate source of the basic necessities of life. The farmers of interest in this study serve as a fertile group for adding depth to occupational science concepts of doing, being, belonging, and becoming, and occupational ecology; contributing to the political and justice dialogue streams by exploring how the socio-political context shapes and selects for different patterns and forms of occupational engagement; and raising consciousness of our inescapable embeddedness as part of the natural world.

This research has potential to inform the development of emerging frameworks and theoretical constructs in occupational science. In particular, this research addresses gaps in the framework of experiences of occupation, which is largely based on populations defined by medical conditions. As occupational science purports to be broadly concerned with human occupation, it is important to explore the usefulness of this framework with populations not defined by medical diagnoses. Occupational justice is an emerging theoretical construct that has largely focused on defining forms of occupational injustice experienced by particular identifiable groups recognised to be subject to discrimination. Exploring the experiences of these farmers will contribute a perspective on issues of justice associated with forms of occupation rather than a particular population and potentially highlight the impact of this discrimination on the broader society. Occupational ecology is a novel concept in occupational science. Some writers have explored occupation as part of the landscape (Hudson & Aoyama, 2011) but there is minimal research about the lived experience of ecologically based occupations. This research contributes to understanding the nature of the dialogue between occupation and the environment.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Purpose and Questions

This research explored the experience of being an ecological, direct-marketing farmer as a vehicle for exploring the experience of being occupied in dialogue with the natural world. Farmers using alternative agricultural practices demonstrate sensitivity to the impact of human occupations on the environment and the reciprocal influence of the environment on shaping occupation. Occupations include all the ways people occupy themselves, their time, and their lives. Studying the experience of those whose primary productive occupation is embedded in the natural world can inform our understanding of how human occupation shapes and is shaped by the natural environment and how it contributes to the formation of interdependent relationships among people and their surroundings.

The study was guided by the research question: *What is the lived experience of occupation among farmers who employ ecological and direct marketing practices?* The investigation was organized around the following subquestions:

1. How do ecological farmers describe what they do in relation to their farming (doing)?
2. How do farmers describe the meaning of what they do (being)?
3. How do farmers describe their evolution as farmers and through farming (becoming)?
4. How do farmers experience connection – to other farmers, non-farmers (consumers), and the natural environment (belonging)?

Phenomenology

The study conducted was a phenomenological investigation of the lived experience of organic direct marketing farmers. As such, this research was inherently grounded in a qualitative, interpretive paradigm in which people are recognised as actively engaged in meaning making and in which the purpose of research is to describe how people construct social meaning (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002). This paradigm holds that an individual's experience of reality is subjectively created, and phenomena are best understood in context rather than in isolation (Krauss, 2005). Phenomenology is the "systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meanings of lived experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 10). It is an appropriate choice of design when the goal of the inquiry is to describe meanings and experiences as lived in our everyday existence (van Manen, 1990) and thus suits the purpose of this study.

More specifically, this research was influenced by the branch of phenomenology known as "hermeneutic phenomenology", which is associated with the work of Heidegger. In contrast to more classical phenomenology, which emphasises pure description of experience, this branch of phenomenology emphasises the quality of "being in the world", holding that the result of phenomenological inquiry is the revelation of experience in context; as our activities and experiences are always "in the world", we cannot separate ourselves from this context (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP), 2008). Given that this investigation was particularly interested in farmers' experiences in the context of interacting with their farms, their customers, and the broader community, the philosophical underpinnings of this branch of phenomenology were most appropriately suited to support the aims of the study.

Consistent with phenomenological inquiry, data collection in this study consisted of multiple interviews with multiple informants. Purposeful selection was used in order to ensure that participants would be able to provide appropriate and meaningful information to respond to the research question and to provide adequate depth (Fossey et al., 2002). Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and analysis was conducted following the methods outlined by Moustakas (1994). Further details pertaining to recruitment, data collection, and data analysis are provided in the following sections.

Phenomenology is primarily a descriptive methodology, meaning that there is no effort toward explanation or theoretical development, although hermeneutic phenomenology includes both descriptions and interpretation (Creswell, 2007), based on the argument that description is ultimately interpretive (van Manen, 1990). The descriptive nature of phenomenology is reflected in the use of naive descriptions of experience as basic data, the description of structures of experience, and the presentation of findings in a descriptive manner (Finlay, 1999). This combination of philosophical orientation to a goal of describing subjective experiences of meaning in context is consistent with this research's purpose of developing an understanding of the everyday experience of occupation among ecologically conscious, direct marketing farmers.

Subjectivity Statement. In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary tool of data collection and thus has considerable influence over the quality and form of data collected. Personal commitment, investment, and interest in the topic are strengths for researchers using phenomenology (van Manen, 1990). Qualitative research is inherently subjective in the sense that the researcher must be “as perceptive, insightful, and discerning as one can be” and means that the researcher is strongly oriented to the

phenomenon under investigation “*in a unique and personal way*” (van Manen, 1990, p. 20, italics in original). Van Manen (1990) further advises using one’s own personal experience as a starting point for phenomenological research in the hermeneutic tradition as these are readily accessible and can provide “clues for orienting oneself to the phenomenon” (p. 57).

The researcher does not have a farming background but has had increasing involvement with local farmers and the local food movement. Prior to conducting interviews, the researcher participated in an internship on a rustic, pioneer style, biodynamic farm north of the city. This experience was documented through journal writing, thus serving as a reflective exercise helping the researcher to develop insight into and clarify her own preconceptions or presuppositions regarding the phenomenon under investigation. In phenomenological reduction, this is known as the “*epoche*” in which the researcher is meant to “*bracket*” or set aside biases. Journal writing was semi-structured as the researcher prompted herself with questions such as “What was unexpected about this experience?” or “What surprised me about this experience?” This experience served to aid the author in gaining entry to the farming community, which later facilitated recruitment and informed the interviewing process.

The researcher prepared a personal statement exploring her vantage in relation to this topic (see Appendix A) some of which is summarised here. Regarding the researcher’s stance towards eco-farming, she acknowledges being strongly in support of this approach to farming. The researcher believes that small scale, diversified, ecologically sensitive farming is critical for environmental stewardship and an important

contributor to strong and stable communities, and that these are worthy ends for which to strive.

Regarding the focus of this research, the researcher has observed that this kind of farming offers opportunities for occupational engagement that enhances individual and community health. The researcher anticipated that sensitivity to and awareness of the impact of farmers' productive work on the natural world would feature more prominently in their consciousness than it does in the everyday dialogue of non-farmers. The researcher hoped to find information that would inform occupational science concepts such as doing, being, belonging, and becoming, occupational ecology, and occupational justice.

Recruitment

Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research in order to ensure that participants have experience that allows them to provide the information necessary to answer the research question (Creswell, 2007). Creswell further indicates that criterion sampling is essential in a phenomenological study; all participants must have experience of the phenomenon being investigated and thus participants should be chosen on this basis. In this study, participants were recruited purposefully from among two registries of local farmers. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed in order to identify characteristics of farmers with the experience necessary to inform the research question.

Participants were recruited from the local farmers market registry and the local food locator (<http://www.fooddowntheroad.ca/online/locator.php>) managed by Food Down the Road, an initiative of the local branch of the National Farmer's Union (NFU) (NFU,

n.d.b). Three key criteria guided selection of participants. Firstly, farmers who use “ecological farming practices” were conjectured to reflect a greater sensitivity to the ways in which the farming occupations interact with and are embedded in the natural environment. Secondly, participants were selected on the basis of participating in “local” markets, and thirdly, on the basis of “direct marketing” practices. These criteria are detailed below.

Ecological farming practices.

The National Farmers Union Branch 316 Local Food Locator lists farms according to their methods of production. Farms are classified as (a) conventional, (b) non-certified organic – meaning that farmers report avoiding using chemical and synthetic products but they are not certified by governing bodies; (c) certified organic – meaning that farms meet criteria to be certified as organic; and (d) biodynamic. Biodynamic farms exceed organic criteria by not only avoiding the use of synthetic and chemical products but also using a system of biodynamic preparations to enhance soil and crop quality. Biodynamic methods meet the criteria for organic certification but organic methods do not meet the criteria for biodynamic certification. For the purposes of this study, certified or non-certified organic and biodynamic farms were considered as these farms are most likely to be based on values that incorporate concern for the impact of human activity on the environment. Farmers who use organic or biodynamic methods, whether certified or not, were invited to participate in this study.

Local.

This study was centred on the community of Kingston, Ontario. Kingston is a medium sized city with a population of just under 120 000 people (Planning and

development, City of Kingston, 2008) located on the north shore of Lake Ontario. The economy is dominated by government services including universities and colleges, hospitals, and prisons, as well as manufacturing industries. Kingston has an active local food community supported by the historic farmer's market in the downtown core as well as initiatives of the National Farmer's Union (NFU) branch 316. The NFU is active in promoting a variety of local food initiatives including Food Down the Road and the New Farm Project (NFU, n.d.a; NFU, n.d.b). The 100 kilometre radius is a loose but generally accepted guideline for defining a food source as local (Smith & MacKinnon, 2007). All but one of the farms listed in the Food Down the Road local food locator (NFU, n.d.b) are within 100 kilometres of Kingston and the one outlier is within 150 kilometres. All farms on this listing and those included on the Kingston Farmer's Market Registry were included for recruitment.

Direct marketing.

Direct marketing methods included in the local food locator include farmers market stands, farm-gate sales (including u-pick), and community supported agriculture (CSA) memberships. Farmers who use any one or any combination of these practices were included in recruitment efforts for this study. Many farmers employ multiple marketing methods. For instance, many of the farmers who operate stands at the Farmer's Market, also offer CSA shares, such that these categories are not mutually exclusive or independent of each other. Farmers were recruited so long as direct marketing was a prominent part of the marketing even if they also distributed their products through re-sellers or other intermediaries. Inclusion and exclusion criteria are listed in Table 1, below.

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Participants

Inclusion	Exclusion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farms listed on the Food Down the Road Local Food Locator or the Kingston Farmer’s Market Website • Classified by Local Food Locator or on the Kingston Farmer’s Market website as non-certified organic, certified organic, or biodynamic • Engage in some form of direct marketing such as attending the farmer’s market, running a CSA, u-pick, farm stand • Primarily engaged in selling food that they have directly cultivated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classified by Local Food Locator or Kingston Farmer’s Market website as using conventional farming practices • Primarily supplies another distributor • Secondary suppliers, distributors • Sellers of primarily value-added products using primary ingredients sourced from other distributors

A total of 28 farms listed on the Local Food Locator and the Kingston Farmers’ Market website met the inclusion criteria. Letters containing information about the study and an invitation to contact the researcher for additional information were sent to each of these farms. Upon contacting the researcher, farmers were able to discuss any questions further and volunteer to be interviewed.

DePoy and Gitlin (2005) suggest recruiting 5-10 participants when the purpose of the research is to explore an experience shared amongst individuals within a bounded

geographical region. In qualitative research, the number of participants is secondary in importance to the depth and quality of data (DePoy & Gitlin, 2005; Fossey et al., 2002). The number of participants needed to provide adequate depth and breadth of information will be determined by the aims of the particular study (Fossey et al., 2002) and by the boundaries of a particular study (DePoy & Gitlin, 2005). It was anticipated that adequate depth and breadth of information to provide sufficient data could be gathered from multiple interviews with 3-5 participants.

Following the first mail-out, 7 farmers contacted the researcher and volunteered to participate. All volunteers were accepted in anticipation of the possibility of attrition. All respondents met all three of the inclusion criteria and represented a variety of products and direct marketing methods. The majority are active in social and political farming interest and advocacy groups and thus were well informed about and well practiced at providing insight into the meaning of ecological, direct marketing farming practices.

Data Collection

Consistent with the privileging of participants' subjective experiences, interviewing is the primary method of data collection in phenomenology (Creswell, 2007; Fossey et al., 2002); the only way to access an individual's subjective experience of meaning is to elicit that person's description of it. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were used to gather experiential material that provided an insider perspective of the subjective experience of being a farmer as well as to explore with interviewees the meaning of their experience (van Manen, 1990). Qualitative research is an exercise in meaning making

(Krauss, 2005) and “experiencing starts to make sense as the person performs his or her psychological functioning of translating it into how he or she thinks and feels” (p. 763). As the interviewer guided respondents through describing their thoughts and feelings about their experiences, respondents engaged in meaning making, providing the data needed to inform the research question.

An interview guide was developed by the researcher (see Appendix B) to ensure that all important topic areas would be covered in the course of the in-depth, semi-structured interviews, while allowing the interviewer to follow the participants’ conversational lead. The interview guide “provides topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject” (Patton, 2001, p. 343). In this case, the interview guide prompted the researcher to elicit examples of concrete experience (Creswell, 2007) in the form of stories, anecdotes, and examples of experience that would provide an understanding of the lived experience of farmers. A comfortable conversational style was achieved (Patton, 2001) by adapting the presentation of questions to each respondent’s individual style and circumstances (Krueger, 1994; Laliberte-Rudman & Moll, 2001) in response to participants’ conversational leads.

Initially, farmers were asked to participate in up to 4 interviews, of anticipated duration between 1-2 hours. The interview guide was based on Seidman’s (2006) three-interview series in which the first interview focuses on developing a focused life history, the second focuses on the details of the experience under investigation, and the third on reflections of meaning. The possibility of a fourth interview was included to allow for follow up clarification as data analysis progressed. The use of multiple interviews over

time contributes to the quality of the data, giving the researcher the opportunity to observe the interview responses for internal consistency (Seidman, 2006), to explore experience in greater depth, and opportunities to clarify meaning.

As the research was under way, the interview protocol was modified to include only two interviews. This was done partly to keep the scale of the project manageable within the boundaries of the master's thesis expectations but largely because with the greater number of respondents, an adequate depth of information was achieved from two interviews. The first interview was used to gather background information about the interviewee's experience of farming and a description of their current farming experiences. The second interview was used to follow up and probe in greater depth into areas discussed in the first interview and to prompt reflections of meaning. The initial interview guide was modified to reflect the two interview structure (see appendix B). Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by a transcriptionist in order to produce a written record for the researcher's reference.

Interviews were scheduled at intervals convenient to both the farmer-participant and the researcher. Interviewing was conducted between November and March, as farmers would not have been available during the growing season. The shortest span of time between interviews was one week and the longest was almost 6 months. Ideally, interviews would have been scheduled approximately two weeks apart but the reality of coordinating schedules resulted in variation in the time frame. Interviews were approximately two hours in length. Two interviews were conducted in interview rooms at a local library while the remaining interviews were conducted in farmers' homes. In some cases, tea or food was offered and out of respect for the farmers' hospitality, the

researcher accepted. At times, members of the farmers' families or other guests were present during parts of the interviews.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in phenomenology, as in any interpretive methodology, is an inductive, reflective process that runs throughout the investigation. An appropriate phenomenological stance or attitude is maintained throughout the process in order to approach the data with fresh eyes and allow the essence of the phenomenon to reveal itself. Throughout conducting the interviews, the researcher recorded impressions from each interview immediately following its completion. Prior to the second interview, the researcher listened to the recording of the first interview and made follow up notes and questions.

Once the recordings were transcribed, the researcher read over each transcript while listening to the audio recordings in order to ensure accuracy, to correct any transcription errors and to become intimately familiar with the data. As the researcher reviewed the completed transcripts, she made notes about impressions and thoughts that arose, including connections to her own farming related experiences. These were recorded in a notebook and discussed periodically with the research supervisors. This process of reflecting on and developing insight and awareness of one's own preconceptions related to a topic is known in phenomenology as *epoche* (Moustakas (1994)). In hermeneutic phenomenology, there is recognition that the researcher cannot avoid being influenced by previous knowledge and life experiences (Finlay, 1999). As a result, the purpose of the *epoche* and bracketing becomes clarifying and developing awareness into the context

from which the researcher approaches the data in order to make these influences more transparent.

Finlay (1999) advocates initially applying analysis to the experiences of individuals and subsequently proceeding to a synthesis of these in order to develop an analysis of the general phenomenon. This is consistent with Moustakas's (1994) method, in which the reduction is applied initially to pieces of the lived experience records collected, followed by a synthesis of meanings and essences. Accordingly, in this study, phenomenological reduction was conducted with each individual farmer's transcripts prior to the integration and synthesis of themes arising from this analysis.

The researcher read over each farmer's set of transcripts multiple times with different purposes. Initially, the researcher read over the transcripts, making notes and highlighting passages of interest in order to develop a general, holistic impression of the participants overall experience. On a second reading, the researcher read through the transcript with a view to identifying categories of information to develop an outline upon which to base a narrative type account as described by Seidman (2006). The researcher read through the transcripts a third time and copied significant passages in order to have a collection of quotes and significant passages related to emerging themes. On an additional reading, the researcher labelled sections and passages according to the outline developed in a previous reading.

Reading through the transcripts multiple times with a different purpose each time supported the process of horizontalizing (Moustakas, 1994), providing a structure for the researcher to bring a fresh perspective to each reading. From the initial reading arose

general impressions of the overall significance of the lived experience account. From subsequent readings emerged important themes and a textural description of each farmer's lived experience.

Next, these passages were compiled, organised, and edited to prepare the first person narrative for each participant. Finally, the researcher composed a 1-2 page summary profile using verbatim quote to highlight important themes in each individual farmer's interviews. This served as the textural description of the lived experience of each individual farmer, providing a rich and detailed descriptive record of the essential constituents of the lived experience of each individual farmer, which is the final outcome of the process of phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994). These profiles are included in the research findings.

Although Moustakas (1994) and van Manen (1990) provide step by step guidelines for analysing lived experience accounts, the process is circular rather than linear. Throughout analysing and preparing textural descriptions for each individual farmer's experience, the researcher recorded impressions of themes that arose in interviews with different farmers, asking herself how this farmer's experience related to the accounts previously reviewed. Upon reviewing each new set of transcripts, the researcher reflected on impressions of previous transcripts in light of the most recent one. Aware of her own bias toward idealising and romanticising these farmers and this kind of farming (see researcher subjectivity, Appendix A), the researcher repeatedly questioned herself as to whether she was being true to the data, whether there might be themes that proved inconsistent with her high regard for the population and phenomenon of interest. Notes

and impressions of topics that arose in multiple sets of transcripts were discussed periodically with the research supervisors.

This process of intuitive, imaginative, reflective consideration of the textural descriptions is known as imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994) and was thus embedded throughout the process of data analysis. As a result, upon completing the analysis of individual transcripts, the researcher had compiled notes and impressions of meanings and essences of the lived experience that were common to all farmers and had reflected on and discussed different possible interpretations. From this process, a set of universal or essential themes, which defined the phenomenon of the lived experience of being an ecological, direct marketing farmer (van Manen, 1990) were compiled. The researcher read over each transcript again, matching thematic codes to passages from each transcript. Verbatim quotes were compiled in separate documents for each theme. The use of farmers' accounts of their experience is important as "anecdotes can be understood as a methodological device in human science to make comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us" (van Manen, 1990, p. 116). Descriptive passages were written for each theme, including verbatim quotes to illustrate these, resulting in "a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole" (Moustakas 1994, p. 100). This synthesis "represents the essences at a particular time and place from the vantage point of an individual researcher following an exhaustive imaginative and reflective study of the phenomenon" (p. 100). The conclusion of the iterative process of inspection, reflection, analysis, and synthesis results in a written record of the essential structures that define the lived experience of this group of farmers.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval for the study was obtained from Dalhousie Health Sciences Research Ethics Board. Informed consent was obtained from each farmer prior to beginning the interview. After contacting the researcher and agreeing to be interviewed, farmers were given the option of receiving a copy of the consent form by email or on paper at the first interview. Many farmers opted to receive a copy by email in advance of the first interview. At the first interview, the role of the participant was discussed and farmers were encouraged to ask any questions. Participants were reminded that they were free to withdraw at any time. A copy of the study information and consent form was provided. Farmers were asked to consent to participate in the interview, to have the interview audio recorded, and to have the recording shared with a transcriptionist. After completion of the final interview, participants were asked to consent to have their quotes used in the final project.

Participants were asked to choose an alias and were referred to by this alias in all material beyond the initial consent form. Audio files were maintained in a secure electronic storage location and paper copies were stored securely. The transcriptionist signed a confidentiality waiver.

Although confidentiality was assured, anonymity could not be assured. Given that the local farming community is small and many of the farmers are acquainted with each other, in some cases, identifying the farmers' product makes them identifiable to those familiar with the farming community. While some identifying information can be obscured, identifying the farmers' product is central to their experience of farming and thus cannot be modified. Care and consideration were taken when presenting the results

of the research to consider measures necessary to protect farmers' identities. For future presentation of the results, depending on the audience, additional precautions may be taken such as aggregating descriptions of farmers interviewed in order to avoid including identifying individual characteristics or paraphrasing farmers words to present key ideas rather than including direct quotes that reflect individual characteristics or individual farm characteristics.

Data will be stored securely for 7 years post-publication of research results. Paper data will be stored securely by the researcher. Electronic data will be stored securely by the researcher or the researcher's advisor.

Rigour

Creswell (2007) lists eight verification procedures that can be used to enhance the quality of qualitative research and recommends that at least two of these be employed in any qualitative study. This study made use of four of these strategies: peer review and debriefing, clarifying researcher bias, member checking, and thick description. Firstly, peer review and debriefing serves as an external quality check, in which the researcher is pushed to reflect more deeply on the research process and findings and to justify any process or interpretation decisions. In this case, the researcher's thesis supervisors were enlisted to question and challenge the researcher on methodological and research process issues and analysis. Secondly, clarifying researcher bias is an integrated part of the phenomenological method through the epoche process. At the onset and throughout the study, the researcher recorded personal reflections, developing insight and awareness into preconceptions that influence her approach to the study. Third, this study used member checking, in which data analyses and interpretations are taken back to participants for

feedback about the accuracy and credibility of the account. This serves as an additional check for the researcher's interpretation process. Each farmer was sent a one page textual description of his or her experience as reported in the interviews (included in Chapter 4: Participants), along with a two-page summary of the analysis across all participants, outlining the common themes identified across the experiences reported by all farmers and were asked to respond with any feedback (see appendix C). Two farmers replied with minor corrections to their profiles. These two, plus two more, indicated that they agreed with the overall results. Finally, data analysis and reporting of the results will use thick description, allowing readers to make their own judgments about the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations of the data.

Chapter 4: Participants

Data analysis resulted in textural descriptions of each interviewee's experience of being a farmer along with an overall synthesis of themes common across the experience of all farmers interviewed. The textural descriptions, which are provided below, consist of a brief vignette summarising the farmer's experience in order to give the reader some background context. This is followed by the presentation of the synthesis of themes identified across the experiences of all farmers interviewed. Farmers are referred to using the aliases they chose.

Description of Participants

In total, seven participants were interviewed for this study. Six participants were interviewed twice. One participant was interviewed once because scheduling and time restrictions rendered it impractical to schedule a second interview. This single interview was conducted near the end of data collection and given the data already gathered, adequate depth of information was achieved with a single interview. One more farmer contacted the researcher several months after the mail out but was turned away as sufficient data had already been collected.

Of the seven, six farmers' farms are certified organic and one is non-certified. All live within an hour's drive from Kingston. Five farmers are regular sellers at farmer's markets. One farmer mostly sells directly from his farm but also markets at specialty events. One farmer operates a pick-your-own operation as well as farm gate sales, where customers come to the farm to purchase produce directly. Three of the market farmers also distribute their produce through local retail outlets. Two of the farmers offer shares in a community supported agriculture (CSA) program and a third offers a variation on

CSA membership¹. Two of the farmers have experience with supply-managed commodities (eggs, milk, chickens)². Supply management is intended to ensure a stable supply to meet demand and to ensure fair prices (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs, 2010). Of the seven, four have university degrees, one has a college diploma, and the remaining two have some post-secondary education. The newest farmers had been farming commercially for approximately six years while the more experienced farmers had been farming commercially for upwards of 20 years. The participants are summarized in table 2.

Table 2: Characteristics of Participants

Farmer (Pseudonym)	Style of farming	Type(s) of Direct Marketing
Twister	Certified organic	u-pick, farm gate sales
Jethro	Certified organic	Market stand
Ron Bronson	Certified organic	Market stand, CSA
Jim	Certified organic	Market stand, CSA
Miss Kier	Certified organic	Market stand, CSA type shares,
Rudy	Non-certified organic	Market stand
Steve	Certified organic	Farm gate sales, specialty events

Textural Descriptions

As the outcome of the process of phenomenological reduction, the researcher produced a textural description of the lived experience of each farmer interviewed for this study (Moustakas, 1994). The textural description provides a rich and detailed descriptive record of the essential constituents of the lived experience of each farmer, incorporating verbatim quotes to highlight important themes in the farmer's experience.

Quotes were edited for fluency – removing utterances such as “um”, “uh”, “you know” – and, in some cases, shortened, in order to highlight the significant meaning, while remaining true to the tone and original intended meaning. These summaries are presented in this section to provide a holistic, contextual understanding of each of the research participants which lays the ground work for the themes identified across their experiences.

Jethro. Jethro is a middle aged farmer who has continued to operate the farm his parents started when they immigrated to Canada. The farm has always been operated as a commercial operation and has included chickens, pigs, grain, and hay. Jethro and his wife took over operation of the farm almost 30 years ago and have been direct-marketing farm products for about the last 20 years. Recently, they had been considering scaling back their operation and evaluating which products to discontinue. The decision making process reflected an effort to manage the risks inherent in the uncertainty of farming. He explained “[My wife] one time really wanted to do only the market garden... And my thought was always concerning [the garden], you know, ten minutes of hail and, you know, your annual income is gone.” (Jethro2, p.11) He contrasted this to the relative predictability and consistency of animal husbandry which provides a “soft landing” (Jethro2, p. 18).

Direct marketing has provided important social connections for Jethro and his family – “that’s what I largely enjoy about our existence or what we do is that personal or interpersonal relationship at the market. We’re just social people I guess to some extent. ... I enjoy people” (Jethro1, p.9). Jethro feels a sense of reciprocity in his relationships with customers, finding their appreciation rewarding:

What I find gets a joy or sense of pride is producing food that's going right directly to people that are using it. ... And certainly it's reciprocal, if we were selling it and people were just buying it and going home I wouldn't get the same satisfaction as, you know, people voicing their appreciation (Jethro2, p.20). It makes you feel connected to a community by those types of things (Jethro2, p.4).

Jethro described financial stressors and the “double jeopardy” of financial stress and relationship stress that arises from working with one's spouse. He connected his experience to broader justice issues related to fair compensation for the work and value of good food produced in an environmentally and socially conscious way. In his opinion and experience:

the fraction that the average person spends on food is a pretty good return on investment. ... Debt ... can be crippling and debilitating, certainly as far as a business goes and spiritually too or energy wise ... [that] the income matches expenses would be nice” (Jethro2, p. 26).

He went on to explain:

It's alright to struggle for 20 years or something like that, but you don't want to see anybody do that for the rest of their life either, and there should be some sort of, I want to say reward, it doesn't have to be much of a reward but at least security. ... [Struggling to pay the bills], I mean that's no fun and there's no justice in that either, with all the work and whatnot that's involved” (Jethro2, p. 18).

Jim. Jim is a relatively young and newer farmer, in his early thirties. He began farming about 7 years ago. The farm produces vegetables which are sold mostly through CSA shares and the local farmer's market. Jim described how the farm has evolved as a process of “making it up as you go”, which involved creating a structure to work within, accounting for the time processes associated with development in each new season, as well as an ongoing process of learning from experience.

The business side of the farming operation is balanced by the philosophy of organic agriculture which has at its roots “[the ideals of] soil building, connection with life cycles ... looking at those systems and natural balances ... through a nurturing and kind of caring towards the world.” (Jim 1A, p. 18). Jim’s farming is a way of expressing his political concern for food that is produced in an environmentally conscious way and under fair labour conditions. For Jim, one of the most rewarding things about farming is “having amazing quality food at hand all the time, like summer, winter, there’s always, you know, really great stuff” (Jim1A, p. 30), in contrast to his concern about the quality of food produced in a more industrial, commercial model. Jim observed that:

when food is shipped in from wherever, you know, South America and it’s a giant company that’s paying their employees a dollar a day and not offering any kind of health benefits or any care in any way, that food is going to be cheaper than food that’s produced by, you know, at least minimum wage hours that go into it in Canada so there’s just costs associated [with it]. (Jim1B, p.4)

He continued, reflecting on the value of good food to a good life in contrast to the economic value associated with food and other amenities:

I’d like people to ... think about food as, you know, the most important part of their life. ... When you look at what percentage of your budget is spent on food [which] is the core of your health and your ... capacity for learning and engaging in the world, [it’s] like 10% of your budget [compared to] how much money you spend in a month on cable or your internet ... it’s such a tiny amount of their budget increase by buying local food (Jim1A, p. 4-5).

One of the most satisfying parts of farming for Jim is being able to reliably provide clean, safe, and nutritious food to his family and his community. A key idea in Jim’s interview included finding a sense of meaning and connection – to himself, his family, and his community – through his farming work in contrast to feeling alienated and

disconnected through much of his earlier life. Jim described this feeling of connection as being association with a sense of purpose:

There's things that you need to know for a reason and I think that 'for a reason' is what most people in society are missing all the way through their adult lives. ... For myself it needs to be grounded in some sort of purpose or direction towards real experience. ... It gives it more meaning I guess. (Jim 1B, p.9).

The sense of connection seems to largely arise from the experience of direct interaction, whether with the environment of the farm through farm work, with neighbours, or with other farmers.

Miss Kier. Miss Kier is a middle aged farmer who established her farm after years of travelling and seasonal work. The farm is operated by Miss Kier and her partner, several long term employees, and a revolving cadre of visitors, volunteers, and WWOOFers. Willing Workers On Organic Farms or World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms is an international network of organisations that facilitate connections between travelers interested in providing volunteer labour on organic farms in exchange for room and board (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms, 2012).

Miss Kier describes their farming as a "lifestyle" and notes that it is all consuming, with demands at all hours from monitoring the greenhouse temperature on cold nights to fielding calls from restaurants on their off hours. Although they have been trying to take Sundays off, Miss Kier gets

calls from ... everybody on Sunday and ... there are very few other farmers that would actually do something on Sunday for people. I do it because I know that if I don't then maybe they won't call again and maybe that will be the end (Miss Kier1, p. 13)

With these words, she reveals a sense of precariousness about their operation.

For Miss Kier, the hands-on work of farming is rewarding and she learned through direct experience – “really I basically only learned [by] doing ... learned by doing stuff” (Miss Kier1, p. 18-19). Farming for Miss Kier is imbued with dimensions of spirituality and meaning; it is what she is “passionate about and [feels] like ... this is why I’m put on the earth. This is my ... my purpose here is to actually like figure this out and help teach other people how to do this” (Miss Kier1, p.18). As a farmer, she sees herself as a vehicle for the expression of the universe through the seeds and the vegetables that she grows. Her role is to be the vehicle for bringing to fruition an organism’s potential and she applies this role to people as much as to plants. She described her own journey to farming as “finding her calling” and actively supports others involved with her farm to more fully explore their human potential through their relationships with food and farming. She commented: “Just showing and helping and ... letting that information come to people just by being here and just by doing what we do is the most amazing thing” (Miss Kier1, p.3).

Ron Bronson. Ron Bronson is a relatively young and relatively new farmer, involved in farming for the last 5 years. The farm produces vegetables which are sold at the local city market and through CSA shares. Ron Bronson described a meandering journey into farming rooted in childhood exposure to and appreciation for the natural world and germinated by exploring social justice and development issues in his young adulthood. His journey to farming was the result of “thinking [about what] life do I want

to live, and how can I bring all of these things [social, political, economic issues] together?” (Ron Bronson1, p.1).

For Ron Bronson, being a small scale, organic producer for local markets is a way of living an example of his values. He questioned “if there’s no alternative that’s viable then what do you suggest? What do you advocate for? And until someone is living an alternative that does meet all these kind of criteria you just, you know, there’s no hope” (Ron Bronson1, p. 8). Ron’s vision for farming is in part based on striving for more harmonious relationships between people and the natural world. He noted that:

when you go into a forest, ... that balance is there so ... it’s not just ... an invention of an ideal, it makes sense to be striving for that type of thing where ... people are intimately connected to [the land] (Ron Bronson1, p. 6-7).

Ron especially highlighted the satisfaction that he derives from engagement in creative problem solving:

Sometimes it’s slugging it out and you’re just harvesting ... but even then you’re thinking about how to do it better. ... It’s this ongoing like every day you’re in a creative mode. ... What’s so motivating is that you can wake up and, you know, be creative. ... It’s endlessly creative and that’s just like what an ideal, what a fun situation to be in (Ron Bronson1, p. 16-17).

Ron also acknowledged high levels of stress associated with finances, interpersonal relationships, and workload. During the busy season, “there’s nothing else going on in life there’s just that work and you can’t stop until it’s done and, so everything else kind of falls apart and, and like stress levels especially when it’s combined with financial stresses” (Ron Bronson1, p. 20).

Ultimately, farming seemed to hold significant spiritual meaning for Ron. Farming ensures that he is regularly exposed to all elements of the natural world, contributing to experiences such as this one:

I remember like this full awakening of parts of my body. ... Yeah it comes right down to your kind of physiological – I think things that are on and things that are off in your body, so awake and dormant (Ron Bronson2, p. 21).

Farming serves as a discipline for cultivating qualities that he values such as discipline, patience, and humility, but which he “couldn’t always just achieve ... just by [his] own will” (Ron Bronson2, p. 19).

Rudy. Rudy is in his seventies and describes himself as having always been an organic farmer as he was exposed to organic agriculture throughout his childhood in Eastern Europe. Although he always wanted to be a farmer, and always gardened extensively, he went through a number of professions before he and his wife came to market gardening later in life as a way of supplementing their retirement income. Rudy’s experience of farming is characterised by a sense of awe and wonder at the natural world. His commitment to organic growing practices is deeply personal and deeply rooted in his appreciation for the soil as a living organism and the “critters” – toads, snakes, bugs, salamanders, and spiders – living in his gardens. This same trusting and respectful relationship extends to Rudy’s customers as he insists

certification is no good but I tell them if they don’t trust me they shouldn’t buy from me. And if there are any other doubts please come to my place and I’ll show you around, and I might even give you something nice to eat. And somehow I got a reputation on the farmers’ market ... because we are so honest and down to earth and plain (Rudy1, p. 5).

Rudy described his customers as “friends, they’re definitely friends on a very casual basis they’re friends on [market days]” (Rudy2, p. 22).

For Rudy, being an organic farmer seems to mean doing the best he can to work with nature, rather than against, because “you cannot work against the soil or against nature. In the long run it doesn’t work you will not, you will not last” (Rudy1, p. 14). Rudy emphasised the importance of close observation in becoming acquainted with the natural environment of the farm and managing his farming practice in harmony with natural cycles and conditions.

Rudy described the wide range of skills needed in his farming practice, including carpentry, electrical, and accounting skills, noting “you can’t afford to be stupid as a farmer basically that’s ... I guess what it boils down [to], ... not if you’re a small operation” (Rudy1, p. 13). Rudy has learned his trade by trial and error and by being receptive to information in different forms and from different sources. He explained how he gets his information: “The crops tell you what you have to do or the seeds tell you what to do. The weather tells you what to do. The soil tells you what to do” (Rudy1, p. 12).

Farming provides opportunities for engagement of all of Rudy’s faculties: senses, physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual. He feels rewarded by his interactions with the land, which includes a feeling of connection or oneness as “sometimes I can sit on one of my rocks and I pray. ... It’s just so nice, it’s creation and I’m part of creation...” (Rudy2, p.11). Overall, Rudy described his work as “just fun and play... I’m playing with a purpose, with a goal, okay, but I’m playing just the same” (Rudy2, p. 10).

Steve. Steve is an older farmer who grew up on what he described as a traditional, mixed, family farm and became disillusioned with the direction of modern agriculture upon observing the direction of agricultural policy and the advent of industrial agriculture. He established a homestead with his first wife, motivated by a 60s era back-to-the land ideal of autonomy and self-sufficiency. As he became more involved with socio-political food and farming advocacy and interest groups, his value orientation shifted to embracing participation in an interdependent network of conscientious food producers and consumers, and envisioning the possibility of a “food economy which is a healthy economy” (Steve1, p. 15).

Steve sees his farm’s products as imbued with spiritual appeal based on their connection with natural cycles and their association with good food and good company. Steve was reflective about the place of people in relation to the natural environment, observing:

I’ve more and more come to understand [that] there’s very little of a natural world that isn’t impacted somehow by people. ... You know, really everywhere people live even in relatively natural environments like the Amazon ... people, native peoples interact quite a lot with their world, and they alter that world quite a bit, that natural world that they live in. So I think that it’s all just sort of a scale. ... I always felt like the natural world ... whether it was heavily altered by us or not – it still was a natural world that allowed me to kind of relate to the creatures in that world. ... You feel this common bond of life (Steve1, p. 10-11).

Steve seemed to suggest that human impact on the natural environment can be positive and can create opportunities for experiencing a sense of commonality with other forms of life.

Steve placed great importance on a sense of place and people having a sense of their place in a place. This sense of place in a place is enhanced by qualities of the place along with the depth and quality of a person's interactions with the features of the place. Steve highlighted how farming draws on a broad range of human skills and capacities in the context of interdependent relationships, both with other people and with the natural world, and how this contributes to feeling connected with one's labour and the fruits thereof, from which arises a sense of being in harmony with one's capacities and potential.

Twister. Twister is an older farmer, who, although he is adjusting his farming workload to be appropriate to his age and ability, has no interest in retirement and intends to continue producing food for himself, his family, and others, for as long as he is able. Twister associated his initial interest in farming to a 60s era disillusionment with social institutions. He described the back to the land movement of the time as “a complete and wholesale rejection of any sort of institutional work option” (Twister1, p. 2) and found himself searching for something that “seems to be causing no harm and is possibly even a positive thing to do? Well feeding people seemed to be the most essential thing. ... It was the only thing that meant anything was just growing food.” (Twister1, p. 2).

Twister provided insight into the challenges facing those who come to farming without a farming background, including access to resources and practical knowledge and skill. Learning these skills, which people who grew up on farms might take for granted, has been a source of great satisfaction.

I get a lot of pleasure out of working with machinery. ... After not knowing dick about tools until I was 29 years old. ... Even just tacking things together to last

for a particular job until I get them properly fixed by a real skilled welder saved me all kinds of down time yeah. And I get a lot of satisfaction doing that. ... Being able to at least replace parts ... to be able to take the fan belt off, unbolt the alternator, take it to someone else to fix it, and put it back on myself, you know, for the son of a history prof, ... I have a sense of accomplishment doing these sorts of things that most of my farming peers just take for granted and have been doing it since they were 8 years old with their dads (Twister1, p.36).

Twister acknowledged a debt to those who helped him along the way by sharing their knowledge, tools and equipment, encouragement, and finances as he grew into farming by trial and error.

Relational, political, and spiritual themes are prominent throughout Twister's interviews. He emphasized drawing fulfillment from his relationships with those who have helped him, with his customers – whom he identifies as part of the farm – with the land of his farm, and with his animals. Twister lamented that farmers have always been excluded from political processes and political power despite their essential contribution to society and culture. Finally, farming figures prominently in Twister's life as a vehicle for spiritual development both as a disciplined practice and as the source of transcendent experiences: "Sometimes ploughing can be dull but trying to find that egoless state that's an ongoing project" (Twister2, p. 44).

Conclusion

In this chapter, the study participants were introduced through the presentation of textural descriptions highlighting important aspects of each farmer's interviews. The textural descriptions present snapshots of each farmer's lived experience, providing a foundation for approaching the overall themes. In the next chapter, themes identified from the analysis of all the farmers' experiences will be discussed.

Chapter 5: Themes

The above textural descriptions of each farmer help provide the contextual backdrop of the five main thematic categories that were identified from analysis of the lived experience reports of all participants. From these farmers, we learn that their experience of farming is characterized by challenging work conditions, engaging and drawing on a wide range of human capacities, harmonious relationships with the people and nature around them, connections with deeper spiritual experiences, and recognition of the broader systems that form the context of their work. Each theme includes several sub themes. Table 3 lists these themes and subthemes which are further explained with supporting data below.

Table 3: Themes and Subthemes

Hard work for little pay <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Financial duress• Enduring discomfort• At the mercy of the weather
Engaging the fullness of human capacity <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning by doing and watching• Creativity and problem solving• Being a jack of all trades• Self-sufficiency and pride
Living in harmony <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Working with nature• Interdependence: Sharing resources through supportive networks• Cultivating harmonious relationships

<p>Spirituality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding meaning, expressing love • Merging with creation • Where do people fit? • Farming as a spiritual practice
<p>Food and farms in society</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity, security, and sustainability in food systems • Subject to systemic injustice • Being a role model

Hard Work for Little Pay

While farmers described many positive experiences associated with their farming – for instance, farming is “fun” and “meaningful” – all farmers acknowledged aspects of farming that were sources of stress or hardship. Farmers work hard, enduring physical discomfort, while struggling to make ends meet. Many of these hardships were related to the work and working conditions of farming including physical discomfort, being subject to unpredictable weather conditions, and financial difficulties. Subthemes include stresses associated with (1) financial duress, (2) uncomfortable working conditions, and (3) being at the mercy of the weather.

Financial Duress. Farmers described the challenges associated with establishing the financial viability of a farm as a source of stress. Farmers face challenges common to entrepreneurs and small business owners in developing their farms in such a way as to provide for their financial security. Financial burdens take a toll on farmers’ lives and values, especially with young families or other dependents.

New farmers face the same challenges as any small business in establishing themselves financially as Jim explained:

When you start a farm, it doesn't happen all at once, you're building into it, and it's becoming something the whole time. It's really like five years in before you know that it's going to be successful and that you can, you know, support your family with it (Jim1A, p. 3)

It takes a considerable up-front investment to establish the foundation necessary for financial viability. More established farmers described the toll of heavy debt loads. As mentioned in Jethro's summary, "debt ... can be crippling and debilitating certainly as far as a business goes and spiritually too or energy wise" (Jethro2, p. 26). In some cases, financial need pressured farmers into engaging in practices that contravened their values. Upon taking over a field full of weeds in which he intended to grow grain, Twister described calling the farm supply store "and I say go spray [the field] just burn off [the weeds] from the ground up." He continued, revealing a value conflict: "...yeah I know, I had to make money. I'm not pure" (Twister1, p. 11).

Part of being self-employed is not having access to employee benefits such as sick leave, extended health benefits, or life insurance, which is a consideration for farmers with young families. Ron Bronson described a situation in which,

someone ... thought we were being irresponsible because we didn't have the right coverage that ... once you have a kid that you should have. ... And it's really not clear how to get to that point, so it just feels so vulnerable and precarious at the same time (Ron Bronson1, p. 21).

Enduring Discomfort. Farmers endure uncomfortable and difficult working conditions, including physical discomfort, relationship stress, and social isolation. Farmers invariably described working long hours and facing constant, incessant, and

overwhelming work demands. Farmers endure exhaustion and physical discomfort in their labour. Relationship stress arises from working closely with others, especially with one's spouse. The long hours associated with farming make it difficult for farmers to maintain social connections outside of farming. Twister described working long hours.

You're propping your eyes open with toothpicks and just pushing through that, pushing through that, that's just sheer force of will. ... just staying awake and safe and getting it done. If something breaks down and it's 2 in the morning you've got to take the equipment back to the farm, turn some lights on outside, and fix it in the dark (Twister1, p. 40).

There is no five o'clock home time for farmers, many of whom live at their place of work and bear ultimate responsibility for the operation of the farm which means "you can't punch out and ... there's no one to leave the extra [work] to" (Ron Bronson1, p. 20). Especially during the growing season, there is no let-up to the demands of the work.

There's nothing else going on in life; there's just that work and you can't stop until it's done. So everything else kind of falls apart, and like stress levels, especially when it's combined with financial stresses like I can be just a monster and total grump and like week after week after week just stress. ... You know, the market stall is falling apart there. ... And it needs to be done in order to get to market the next day and there's just ... such a wide range of things you need to be on top of in this type of operation. It seems that you get a headache at the end of the day because you're just overrun and you can't stop. There's so much to do and you can't do it all (Ron Bronson1, p. 20-21).

With field crops, taking a day off can have major financial repercussions but with animals, taking a day off is never an option. With livestock, farmers must carry out at least basic care tasks regardless of their own health status or injuries. Twister reported:

I've worked sick, I've worked with the flu and with migraine headaches and stuff like that and that's like doubly exhausting – hoisting bales of hay, forking manure, shaking out straw, carrying milk pails, doing it all again, doing it all again, and again, and again. (Twister1, p. 39).

Working alongside one's spouse provides ample opportunities for disagreements over day to day decisions to place strain on relationships: "trying to decide how the carrots are planted, like that becomes like the biggest fight ... [big sigh]" (Miss Kier1, p. 14). Jethro described the combination of work demands and financial stress as "a double whammy ... that you're working together [and] that things are kind of tight ... and that's not a healthy place for ... for one's life and certainly not in a relationship either" (Jethro2, p. 21). While farmers identified encountering stress and conflict when working with one's spouse, especially in combination with financial stress, they also appreciated being able to integrate their home and family lives. This will be discussed in a later theme.

On top of it all, physical work in the outdoors means working in all kinds of conditions and enduring all kinds of discomforts. Weather conditions, insects, and physical labour can take a toll as Ron Bronson describes:

You're wind burned and sun burned and you're, and you're soaking wet and muddy and you're ... bitten by mosquitoes ... or just physically tired or your knees are sore from crawling around all the time or ... blisters or your back is sore or the cold or the heat (Ron Bronson2, p. 21).

Farmers also identified the working demands of farming as having social costs. Over the long term, farmers saw the constancy and intensity of farming demands as having compromised some friendships. The intensity and constancy of farming demands leaves little flexibility to accommodate time for social engagements. Miss Kier explained:

The thing about farming is that it's all day every day ... we have trouble committing to doing things because we never know if we have something that we have to do. Like it's just all the time. ... It's just whatever needs to be done you

have to be willing to do... all the time. ... We have to be here, ... so much so that it has made it difficult for friends of ours because we don't see them for basically eight months of the year. ... We're kind of cut off from a social life (Miss Kier2A, p. 15-16).

At the Mercy of the Weather. Weather, with its limitations and unpredictability, contributes to the inherent uncertainty of farming. Weather is entirely unpredictable and is a major determinant of the success or failure of a crop. Weather patterns can affect a crop's development over the course of a season as Twister experienced in his early farming years. He reported:

We planted a garden that first summer, discovered what drought can do. The first three years it never rained and then it would rain all fall so you'd nurse things along, and then you had mud for harvest. It was, we really, you know, we were up against it (Twister1, p. 3).

Alternately, weather events can wipe out an entire crop in a matter of minutes. Ron Bronson talked about his farm's experience with hail:

It was over probably four minutes or three minutes and it kind of shredded every leafy crop and ... and so the crops aren't gone but that whole next harvest which can be thousands and thousands of dollars um you just have to kind of, you just ... it's not fit for sale kind of thing" (Ron Bronson2, p. 13).

Ultimately the unpredictability of weather is part of why Rudy says "agri-business is definitely an oxymoron as far as I'm concerned, you cannot do it. ... You can have your crop failures regardless how smart you are, whether you've got an MBA or not, if it rains it rains" (Rudy1, p. 15).

Engaging the Fullness of Human Capacity

This theme encompasses the experience that farmers have of farming as drawing on a broad range of capacities, and as presenting challenges that keep them on their toes and

engage their faculties. They seemed to see these capacities are an intrinsic part of being human and felt that farming offered greater opportunity to engage a broader range of the fullness of this human capacity. As Rudy described: “Every day it’s different. There’s always a little bit of a problem, there’s always something to learn, it’s a never ending kind of process ... and it keeps you on your toes” (Rudy1, p. 5-6). As Ron Bronson highlighted in Chapter 4, farmers are fulfilled and engaged by learning and refining their craft through trial and error, calling upon their capacity for creative problem solving, their broad ranging skill set, and their pride in their self-sufficiency and role as providers for others. Sub-themes include (1) learning by doing and watching, (2) creativity and problem solving, (3) being a jack of all trades, and (4) self-sufficiency and pride.

Learning by Doing and Watching. Farming is a craft learned through integrating practical experience more than theoretical knowledge. Whether farmers had grown up on farms or come to farming as adults, they all described farming as a trade learned by doing and watching. Those who had grown up on farms talked about learning from watching a parent and helping with chores while those who came to farming later in life described a process of learning through trial and error. Steve, for instance, described his experience of watching his dad do the milking:

I guess at one point the cows seem awfully big to you. ... [But] you see your dad milking them and, generally not getting kicked or anything, and so you kind of learn how to be around them, you know (chuckles) (Steve1, p. 7).

Twister reflected on his early years of farming with a sense of humor:

In the early years, my god, we wasted a lot of time doing things the hard way or just not seeing something that was staring us in the face. ... Oh god we were, I’m sure we were the laughing stock of the neighbourhood half the time. But, you

know, you just keep doing things over and over and things do occur to you.
(Twister1, p. 43).

Rudy was faced with having to replant all his berry bushes “because they were right in the middle of a bind weed patch and they just pulled them all down.” Rather than expressing frustration, Rudy seemed to accept such experiences, chalking it up to experience: “So you learn that. ... Okay you learn, ... so everything what I do is intuition and trial and error experience” (Rudy1, p. 9).

Creativity and Problem Solving. Creative problem solving is another aspect of learning by trial and error and part of being fully engaged in one’s work is an ongoing reflection about how to improve both the work and its outcomes. Farmers are constantly faced with new situations and required to come up with novel solutions based on their experience and materials available, requiring creative integration of their previous experiences. Farmers described creative problem solving as a particularly rewarding aspect of their farming experience. As quoted in his textural profile, Ron Bronson expressed his particular enjoyment of this aspect of farming: “I just really like troubleshooting and solving things, you know, and if this is a problem I’m just really excited to figure out what a solution could be” (Ron Bronson1, p. 18). Rudy linked creative problem solving to respectful use of the land suggesting, “A real farmer – it doesn’t matter how big the farm is – they all have to be creative yes because they have to respect the land or they lose it” (Rudy 2, p. 8). Respectful use of the land means observing and responding respond to largely unpredictable conditions and circumstances. This creativity is fundamental to engaging the fullness of human capacity because it relies

on observation, integrating experiential learning, and drawing on a wide range of capacities to respond to a broad range of challenges.

Being a Jack of All Trades. Being a farmer requires a host of skills not necessarily directly related to working the land. Farming specific knowledge is demanding enough – “There’s just so many... different things to know, that’s what makes farming so interesting and so impossible, there’s just too much to know” (Twister1, p. 18) – but farmers also must possess mechanical, electrical, construction, marketing, legal, accounting, and management skills. Steve summarised some of the range of skills and knowledge required for small scale, direct marketing farmers to succeed as follows:

You have to have more knowledge of the soil and the life in the soil and more knowledge of plants that you’re growing. ... Organic farming in my mind is really all about kind of knowing the crop, knowing the soil, and working up from there. ... So the production end is more complicated and you have to have more knowledge and more sensitivity. ... I think you have to have more knowledge of the market. ... When you sell direct to the public, you know, marketing then becomes really much more complicated. ... You have to know your customers as individuals, you have to know people in general and how they react, ... you have to kind of know what people are likely to buy through your channels and you have to produce the right amounts and you have to produce it in qualities that people will find acceptable. ... even just with a few part-time employees, ... just dealing with the relationships between you and employees, and then managing them. You actually have to be a manager, to manage the business side. ... So it demands a lot of knowledge, a lot of skills, and a lot of abilities, and it’s why I’m always sort of amazed when farmers do make it, because they are probably more diversely skilled than almost anybody else has to be in the way they operate in the world (Steve2, p. 23-24).

In addition to the broad skill and knowledge based Steve described, Rudy referred to the need for constant mental engagement to be able to integrate knowledge and learned experience to develop strategies to achieve quality crops. He summarised it neatly by

saying, as quoted also in his textural profile, “you can’t afford to be stupid as a farmer basically that’s ... I guess what it boils down to ... not if you’re a small operation” (Rudy1, p. 13-14). Farmers generally saw this aspect of farming as a positive experience and derived satisfaction from the challenges presented by these demands.

Self-sufficiency and Pride. Farmers described a sense of satisfaction associated with self-sufficiency and pride in their work. They feel proud of the value of what they produce, of their stewardship of the land, and of being able to provide for themselves and for others, on their own terms. Miss Kier especially appreciated her autonomy to:

do things the way that you feel they need to be done. Somebody’s not telling you how you have to do things. ... Having your own food, like that was why I started really because I wanted to grow food that I knew was safe to eat. ... I get to work outside. I get to wear whatever I want. I get to walk around in my bare feet. I work as little or as much as I want. ... And people like it. People are really, really amazed (Kier1, p. 2).

Her enjoyment of her autonomy in her work is enhanced by the appreciation expressed by those who buy her products. Farming has afforded Jim a sense of:

connecting to things that are real and at the base of, you know, survival. ... It’s kind of just understanding or having those skills to be able to provide for yourself and for your friends and community and stuff. So, you know, it brings it back to practical skills that you can ... have a certain amount of pride that you can do and do well (Jim 1A, p. 20).

This pride in self-sufficiency arises from confidence in their capacity to confront and overcome a broad range of unpredictable challenges.

Living in Harmony

Farmers placed importance on cultivating harmonious ways of relating in the world. They described how they work with elements of the natural world on their farms and how

they have been supported in their farming. They described relying on webs of interdependent relationships based on mutuality and reciprocity and put thought and deliberation into cultivating harmony in these relationships. Farmers described striving to cultivate harmonious and mutually beneficial relationship with the natural world of their farms. They expressed gratitude for the help they have received and put priority on maintaining strong and respectful relationships with customers, members, supporters, “our people”. Subthemes include (1) working with nature, (2) interdependence, and (3) cultivating harmonious relationships.

Working with Nature. Working with the natural elements of the farm is critical to the success of any farmer but an integral principle of organic farming. Farmers do this by observing the natural conditions of their farms and developing systems of farming that are supported by these conditions and even that will enhance the natural ecosystem of the farm. Rudy described the difference between working with the nature of his farm rather than working against it as follows:

I manipulate the land as long as the land lets me. I do not force, I do not force my soil to grow bananas.... Air conditioning is [an example of working against natural conditions]: you don't like the climate we'll get you a machine. The same thing you do with the land. If you don't like the land you can go on desert sand [with] just hydroponics, you know ... A few pumps, a little bit of water and you get the water here and you desalinize it and you do this and that and that [and] all of a sudden you've got a cornfield but you do not work with the land you work against it. I try to work with the land. I look at that soil. [The soil] will do this and this [soil] will not do [that], and you can talk to it (Rudy1, p. 6).

Organic farming in particular relies on an intimate knowledge of the climate and soil conditions. Farmers must be able to integrate this knowledge as well as plant-specific knowledge to optimise the relationships among these. While Rudy described the

difference between working with and working against climate conditions, Steve explained how this ecological knowledge is the foundation of organic farming:

You have to have more knowledge of the soil and the life in the soil and more knowledge of plants that you're growing than a conventional farmer does ... an awful lot of [organic farms] are more diverse in terms of the products and the crops that they grow and everything. And organic farming in my mind is really all about kind of knowing the crop, knowing the soil, and working up from there. ... So the production end is more complicated and you have to have more knowledge and more sensitivity (Steve2, p. 23).

Ron Bronson described how organic farming practices are modeled after cycles observed in the natural world as: "a forest floor never gets drawn from as intensively as a farm and so it can just regenerate gradually over time and ... but on a farm you have to be more active and regenerate and that" (Ron Bronson1, p. 14). Ron Bronson went on to describe some of their efforts to regenerate the soils such as through the use of compost or green manures. The purpose of these activities is not only to enhance the nutrient content of the soils but also to enhance the biotic life in the soils, thus enhancing the overall vitality of the soil ecosystem. In all these examples, farmers are describing the importance of knowledge about the natural elements of the soil, climate, and plant life in particular and describing how this knowledge is the basis for their farming practices.

Interdependence: Sharing Resources Through Supportive Networks. Farmers interviewed for this study generally acknowledge a debt of gratitude for support that has allowed them to develop their farms and themselves as farmers. Farmers rely on assistance from friends, family, and neighbours and on resources shared amongst the farming community. Supportive community networks and farmers each enhance the

capacity of the other. Having a strong community is critical for supporting farmers and farmers contribute to building a strong community.

Miss Kier, for instance, uses the sheep manure from a neighbouring farm for composting and describes an example of how resources are shared to mutual benefit. In this case, both farmers benefit and the arrangement is enabled by her dad's equipment.

They give us the manure for us cleaning it out. ... So it works out really well and they have enough sheep that we've been able to get a lot of sheep manure and my dad has all of that equipment [for cleaning out the barn] ... [so] we're capable of doing that (Miss Kier1, p. 15).

This sharing of resources is also present in Twister's description of how he learned from an early mentor. In this example, Twister describes how he benefited from the older farmer's experience and knowledge both through learning practical skills related to the use of tools as well as instrumental support in the assistance of purchasing farm equipment.

I worked with an old farmer, ... and that was the greatest thing for me because ... I learned how to use tools from going to [him], you know. I learned how to use simple things just like crowbars and levers, ropes and pulleys, and meanwhile as we're working he'd be talking about farming, you know, and equipment. He helped me buy my first combine (Twister1, p. 4).

Twister contrasted the recent development of organic workshops, which he described as a "huge help", to the lack of information resources available when he started farming almost 40 years ago. He explained: "When we started we were [alone]... Oh yeah in 1977 there wasn't any sense, ... organic was just a joke" (Twister2, p. 23).

As a young farmer, Ron Bronson is able to take advantage of these support networks and sees farming and community as interdependent:

having an active farm community, supportive farm community around you so that you're motivated and you can feel confident and you have other people around you facing similar things and you can meet ... it just supports everything that you're doing. ... That's crucial so that both ways like the farm enabling community to happen but the community enabling the farm, like a supportive condition, set of conditions for these things to happen. It's hard to tell what comes first. (Ron Bronson¹, p. 12).

Cultivating Harmonious Relationships. Farmers described how farming allowed them to integrate different elements of their lives and how they strive for harmony in integrating different areas of their lives (e.g. home and work) and in relating to place and to people. While working with one's spouse, especially in the context of financial insecurity, could be stressful, as discussed in a previous theme, farmers also appreciated being able to integrate their work and home lives. For instance, Jim contrasted his childhood experiences with his dad working away from home much of the time to the integration he is able to achieve between work and home:

It's great, you know, the family is there and you're working. That's something that I didn't have when I was younger. ... I think that's really exciting, I really like that, to be at home and be able to be engaging in kind of home life at the same time as at work so there's not a disconnect between those two things which is amazing (Jim 1A, p. 30).

Jethro reflected on how having more time with his kids influenced the dynamic of the relationship. He seemed to feel that having more time with his kids created less pressure on the relationship.

Certainly if one works a different type of job I mean you probably don't see your kids as much as we've seen our kids ... and that time is sort of skewed in a way too ... I mean if you only get a few hours time with your kids at night at the end of a day then there's a different dialogue or dynamic that happens than if it's sort of extended through the day I think. ... There are different ways or opportunities to convey life lessons or whatever, the etiquette or something like that. I mean ...

are you going to be critical of your kids for the two hours that you see them or do you sort of sprinkle parts of that into a day.... It's just a normal course of conversation rather than discipline or something (Jethro2, p. 22).

For Jim, the integration of home, family, farming and community life provides a feeling of being “kind of grounded in a place and a sense of being that's like associated around the farm and family and kind of those familial connections” (Jim 1A, p. 24), in contrast to much of his earlier years feeling “disconnected from, from like, you know, the world I was in ... I felt like there was a lot of parts to living that didn't make sense. ... I just wasn't relating” (Jim1B, p. 8-9). Jim has achieved a greater sense of ease and continuity among the different elements of his life as a result of being able to integrate these.

This sense of integration provides a sense of harmony with one's roles and one's place in the world. As Steve observed: “people can be alienated from the natural environment, they can be alienated from themselves, and they can be alienated from their fellow beings, you know, and they can be alienated from the product of their labour.” He contrasted this to the experience of connection with one's efforts and of participation in natural cycles that comes from growing plants for food:

We also have the sense of, you know, getting to see the results of what we've done, you know, like you plant ... and with any luck you harvest it, you know, and it's a clear kind of consequence of what you did. ... And in this case it's a connection to a [natural] growth cycle (Steve2, p.9).

Steve observed how “this ability to be connected to your immediate surroundings” arises from a sort of alchemical combination of the unique qualities of the place and a person's interaction with and experiences of the place. Using his own farm as an

example, he identified qualities of the place that contribute to this experience and elaborated on how that sense of place is enhanced by his experience of interacting with it:

[I] think that somebody else coming in here immediately experiences a sense of place. ... When you walk around you see the pond and ... a little further around through the fields around and so on, you get more of a sense of place. So I think, I think it's accessible to anybody, that sense of place here. Obviously they don't feel it the same way I do probably, you know. ... [People] have a real sense of place, a stronger sense of place if they live there and interact in it. So I think that's something that we miss in society. (Stever2, p.11)

He concluded by associating a sense of place with emotional health: "I really don't know how people can be emotionally healthy if they aren't able to have a sense of place and a sense of their place in that place, you know" (Steve2, p. 11). While earlier examples have focused on integrating different elements of farmers lives (work, home, family, community), in this example, Steve is introducing a spatial element, suggesting that integrating oneself into a place through one's labours, contributes to emotional health.

Farmers used different terms to refer to the people who purchase their products and at times struggled with how to characterise these relationships. Farmers used business terms such as customers or consumers, as well as more relational terms such as supporters, members, or "our people". When marketing directly, the farmer can earn credibility by developing this relationship but when marketing outside of the context of a direct relationship, organic certification was seen as a substitute. Ron Bronson explained:

The big thing [in getting certified] was yeah beyond the direct connection. ... [When selling directly] people could, you could come to the farm or you could ask me questions or we could talk and you could get my ... sense of my character and, you know, all those types of things help you feel confident in what I claim, you know, but through a store it's different (Ron Bronson2, p. 24).

Twister emphasized the humanizing value of this relational transaction. Although the financial transaction is necessary for the farmer's livelihood, the economic transaction is grounded in the context of a human relationship. The trust, respect, and shared value that characterise this relationship are expressions of and enhance the humanity of the relationship partners. Twister observed:

In my personal relationships I'm never sure that I'm that good at sort of giving... But [with farming, I can be sure] that I provide something that's good for you, and the exchange is fair when you've provided me with some cash (Twister1, p. 41).

Twister characterises the exchange of cash for the food that he has produced as a fair exchange and it brings him satisfaction to be able to provide something of value. While acknowledging the financial aspect of the exchange, Twister goes on to emphasize that it is first and foremost "a relationship transaction." In this light, it is important that each relationship partner is fair and respectful of the other(s) in order that all leave the transaction feeling good about themselves; the relationship transaction serves to honor the humanity of all parties. Twister contrasts this approach to a purely commercial exchange.

I don't know how you can feel good about yourself even if you make lots of money on [shoddy merchandise]. ... We've turned sort of what we call economic reality into this very functional thing and it's all about competition ... if you don't really care about it and you're just trying to get the most that you can from them ... - [a] take the most you can get kind of approach - that's an unhealthy relationship.... and I think that diminishes humanity (Twister1, p. 41-42).

The examples throughout this theme revolve around accepting interdependent relationships and understanding how to enhance the mutual benefit to all relationship parties. This applies at the micro level to working with nutrients and micro-organisms in

the soil to the macro level of building community. The respect for the integrity of the relationship partner that is evident in Twister's final quote underlies all aspects of farmer's relationships from their relationship to the natural elements on their farms, to their relationships with their families, customers, and communities.

Spirituality

The theme of spirituality is all about wrestling with the great mysteries of life, which farmers are immersed in on a day to day basis. For farmers, spirituality arose out of their contact with the natural world and seemed to be associated with being "small" in the face of something great, unpredictable, un-knowable. Farmers' experiences of the natural world were infused with humility, awe, reverence, and wonder and from this position, they grapple with questions about the meaning of life, how to live a good life, and the spiritual nature of people. Farmers all reached points in their interviews at which they struggled to put words to their experiences. As Ron Bronson stated, "I don't have much of a vocabulary to talk about that... more just a personal thing and kind of feelings and thoughts... they're hard to articulate, they're hard to express..." (Ron1, p. 23). Farming serves as a source of meaning and a vehicle for expressing love and caring into the world. Farmers described experiences of feeling merged with creation but also observed how people in general seemed to not fit with the order they observe in the natural world. For some, farming serves as a vehicle for their spiritual growth and development. Subthemes include (1) finding meaning, expressing love, (2) merging with creation, (3) where do people fit?, and (4) farming as a spiritual practice.

Finding Meaning, Expressing Love. This sub theme is about the meaning that farmers derive from farming and their experience of farming as a form of expressing love into and for the world. Farming means more than an identity and more than a form of income; it provides a deep sense of purpose and a means for nurturing and caring about forms of life in the world. Farming is a vehicle for the expressing a calling to provide care.

For some farmers, farming simply gives meaning to life. Twister said simply “it was the only thing that meant anything was just growing food” (Twister1, p. 2). For Miss Kier, farming is her own expression of the “interpretation of the universe” (Kier2A, p.22) as she explained that growing vegetables is “why I was put here on earth” (Kier2A, p. 21-22) and “it’s part of me... it’s my gift and so that’s what, that’s what makes it so easy for me because I innately already know it. It’s already part of my chemical composure” (Kier 2A, p. 25). Part of what is meaningful is using farming as a vehicle for expressing love and caring to the world. Miss Kier claimed “our food is really full of love” (Kier2A, p.22) and Jim explained “love in farming is kind of like... caring towards the world. ... You express that in your day to day and farming is a way that... we’re able to kind of express that care or love to the world” (Jim, 1A, p. 35-36). Twister saw this kind of caring as inherent to farming, describing farmers as “kind of maternal people actually. No matter how rugged they are on the outside yeah, yeah they’re always nurturing, nurturing, growing, nurturing, growing, and then in the end they feed people” (Twister2, p. 33).

Merging with Creation. While some farmers described farming as an expression of values, others described experiences of feeling a sense of one-ness. Farmers described

transcendent experiences of losing themselves in their work and merging with creation.

This experience was often characterised by a sense of humility or awe. Jim, for instance, explained that

it's kind of like through your activities you forget yourself ... you just are all of a sudden part of what it is you're, you're like producing and the thing that you're working on kind of becomes... like gains a life of its own I guess where you're just kind of, you know, you merge with what it is (Jim 1A, p. 24-25).

Some farmers emphasized that these experiences were not associated with any formal religious system but rather part of their experience of the natural world. As quoted in his summary, Rudy explained:

In a way I'm religious but I don't go to church and I don't believe in any particular power with a name on it. But sometimes I can sit on one of my rocks and I pray... it's just so nice, it's creation and I'm part of creation (Rudy2, p. 11).

For Twister, this kind of experience can be intensely emotional as well. He described taking a break from the tractor and “[getting] off and [walking] around the field a bit and just [looking] around and I've started to cry just because it's just so beautiful” (Twister2, p. 41).

Where do People Fit? In contrast, farmers' experiences also prompted them to reflect on and question the spiritual nature of people and the place of people in relation to the natural environment. Where farmers generally saw a sense of order in the natural world, they saw dis-order in the way people in general relate to and affect the natural world. Where farmers seemed to be able to make sense of the way plants and animals and other elements of the natural world on their farms contribute to the overall health of the eco-system, they struggled to understand how people were meant to be part of this

balanced system. This questioning often took an existential turn, leading farmers to reflect on the spiritual nature of people.

Ron, for instance, described modelling farming practices after the balance found in a natural ecosystem “with that huge daunting human piece to it. ... That’s the thing is that everything we do to survive we tear everything up, we destroy everything. ... Are humans just a total ... cancer?” (Ron Bronson1, p.7). Rudy recounted his revised version of the biblical story of Genesis in which it is revealed that humans arrived on earth as refugees after having committed an ecological holocaust on their previous planet. Twister described his observations of how being confronted with this incongruence between people’s needs and those of other living creatures has led to his questions about the place of people in the natural order.

It’s so basic when you’re farming. It’s sort of in your face every day that you’re the only animal in creation that just doesn’t get up and go look for breakfast, you know, every day. ... So you’re kind of always faced with, with seeing a whole natural world that works well and spontaneously except for human beings. And that makes you sort of question what is it about us? ... We don’t seem to quite fit into everything else. ... We’re the ones that, that can’t figure it out, that create great big screw ups all the time. ... The animals aren’t out there making mistakes. Where did we come from? (Twister1, p. 37-38).

Farmers seemed to be confronted with existential questioning about humanity in general in relation to the natural world, in some cases questioning whether people are some kind of disease and in others considering the possibility that humans have their origins from outside the natural order. Despite their efforts to integrate themselves into harmonious relations with the natural systems of their farms, farmers seemed to continue to observe the alienation of humanity in general from the natural world.

Farming as a Spiritual Practice. Farming also serves as a spiritual discipline, akin to yoga, meditation, other spiritual practices, through which farmers practice their values or are challenged to develop spiritually. The repetitive nature of some farming tasks and the absolute dedication to addressing the needs of the farm as they arise foster a sense of humility. In the face of a great deal of unpredictability, farmers must submit themselves to the higher ideal of serving the needs of the farm.

Ron Bronson reflected on his struggles to create the life he envisioned and how farming supports this. He said:

I don't have the self-discipline to do a lot of the things that I, you know, believed I should be doing. ... I need more than just my own will to live the life I really want to get. ... [Discipline was one thing] and patience and... humility - like all those things just about really that core kind of self or ego or whatever. It's tied into that a lot just needing to be patient, not getting everything you think you want and, and that's really nice and I think it's really important. I couldn't always just achieve that just by my own will" (Ron Bronson2, p. 20).

Dedicating himself to farming as a higher ideal provided the framework that Ron Bronson needed to practice the values he sought in his life. Twister described most clearly how some of the repetitive tasks of farming can serve as a spiritual practice:

There are certainly times when you're farming when you're doing fairly simple repetitive tasks. ... it's something you can just about do in your sleep after awhile so what are you going to do in your mind? ... The hardest thing [you can do] is nothing... You have to learn how to do nothing without being bored. And I think that's the hardest thing in the world for most people. ... - ... there's a kind of a liberation [in letting go of the ego] and you're no longer in a demand mode in your mind then. Your mind is at rest, it's clear and some other aspect of yourself as a conscious being is simply present. ... What I think, based on what I've read and the brief experiences that have kind of transcended consciousness that have leaped into my life, is that that state of mind is the open state in which you're just beginning to be fully realized as a human. ... The idea of enlightenment isn't to leave it's to bring it all home while we're still incarnate. That's kind of the Christ

consciousness or the Buddha mind or whatever and you can do it hoeing.
(Twister2, p. 34-35)

Food and Farms in Society

Farmers described themselves as being situated in a broader social, historical, and political context and this consciousness informs their farming practices, their perception of their role in society, and their commitment and dedication to their farming values. Farmers were knowledgeable about food systems and expressed concern about how policies and systems affect small scale producers and rural communities. Among the issues associated with food and agricultural policies and systems, farmers explicitly identified injustices embedded in current Canadian and global food systems. Farmers see themselves as role models, setting an example of alternative agricultural models incorporating concern for natural ecosystems, communities, and food security. The three main subthemes in this section are (1) diversity, security, and sustainability in food systems, (2) justice issues, and (3) being a role model.

Diversity, Security, and Sustainability in Food Systems. Farmers expressed great concern about the safety and security of current global food systems based on industrial models of production. Farmers compared food systems to natural ecosystems, noting that diversity is required in both cases to ensure the capacity of the systems to remain responsive, adaptive, and resilient. Food security and the sustainability of farming in society is questionable when the system fails to protect the land, the necessary community infrastructure resources, the knowledge base, and farmers themselves from bankruptcy and agro-chemical exposure.

One concern is for the mis-use of farmland in our society. Rudy lamented the loss of farmland as it is converted into sub-divisions:

They build subdivisions on fertile land. ... [A farm I used to visit], you wouldn't find it now, it's a subdivision, and that used to be Mennonite land. Beautiful bush, maple bushes and nice, nice fields, ... just gorgeous, all gone... Now they have high rises and shopping malls ... it's not right that they do that (Rudy2, p. 17).

Steve compared the importance of diversity in food production systems to the need for biodiversity in natural ecosystems. In both cases, diversity is important to the health and resilience of the system:

Smaller scale more artisan kind of farming you might say aimed at local markets and organic production and diversity is the watch word of, I would say, of successful farming in the future. ... Just, you know, as we've learned in biodiversity is sort of fundamental in the planet we need to do everything we can to preserve biodiversity, you know, we also need diversity in the food system that we produce the food in (Steve1, p. 18).

Twister expressed concern that the general population does not understand how dependent they are on farmers and the health of rural communities and that the supply management systems help to preserve our national food security.

I think most people if you ask them would just have an idea that farming is a lot of work and that's right but, you know, lots of things are a lot of work ... I think I'd like them to understand ... how absolutely dependent they are on farmers... (Twister2, p. 45)

While the most obvious way that the general population is dependent on farmers is for food, Twister makes broader connections to how farming and food production, rural communities, and society in general are shaped by agricultural policies. In particular, he notes that with minimal government involvement, supply management systems in Canada serve to both support rural communities as well as contribute to food security.

This social and political philosophy that maintains this kind of independent food system just in dairy, eggs, and poultry that's allowed a lot of Canadian agriculture to survive because it brings income into the countryside that wouldn't be there if they went to a more sort of large scale industrial model... It would profoundly change the face of Canadian agriculture and rural society if we lost supply management or if we didn't transition out of it in an orderly kind of way... the quota system and managing supply [has allowed a lot of prosperity in rural Canada. ... the only thing [the government does] is help oversee the quota system through the industry organizations. (Twister2, p. 45-46)

In the previous theme, farmers' efforts to maintain harmonious relationships were discussed. Parallels were drawn between farmers' respect for the integrity of the micro-life forms of their farms to their respect for the integrity of customers with whom they engage in relationship transactions. In this example, Twister carries this systems level thinking one step further to consider food, farming, and the shape of society in the macro context of the broader political environment.

Subject to Systemic Injustice. Injustice embedded in the current industrial food system was one of the biggest concerns farmers raised. On an individual basis, farmers find their financial precariousness stressful, as discussed in a previous theme. However, farmers also connected this individual experience to a broader political and social context. Within the national context, community based ecological farmers operate within a system in which they are marginalised from political power and in a social context in which food is poorly understood and valued. Farmers' poor compensation in relation to the value of good food produced responsibly reflects systemic alienation and marginalisation. More broadly, farmers identified themselves as situated in a global system that is based on marginalisation and exploitation of food producers and global outsourcing of more egregious environmental degradation and exploitative labour

practice in order to provide “cheap” food to those in the developed world. Their own struggle to earn a fair economic return for their work and the value of their product is in solidarity with global fair trade efforts.

While Twister expressed support for the quota system, he also expressed concern for the barriers it presents to new farmers. To participate in the production of supply managed commodities (dairy, eggs, and chickens in particular) a farmer must purchase “quota³” which is essentially a license to produce and sell a certain amount or quota of that product. In dairy farming in particular, he notes that it has become:

too much of a closed shop... and to get into it too the quota is so bloody expensive you either inherit it or you bring money in from somewhere else... I was just so fortunate to be able to get into it even at the scale that I got into it and I still couldn't survive (Twister2, p. 46).

Jethro identified similar barriers to getting established as a farmer. He contrasted the current reality to a time when it was possible to enter into farming with minimal resources. He goes further to suggest that these barriers to entering in to farming is part of the reason for the declining numbers of farmers:

There was one time when one could do that without, you know, again sort of the resources behind you, you just started up a farm and went with it, but I mean there's a reason why there are so many fewer farms now than there were, and why the average age is increasing of farmers (Jethro2, p. 19).

Jim highlighted the discrepancy between the value of good food to good health and the economic status of those engaged in producing this necessity of life: “There's a lot of talk about how, how [organic farmers] should be paid, you know, physicians' salaries because, because we're providing the building blocks for healthy bodies” (Jim 1A, 36). Steve situated the issue of financial compensation in a global context, making a link

between the price of food and the environmental and labour conditions under which it is produced.

It would be nice if people would value [organic food] more. I think they need to know that it's more time demanding to produce organic food and frankly they are going to need to pay more, you know. ... Like, you know, if you bring in food from South Africa or Chile or someplace, there's going to be ... labour that's compensated very poorly, you know, and where people have very poor lives. We need to kind of understand all that stuff too that part of paying more for local organic food is that we need to have people make a ... kind of it's a social justice thing, you need to have people make a decent return for the work that they do (Steve2, p. 25-26).

Twister summed up the discrepancy between the value of good food production and the social status of farmers throughout history:

It's all screwed up. But it was ever thus. Food producers have always been the lowest paid people in any given society. Peasants used to just work for the food they produced to keep themselves alive plus whatever the [feudal lord] would take as his cut because it was his land. We've always been at the bottom. It's just, it's bizarre. It's the most essential thing that anybody does. ... And that's not a boast; it's a simple obvious fact. If we can't eat, nothing else happens and yet food producers are paid the least. ... Why do we value least that which is the most important? (Twister1, p. 34-35).

Being a Role Model. Finally, farmers saw themselves as role models, as living examples of alternatives to the concerns they identified with the industrial food system. Brimming with hope, farmers were actively undertaking efforts to engage community members in becoming more informed and involved with food and farming. The farmers interviewed for this study actively and consciously identified their farming commitment as providing a hopeful alternative to the environmental and social justice problems they identified in the global, industrial food system. Rudy stated simply:

We're role models. We show people it can be done okay. It can be done. It doesn't have to be the agri-business. ... We are cultivating an ecosystem which wasn't there and we brought it back, and we can show the beauty of our surroundings. ... I feel that what we are doing here shows everybody that it can be done (Rudy2, p. 26).

Ron Bronson looked forward to being able to “use the farm as a place of learning and engaging people, and very social, and education kind of at the core of it. Like that's kind of our dream” (Ron Bronson1, p. 2). When Miss Kier started selling seedlings, some people expressed concern that she would be undermining her business but for her, leading people to have some experience of growing their own food is part of her purpose.

That's the whole idea. I know that here on this farm we cannot grow enough food for everybody, and so ... the idea behind getting everyone else to grow their own food is really to learn how to do it too. [To] actually do it yourself is really the only way that you can start to appreciate how food is grown because if you've never done it before, you have no idea the energy and the effort and the amount of time and ... the satisfaction of growing your own food and then picking it off and eating it and how good that tastes. ... That's also part of why I think I'm here and I'm doing what I'm doing is to give people that connection. ... People come back year after year okay, and ask questions. ... There are people who have been coming year after year after year who ... may not have grown a garden if we didn't put a little bug in their ear (Miss Kier2A, p. 29-30).

Engaging the broader community in food and farming was an integral part of farmers' visions for their farming and part of how they sought to be role models. This engagement serves to inform and educate the broader society about issues related to food and farming. Introducing people to growing their own food and supporting them in being successful in this, as Miss Kier is describing above, serves to engage people more directly in the experience of growing. This kind of community-building engagement contributes to building stronger relationships between farmers and non-farming communities.

Summary

Seven farmers provided the interview data that served as the basis for this analysis. All seven are involved in the local food movement and marketing directly to eaters is a central feature of the farming operation. Despite being generally positive, enthusiastic, and hopeful in discussing their farming, farmers all talked about the difficult working conditions and financial hardships they face. Partly related to facing and overcoming these challenges, farmers had the experience of drawing on what they identified as a broad range of human capacities. They seemed to suggest that these capacities are part of being human and that farming provided opportunities to engage a fuller range of their innate potential than would other forms of productive occupation. Farmers expressed their efforts to integrate different aspects of their lives (e.g. family, work, community) harmoniously and this paralleled their efforts to relate harmoniously to features of the natural world on their farms. Farmers grappled with big existential questions that arose from their experiences of being in contact with elements of the natural world, giving rise to different expressions of spirituality. Finally, farmers were explicitly conscious of their farming practices as being situated in and influenced by a broader social, temporal, and historical context. Political awareness was a prominent feature of these farmers' experiences.

Farmers' experiences have much to contribute to the understanding of the occupational science constructs of interest in this study. While farmers were not asked directly about their experience of doing, being, belonging, and becoming, their experiences can contribute to a deeper understanding of these concepts. Further, it was conjectured that the experiences of community based farmers using ecological farming

techniques would offer insights into concepts of occupational justice. Farmers themselves explicitly identified justice concerns associated with their farming. Finally, farmers' experiences of being engaged in dialogue with the natural world were anticipated to shed light on the development of the concept of occupational ecology. The implications of farmers for these three areas of occupational science will be elaborated in the next section.

Chapter 6: Discussion

This section will provide a discussion of the implications of these findings for the occupational science concepts of interest in this study. Recall that the research question addressed by this research was “*What is the lived experience of occupation among farmers who employ ecological and direct marketing practices?*” The subquestions were related to how farmers described dimensions of occupational experience, specifically doing, being, belonging, and becoming, concepts drawn from the occupational science literature. It was further anticipated that the findings of this study would contribute to the theoretical constructs of occupational justice and occupational ecology. In response to the research sub-questions, first, the contribution of farmers’ experiences to dimensions of meaning of occupation will be discussed. This will be followed by consideration of farmers’ experiences in relation to the occupational justice dialogue. Finally, the contribution of farmers’ experiences to the emerging concept of occupational ecology will be considered.

Farmers Experiences of Doing, Being, Belonging, and Becoming

According to the findings of this study, the lived experience of this group of farmers is characterised by difficult working conditions; a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment arising from engaging a broad range of skills and capacities; striving to be aware of, understand, and contribute to harmony in their relationships with people and with the natural world; a deep sense of humility in relation to the natural world and their engagement in farming as a spiritual practice; and a strong socio-political awareness of the role of food and farms in society. These themes are substantiated by published

accounts of other such farmers (Berry, 1995, 2005; Brett, 2009; Kingsolver, 2007; Salatin, 2007) and commentary (Ikerd, 2000; Kirschenmann, 2005).

The occupational science framework of doing, being, belonging, and becoming was used initially to frame research sub-questions. Although phenomenological research especially entails approaching the investigation without preconceptions, it was necessary to have a framework from which to operate as an initial starting point. As the investigation progressed and was refined, the influence of this framework decreased. As a result, the themes that crystallised are more organic to farmers’ descriptions of their experiences but concepts of doing, being, belonging, and becoming can roughly be mapped against the identified themes as follows:

Table 4: Themes and Concepts

Theme	Dimension of Experience of Occupation
Hard work for little pay	Doing
Engaging the fullness of human capacity	Doing, becoming
Living in harmony	Belonging
Spirituality	Being
Food and farms in society	Context: occupational justice, occupational ecology

This discussion will be structured according to this framework. Firstly, the relation of each of the theme areas to the corresponding dimension of experience will be

discussed. This will be followed by a discussion of the implications of these results for occupational ecology and occupational justice, which form the context in which these farmers operate.

Hard Work for Little Pay/Doing. Farmers were humble in downplaying some of the discomforts and challenges they face but no discussion of farming would be complete without acknowledging the incessancy and extremity of physical demands, the interpersonal stresses associated with working closely and intensely with other people, the stresses associated with uncertain and inadequate finances, the vulnerability to unpredictable weather, and the constant balancing act associated with risk management. The experiences of these farmers bear out the assertion that “the life of a farmer has characteristically been a fairly hard one” (Berry, 2009, p. 40)

Farming is both a sprint and an endurance sport. For many farming tasks, there is a window of opportunity, most often unpredictable and determined by the weather, for carrying out tasks such as bringing in the hay, planting grain, or harvesting garlic. Farmers talked about working into the wee hours of the morning and getting up in the night to check on the green house. When the hay is ready, farmers must be prepared to go all out until it is in and then return to the steady grind in order to be prepared for the next sprint.

Work demands fluctuate with the seasons and with the weather, the latter being largely unpredictable. The combination of rain, drought, and heat present an infinite possibility of outcomes, ranging from disaster to bounty. Farmers talked about weather related setbacks as well as opportunities. One farmer had had hail and flooding affect his

crops in a single season, while another talked about the opportunities presented by longer growing seasons. In the face of such uncertainty, farmers often talked about striving to balance risk taking against caution. They also struggled to balance their interest in incorporating more of their environmental and community engagement ideals against the financial realities of supporting their farms and their families.

Doing, as a dimension of occupation, is most associated with goal-directed, purposeful actions (Fidler & Fidler, 1978; Hammell, 2004). Farmers provided many descriptions of the day to day actions involved in farming, which illustrate the purposeful, goal directed actions (Hammell, 2004) that characterise the experience of doing in occupation. Farmers described the actions involved in various farm chores including specific techniques for weeding carrots or washing lettuce. This kind of farming involves a great deal of physical labour – lifting, pulling, pushing, reaching, carrying, digging – as well, farmers do many different kinds of skilled labour – carpentry, electrical work, mechanical work, welding. These task demands, varying from day to day and through the seasons, nonetheless serve the doing purpose of providing a predictable structure and routine to farmers’ lives (Hammell, 2004).

In addition to physical labour, this kind of farming involves significant mental demands from business management tasks such as pricing, managing budgets, managing cash flow, keeping accounts, marketing, market research, to creative problem solving: how can we wash more lettuces more efficiently? How can I fit this cooler into the truck? What is the best way to grow tomatoes in these conditions? What is the best way to clean the garlic? Farming provides many opportunities for farmers to explore the

environment and explore their capacities for affecting the environment and they experienced a sense of pride and satisfaction at being able to handle such a wide range of demands. These traits of farming illustrate other characteristics of the experience of *doing*, which will be discussed further in the next section.

Engaging Human Capacity/Doing, Becoming. Farmers interviewed in this study described an experience of engaging the fullness of their human capacity and potential in dealing with the challenges presented in their farming practice. As in any occupation, farmers become more skilled and knowledgeable with practice but dealing with the natural world and the never-ending and overwhelming list of things that need to get done means that farmers are constantly encountering new situations and new problems requiring solutions. Farming is characterised by a high level of demand for creative problem solving and this was a source of great satisfaction for the farmers interviewed in this study. Although farmers talked about the demands being daunting, they all experience a great sense of pride and satisfaction associated with a sense of self-sufficiency and direct engagement with the fruits (and vegetables!) of their labour.

Learning from experience, from hands-on, direct engagement with the world was a common thread for all farmers, regardless of whether they had grown up on farms. Farmers who had grown up on farms talked about learning skills and practices from doing chores or observing a parent. Those who had not grown up on farms talked about experiences of engaging directly with the natural world in their childhoods and through manual labour. Those who came to farming without farming backgrounds in particular spoke about learning farming skills and practices through trial and error. Small scale

direct marketing farmers require a vast range of knowledge and skill including entrepreneurial business management skills from accounting to marketing to human resource management; trade skills including mechanics, construction, electrical, and plumbing work; and specific farm related knowledge and skills such as using tools and machinery, plant and animal care, soil science, etc.

This theme highlights the tight relationship between *doing* and *becoming*, in particular the way experiences of doing contribute to the development of the person's potential. In addition to the qualities mentioned previously, doing is strongly associated with a drive to explore one's capacity for affecting the environment. It is through such experiences that one *becomes* more fully oneself and more fully connected to the environment and other people (Fidler & Fidler, 1978).

Farmers are constantly faced with opportunities to challenge their own capacities for acting in response to changing conditions in their environments. Overcoming such challenges is associated with affirmation of competence and a sense of being valuable and capable (Hammell, 2004), with development of feelings of competence and self worth (White, 1971), with recovery from traumatic experiences (Lentin, 2002,), and with psycho-emotional maturity (Neufeld, 2004). Fidler and Fidler (1978) describe doing as the means for developing a sense of oneself and a sense of oneself in relationship with other people and the surrounding world. Farmers in this study described their farming lives as characterised by ongoing opportunities for exploring and testing their abilities against different circumstances in their environments. According to Fidler and Fidler, "It is through such action with feedback from both nonhuman and human objects that an

individual comes to know the potential and limitations of self and the environment and achieves a sense of competence and intrinsic worth” (p. 306). It is through their doing, that those interviewed were able to become farmers, and bring to expression more of their innate capacities and qualities. Jim illustrated this becoming through doing when he described having developed “life skills” through his farming experience that enhance his capacity to look after and provide for himself and his family. He described developing confidence through the challenge of developing the broad skill base required in his farming.

Becoming is oriented to the future and is supported by a sense of hopefulness in relation to envisioning future selves and possibilities (Hammell, 2004). Steve most explicitly identified hopefulness as a feature of this style of farming, also offering visions of the role this style of farming could play in the cultural development of societies. Although all farmers talked about plans for the future, not surprisingly, younger farmers expressed greater future orientation associated with their farming. Older farmers tended to talk about adjusting workload and income to a slower pace of life and to describe how they *became* farmers through their experiences on the farm. Processes of change and evolution were identified by younger farmers as they described the ever-evolving nature of the farm and how exploring new markets offered opportunities for the development of the farm. Jim and Twister both described a sense of satisfaction associated with becoming something that hadn't been part of their childhood experiences and that was associated with a greater sense of competence. Jim talked about having developed skills that are important for looking after his family, having become something different than he would have had he chosen a different career path. For many of the farmers, their own

individual becoming was deeply tied to the evolution of the farming communities of which they are part. Experiences of *belonging* will be considered along with the next theme.

Living in Harmony/Belonging. Farmers described striving to be in harmonious relationships with natural cycles and rhythms, with the natural conditions and elements on their farms, with other farmers, and with customers. Farmers had a strong sense of natural cycles and systems and seemed to experience themselves as being part of these kinds of complex systems of connectivity and relationship. They talked about “going with the flow”, about adapting their farming practices and activities depending on natural cycles, elements, or conditions on the farm. Farmers described an awareness of seasonal rhythms using indicators such as particular flowers in the forest or the presence of particular migratory birds to mark their place in the seasons.

Inter-dependence figured prominently in farmers’ experiences. They talked about relying on farming organisations for support when getting started farming, about assistance or contributions from family members or neighbours, and about exchanging goods and services with other farmers. Farmers seemed to see themselves as embedded in networks of inter-dependence just as they worked with such networks of relationships among natural elements on their farms.

Attention to inter-dependence and harmonious relationships ran throughout all aspects of farmers’ experiences and practices. Although farming is clearly an economic activity, farmers all seemed to orient to harmonious relationships as their guiding principle even in economic transactions. Farmers see their customers as part of their lives

and part of their farms. When customers violate this relationship code, they may be confronted with backlash from farmers. Farmers derive satisfaction from feeling that they are contributing something of value to building a relationship with their customers.

Belonging to an interdependent web of relationships was a central and inescapable part of farmers' experiences. Steve explained that in his experience, many farmers involved in the local food movement had sought this way of life in search of a more "genuine, integrated way of relating to family, friends, and community" (Steve, personal communication, February 24, 2012). Interdependence and especially receiving support figured prominently in all the farmers' experiences. Beyond communities of people, farmers also expressed a sense of belonging to the natural systems and cycles of their farms. This sense of belonging to place was enhanced by engaging with and developing a relationship with the place of the farm over time.

Belonging is associated with autonomy, safety and acceptance, and feeling valued (Rebeiro et al., 2001) and is noted as the foundation for exploring, taking risks, and trying new things (Betz-Zall, 2006; Jonsson & Clinton, 2006; McKanan, 2006). For those who came from a farming background, belonging to a family with those resources has been centrally important in enabling them to accomplish what they have with their farms. It has provided the foundation for establishing themselves as farm operators. For new farmers, belonging to a farming community was a critical support as a source of information and encouragement as well as for social affirmation of their efforts. Farmers identified that individual farms, the farming community, and a supportive broader community are mutually supportive and enhancing, with their fates intertwined. Each

contributes to the thriving of the others and relies on contributions and support from the others. Many of the farmers interviewed are involved in farming interest and advocacy groups or other initiatives linking local farming to the broader community.

Experiences of belonging, including supportive social relationships and the feeling of being included and welcomed, are identified as contributing both to the performance of occupations and to the quality of experience associated with performance (Hammell, 2004; Rebeiro et al., 2001). This additive benefit is similarly evident in farmers' appreciation for both the material support of the farming community along with the shared values and commitment. For farmers, belonging to the farming community supports the purposeful, goal directed actions of farming while also providing support and validation for shared experiences and a shared sense of purpose and meaning associated with farming. Belonging to the farming community provides material support for the *doing* of farming, while also enhancing and affirming the meaning of the experience. Extending these belonging relationships to include customers widens this web of shared meaning, further enhancing the quality of the experience. Reflections on belonging and harmony seemed to lead farmers into spiritual and existential questioning.

Spirituality/Being. For many, farming was consciously a medium for personal and spiritual development, providing a discipline to practice living by a set of values and beliefs. Farmers typically described a strong sense of meaning associated with their farming. For some, this was in the form of a calling or expressing their destiny. Often, farming was characterised as a vehicle for expressing love and caring into the world.

Farmers all had a range of experiences associated with their farming and in particular with their contact with the natural world that seemed to be related to feeling small in the face of something much larger and more mysterious. With all their physical senses engaged, farmers described experiences that were hard to put into words but that evoked experiences of wonder, of awe, of transcendence, of celebration of life. At times this seemed to be an experience of merging with, or of one-ness with creation, experiencing a common bond of life. At other times it seemed to be more characterised by a sense of humility, a sense of being small and insignificant in the face of grandeur and magnificence. Farmers frequently seemed to have great respect for, even be in awe of, the great mystery of the natural order and struggled to understand the role of people in this order.

The theme of spirituality correlates most closely with the quality of *being* associated with occupation. Being is associated with expression of identity, of one's true essence or self and with stillness, reflection, contemplation, and restoration (Hammell, 2004; Rebeiro et al., 2001). The experiences farmers described that were grouped into the theme of spirituality included descriptions of experiences reflecting these qualities. Further, being is associated with experiences of meaning and farmers consistently identified their farming activities as sources of meaning. For the most part, the more secular, humanistic descriptions that farmers gave in relation to the meaning of their farming activities overlap with descriptions of being. However, farmers also described experiences that are more explicitly spiritual or suggestive of the sacred. The association between these types of experiences and being will be discussed in the following section.

Theoretical Implications

At the outset of this research, it was proposed to be a worthwhile endeavour to consider the occupational experiences of farmers as a group defined by their shared occupation rather than by medical diagnosis as is predominant in the occupational therapy and occupational science literature thus far. This framework proved adequate for encompassing the experiences of farmers, validating these experiences in a population not defined by disability. Beyond this, there are a few key points worth highlighting:

- The results of this study emphasize how closely related the dimensions doing, being, belonging, and becoming are and offers some suggestion of how they support each other.
- Secondly, the results of this study suggest the consideration of temporal and spatial aspects in relation to belonging.
- Third, the results prompt reflection about an association between more sacred, spiritual experiences and the dimension of being.

Each of these key points is further explained below.

The Relationships Among Doing, Being, Belonging, and Becoming. Although for theoretical purposes, we describe and define each of these dimensions of meaning of occupation separately, in reality of course, they are not experienced in isolation or independently of one another. No occupation relies on or brings forth only one dimension of experience. Fidler and Fidler (1978) hinted at the integration of these dimensions early on, explaining that in addition to the purpose of producing an end

product, the goal directed actions of doing may also be directed for the purpose of testing a skill (becoming) or clarifying a relationship (belonging). It is clear in farmers' descriptions of their experiences that these dimensions work together to enhance the overall satisfaction associated with farming occupations. Some highlights of these relationships are highlighted in the following.

Although *doing* can bring a satisfactory sense of accomplishment in and of itself, it also serves as a vehicle for the expression of one's *being*, for building relationships and experiences of *belonging*, and for the ongoing process of change and evolution that is *becoming*. Although being and doing are often presented as being in opposition to each other, farmers described experiences where the two aspects seemed to merge. Farmers described a feeling of merging with their work, of expressing themselves most fully when engaged in action, a sort of *being through doing*. Farmers found expression of their values and essential selves, qualities associated with being, within engagement in the purposeful, goal-directed actions of doing. For instance, Ron Bronson talked about building a compost pile, which is a task with no financial reward but which is valued for its role in replenishing the soil.

As has been discussed elsewhere (White, 1971) *doing* provides opportunities for exploring and challenging one's capacity to effect change in one's environment. For farmers, it was through doing that they built the infrastructure of their farms and carried out the day to day and season to season tasks of growing food. Through the doing associated with confronting and overcoming ongoing challenges, farmers developed and expressed their innate potential more fully; *doing* allowed them to *become* more fully

themselves. It was through doing, through challenging their capacities and learning from experience, that they became farmers. As Schwammle (1996) suggests, “Perhaps the reason why *doing* is so critical to our existence is because it is how we contact, interact and influence our environment, as well as learn, experience and alter ourselves” (p. 326, italics in original).

Wilcock (1998) noted that *doing* is a foundation of community and contributes to shaping society. Farmers described shared doing or doing for others as the foundation for building relationships that brought a sense of connection, of *belonging*. Farmers described associations between experiences of doing and experiences of belonging, with each enhancing the other. They described this in relation to other people as well as in relation to place. A stronger sense of belonging arose in their personal relationships as a result of doing with, especially for a shared purpose. Similarly, a stronger sense of belonging to place (i.e. their farms) arose out of engaging in doing interactions with that place over time. Competence and self-esteem are enhanced by social recognition for the outcome of one’s actions, by opportunities to deal “with the environment by exploring, testing, and trying out [one’s] own powers to make things happen” along with “the appreciating recognition of this competence by others” (White, 1971, p. 273). Farmers described how their sense of satisfaction with the fruits (and vegetables) of their labours was enhanced by the expression of appreciation from consumers. Sharing their doing contributed to building relationships, nurturing a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging in turn supported their doing, allowing them to do things that would not have been possible without this reinforcement, and therefore to *become* more than they could have otherwise. Farmers own individual development and the development of their farms

contributed to and relied upon the development of a strong community of farmers and local food eaters.

Temporal and Spatial Aspects of Belonging. As mentioned above, farmers described associations between experiences of *doing* and experiences of *belonging* in relation to both people and place. While belonging is commonly associated with social relationships, farmers' reports suggest added temporal and spatial dimensions to this experience. As with people, farmers' relationships with their farms developed through shared experiences over time. Just as doing could be shared with other people, it could also be a collaboration between the farmer and the natural systems of the farm. Through this shared collaboration, farmers developed a strong sense of belonging associated with place. Steve in particular talked about a sense of place being associated with the combination of unique qualities of the place along with experiences of interacting with the place. The sense of belonging associated with place is enhanced to the degree that the relationship with the place is characterised by an experience of mutuality and reciprocity.

The suggestion of added dimensions of time and space to the experience of *belonging* begins to hint at trans-active perspectives. To the extent that our western worldview is oriented to see independent, discrete parts, we tend to emphasise independence when considering people and to locate occupations within the individual (Dickie et al., 2006; Fogelberg & Frauwirth, 2010). Farmers' experiences challenge these individualistic views. Their descriptions of experiences of belonging associated with place, arising out of shared interactions over time, reflects a process through which they become "more and more a part of the place to the point where [the place] has

become an extension of the self” (Rowles, 1983, p. 303). When the place becomes an extension of the self in this way “then obviously we can no longer think of the work as ‘the environment’ – something out there around us. We can see that our relation to the world surpasses mere connection and verges on identity” (Berry, 1995, p. 74-75).

In describing the transactional perspective, Dickie et al. (2006) explain that it means “that what we would typically see as separate from each other are really *part of* each other” and go on to explain that “the environment/place/world with which persons transact is not limited to physical forms; it includes, for instance, social, cultural, and political aspects as well.” (p. 88, italics in original). The broader social, cultural, historical, and political context in which farmers operate featured prominently in farmers’ discussions and will be explored further but first the next section will focus on farmers’ transactions with the realm of the spirit.

Spirituality and Being. Although the dimension of *being* is closely associated with the concept of spirituality as described in the occupational therapy and occupational science literature (Lyons, Orozovic, Davis, & Newman, 2002), there are a few significant differences between the concept of *being* and the concept of spirituality. Farmers’ experiences contribute some novel consideration of these. Spirituality is mentioned only in passing in Wilcock’s (2006) chapter on being through doing. However the characteristics generally associated with *being* largely overlap with the more secular definitions of spirituality in the literature. Mention of the essential self, self-awareness, reflection, experiences and expression of meaning are common to both concepts (Beagan & Kumas-Tan, 2005; Egan & Delaat, 1997; Hammell, 2004, 2009; Howard & Howard,

1997; Unruh, Versnel & Kerr, 2002; Urbanowski & Vargo, 1994; Wilcock, 1998, 2006). Discussions of the concept of spirituality tend to include mention of a transcendent or existential dimension, a connection to something greater than the self, and a concern with questions of existential meaning, in contrast to experiences of meaningful engagement. Part of the conundrum presented by the topic of spirituality is the tension between secular and sacred definitions (Egan & Delaat, 1997; Hammell, 2001; Howard & Howard, 1997; Kroeker, 1997; McColl, 2000; Unruh, et al., 2002).

While some farmers certainly expressed their philosophy of farming in more secular terms (e.g. positive thinking), others described a sense of communion with other life forms, awareness of other forms of consciousness, and being moved to tears simply by being present within their surroundings. These kinds of experiences transcend the purely secular – that which is strictly of this world (Kroeker, 1997) – and bring to mind McColl’s (2000) descriptions of experiencing “spirit”. She describes spiritual experiences as having qualities of “[dissolving] the boundaries between the self and the world... and [making] one more aware of the mystery and connectedness of the world” (p. 225). These qualities are evident in the experiences farmers struggled to articulate. McColl goes on to suggest that transcendent experiences are interpreted through the senses, the emotions and the intellect and that these experiences may feel like wonder, awe, and mystery. She notes “we have no language to describe the experience of transcendence” (p. 219), which is consistent with farmers’ struggles to describe some of these experiences, as well as with their descriptions of a kind of wholeness.

Such transcendent experiences have long been associated with contact with the natural world and McColl (2000) identifies appreciation of nature as a vehicle for invoking experiences of spirit or transcendence. Wilcock (2006) suggests that “it is probable that intellectual activities of the type now called philosophy first emerged as wonder at the natural world and that early belief systems were based on animals and environmental forces important in survival terms” (p.118). Although animals and environmental forces are not directly a threat to farmers’ survival in the way they might have been historically, they do have greater salience for farmers, whose livelihood is based directly on interactions with these entities. Indeed, farmers’ philosophical reflections largely seemed to arise from experiencing a sense of awe and humility in confronting the natural world. Twister went so far as to suggest that being a philosopher is essential to farming as a way to cope with the inherent unpredictability.

Farmers’ philosophical reflections led them to question the place of people in relation to the natural world and to question the “nature” of people in contrast to the “nature” of the natural world. Several farmers suggested that the true, essential “nature” of people is spiritual, rather than of this world. The overlap between *being* and spirituality in terms of their association with experiences of meaning and expression of the essential self, along with farmer’s reflections on the spiritual nature of humans suggests consideration of more explicit inclusion of the religious, sacred, spiritual experiences as part of *being*.

Summary. In addition to the hard working conditions, experiences of challenging their capacities, working in harmony with systems and cycles, and spiritual experiences,

farmers spontaneously and explicitly discussed their farming as situated in a political, social, and historical context. This awareness informed and expressed itself through their overall experiences of farming. Their experience of being situated in this social, temporal, political context has implications for occupational justice and occupational ecology, which will be the focus of the next section.

Community Based Ecological Farmers and Occupational Justice

Although it was anticipated that farmers would have a high level of familiarity with the natural world, the results of this study suggest that their awareness of their work environment extends beyond this. Farmers keenly experienced their farming practices as situated in a socio-political context and were consciously aware of trying to work outside of or against the dominant system. Farmers consciously viewed themselves as role models for an alternative way of being in the world. Striving to engage the non-farming community in this vision is part of their commitment to farming. Farmers interviewed for this study all talked about socio-political aspects of food systems that affect their farming practices and their visions for how this system could be changed.

Farmers frequently expressed concern for how “brittle” our current, globalised food markets are and the extent to which populations so divorced from their food sources are vulnerable. Alongside concern for developing a more flexible and responsive local food system, farmers expressed concerns about justice for farmers in terms of living wages, fair wages for labour, and access to power in social and political structures that are all built on the foundation of farming. Part of the socio-political awareness that farmers expressed included a concern for fair wages and working conditions for those in less-

developed countries who supply the labour that goes into much of our cheap produce. In this, farmers demonstrated an awareness of their own circumstances being situated in a broader context of global inequities. Although farmers explicitly named issues of justice, their experiences are hard to classify using existing theoretical constructs of occupational justice. What does the experience of these farmers contribute to our understanding of occupational justice?

Townsend and Wilcock (2004) proposed four conditions of occupational injustice: alienation, deprivation, imbalance, and marginalisation. In the case of the farmers interviewed for this study, none of the four categories neatly captures the injustices associated with these farmers' occupations. These farmers were not alienated from their occupations; in fact, some contrasted the depth of their engagement with farming to alienation that they had previously experienced in other areas of their own lives or that they observed around them. The farmers interviewed cannot be described as deprived in relation to their farming although they acknowledged significant barriers for those interested in pursuing farming. They identified overcoming barriers to farming which may serve to deprive others of the opportunity to engage in farming. Farmers experience some imbalance associated with the seasonal demands of their work and in particular identified limited opportunities for socialising with non-farming friends. This difficulty is at least in part secondary to financial challenges. If farmers were able to earn a greater return, the workload could be decreased or offset with more labour, thus freeing up availability for social engagement. Community based organic farmers in particular are, without a doubt, politically marginalised. From an occupational perspective, their occupational opportunities related to farming are marginalised to the extent that policies

and legislation and the financial burden associated with meeting industry standards combine to severely restrict farmers' opportunities for innovation, expansion, and entrepreneurship (Berry, 2009; Brett, 2009; Salatin, 2007). While the supply management system in Canada was identified by some farmers as supporting rural communities, it was also acknowledged as a barrier for potential new farmers.

In keeping with its social justice roots, the occupational justice dialogue has concerned itself largely with experiences of injustice faced by individuals or groups of individuals who, by virtue of their social status, face restricted opportunities for engaging in occupation. Farmers are not one of those readily identifiable groups of people subject to social disadvantage by virtue of some characteristic of themselves (race, ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation) or their position in society (socio-economic class, prisoners, geographic isolation, immigrants/refugees, disability status) but their occupation is subject to economic and legislative discrimination.

An addition to the occupational justice dialogue would be a shift in perspective from groups of people who are subject to conditions of alienation, deprivation, imbalance, or marginalisation to consideration of forms of occupation that are marginalized or subject to discrimination. Community based ecological farming is one such example but other occupations involving securing the necessities of life through engagement in dialogue with the natural world, such as sustainable forestry, fishing, and hunting, may also be subject to similar devaluation. Farmers' descriptions of their experience suggest that such occupations have great potential to provide a wide range of forms of *doing*, the spiritual and personal growth challenges that enhance *being*, shared

doing and inter-dependence that build *belonging*, and the competence building challenges associated with *becoming*. Yet, the potential to derive a “fair and just wage” (Wilcock, 2006) to provide for the necessities of life from this form of productive occupation is severely restricted. This lifestyle is endangered before the health benefits of its occupational profile have been fully studied (Hudson & Aoyama, 2008).

While there is considerable focus on the impact of conditions of injustice on disadvantaged groups of people, new insights may be achieved from considering the impact on society and communities of economic discrimination against forms of occupation, particularly those involving securing the necessities of life through engaging in dialogue with the natural world. The justice dialogue has focused largely on individuals or groups of individuals facing conditions of disadvantage, but “concentrating on justice for an individual without considering the justice of social policies *for the total community* (italics added) or environment is unlikely to succeed in the longer term and injustices will be enacted later with others” (Wilcock, 2006, p. 250). Hammell (2008) further highlights the connection between individual and community with her definition of occupational rights as “the right of all people to engage in meaningful occupations that contribute positively to their own well-being and the *well-being of their communities* (italics added)” (p. 62). Conditions of oppression – marginalization, cultural imperialism, powerlessness and exploitation (Young, 1990) – are associated with conditions in which occupational rights are thwarted. Hammell’s inclusion of community well-being in her definition of occupational rights broadens the scope of analysis for identifying conditions of occupational injustice.

Fogelberg and Frauwirth (2010) propose a framework for occupation-focused research at different levels of occupational systems: individual, group, community, and population. They note that “the community and population levels (the two most super-ordinate levels) [represent] potential, but currently relatively unexamined arenas for occupation-based research” (p. 134). The above definitions suggest a shift of perspective away from individuals or groups to communities. What are the consequences to the broader community of discrimination against or oppression of certain forms of occupation?

In the case of community based ecological farming, the outcomes of economic and legislative marginalization of this form of farming and the associated enablement of a globalized, industrialized food system, are felt not just by these farmers, but also at community and population levels. Community based ecological farmers may experience social disadvantage secondary to, for instance, the social and economic status ascribed to farming, particularly their form of farming. Potential new farmers may experience occupational alienation, deprivation, and/or marginalization if unable to access the substantial resources necessary to overcome the barriers to becoming established in farming. Overall, the adverse effects of discrimination against this form of farming and the values associated with this lifestyle are visited on all members of society – in the form of environmental degradation, fragmentation of the social fabric of communities, “nature deficit disorder”(Louv, 2008) urban issues, etc – not just on farmers. This change in focus prompts evaluation of the role of different forms of occupation in contributing to community and population well-being.

With some exceptions (Wilcock, 2006; Wilcock & Whiteford, 2003), consideration of the natural environment and ecological concerns do not feature prominently in the occupational justice dialogue although environmental degradation is closely linked to conditions of discrimination and exploitation globally. As referenced above, Wilcock notes that “concentrating on justice for an individual without considering the justice of social policies for the total community or *environment* (italics added) is unlikely to succeed in the longer term and injustices will be enacted later with others” (Wilcock, 2006, p. 250), explicitly linking environmental considerations to the pursuit of justice. It has been argued above that occupations associated with securing the necessities of life from engaging in dialogue with the natural world are a form of occupation particularly subject to discrimination, largely because of their incompatibility with the dominant “paper” economy (Berry, 2009). It is to exploring the nature of being occupied in dialogue with the natural world that we now turn.

Implications for Occupational Ecology

The style of farming that was the focus of this work is inherently embedded in the natural world. Farmers accept that their efforts are limited by conditions of the natural world and deliberately undertake to understand and mimic the processes of degeneration and regeneration found in the natural world. Five main themes were identified from farmers’ reports of their experiences: difficult working conditions; engaging their capacities; striving for harmony; spirituality; and awareness of the socio-political context in which they operate. Two macro-themes encapsulate all of the theme categories and these are (1) the experience of connection, including an awareness of being part of a

whole, rather than experiencing oneself as a discrete, self-contained entity and (2) farmers' humility in accepting the limits imposed by nature.

The macro-themes of connection and humility tie each of the five themes together. Farmers accept difficult working conditions because “[they] come with the territory it’s a package deal” (Rudy2, p. 4). The benefits of overcoming challenges and developing one’s capacities cannot be reaped without accepting the hardships. Farmers extend their awareness of relationships among the natural world elements of their farms to social relationships with customers and more broadly to the macro socio-political context that situates their farming. Through their farming, they are trained to see themselves as connected through these relationships – as parts of a broader whole – rather than as separable and separate. Each one of these areas is part of farming and thinking about farming is not complete without considering all of these inter-related influences. Rather than trying to impose mechanistic, reductionist practices, farmers humbly submit to the limits of natural processes and seek to develop deeper understandings of these relationships and to be guided by feedback from the natural world. A number of farmers alluded to communicating with the soil, plants, and other natural elements of the farm. The process of accepting hardships and limitations, of overcoming challenges, of deepening one’s awareness of being connected to all of one’s surroundings, prompts spiritual reflection and development.

Our alienation from engagement with the natural world has been termed “nature deficit disorder” and is associated with a host of modern ailments (Louv, 2008; 2012). A variation on “connecting with nature” is a theme commonly identified and valued in

studies exploring people's experiences with gardening (Unruh, 1997; Unruh & Hutchison, 2011; Unruh, Smith, & Scammell, 2000). McColl (2000) suggests that some occupations may have greater inherent capacity to invoke spirit and identifies nature-based activities among these. There is however, a significant difference between being occupied *in* nature and being occupied *in dialogue with* nature. Consider spending a pleasant evening socialising with close friends in contrast to the intimacy of getting down and dirty in negotiating daily minutia with one's spouse. Similarly, the intimacy of acquaintance between the farmer and the natural environment of the farm arises out of the farmer's dependence on the farm and engagement in dialogue with the natural elements of the farm. While gardening may share qualities of this dialogue, the part-time leisure gardener is not dependent on the natural world for survival as the farmer is.

Farmers did not identify a theme such as connecting with nature, although experiences of communing with the natural world contributed to their sense of being and of spirituality. This may be because they do not experience themselves as alienated from nature to begin with. Identifying this aspect of an experience as a theme highlights the "norm" of being alienated from nature, while farmers' failure to identify this theme highlights their embeddedness in nature. Exploring the nature and experience of being occupied in the natural world is a neglected area for occupational scientists and the experiences of these farmers contributes to filling this gap.

Simo Algado and Cardona (2005) coined the term "occupational ecology," which they defined as "awareness of the ecological genocide we are confronting, along with proactive measures, through human occupation, to restore the balance with the natural

environment” (p. 346). They go on to characterise occupation as “the dialogue between the human being and the environment”, a dialogue they suggest “must be based on veneration and respect”. Although Simo Algado and Cardona are to be lauded for highlighting the importance of a greater ecological consciousness in occupational therapy and occupational science, their definition has proven awkward in the course of this study.

Ecology is defined as both the relationships of an organism to its environment as well as the study of these relationships (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/ecology?s=t>). The use of this term in relation to occupation contributes two important concepts. For one, the idea that organisms cannot be understood without considering them in the context of their relationships with their surroundings is consistent with more transactional perspectives, countering the more reductionist and individualistic orientations. Secondly, the use of the term “ecology” implies consideration of organisms as embedded in natural systems in the natural world. This implication is absent in occupational therapy discussions of the environmental influences on occupation.

Thus occupational ecology might better be defined as the study of how occupation mediates the relatedness of human beings and the natural world. Occupation is our language, our means of communicating with the natural world; it is through occupation that we engage in dialogue with the natural world. A better understanding of this dialogue, of how we and our occupations are embedded in natural systems, would provide a foundation for the awareness and efforts to restore a balance with the natural environment that Simo Algado and Cardona advocate.

Before proceeding, it is worth considering what it means to be in “dialogue”. For the purposes of this discussion, the most useful definitions of the word “dialogue” include “a conversation between two or more persons”; “an exchange of ideas or opinions on a particular issue”; “to discuss areas of disagreement frankly in order to resolve them” (Steinmetz et al., 1997, p. 547). Further, definitions of “conversation” include “informal interchange of thoughts, information, etc” and “association or social intercourse; intimate acquaintance” (p. 444). In both cases, there is a relationship partner and a collaborative stance, in contrast to a monologue, which is defined as “a prolonged discourse by a single speaker, especially one dominating or monopolizing a conversation” (p. 1244). In a dialogue, there is turn taking and seeking to understand the dialogue partner’s position. A farmer engaging in conversation with his or her farm would

ask what nature would be doing there if no one were farming there. They would ask what nature would permit them to do there... [and] what nature would *help* them to do there. And after each asking, knowing that nature will respond, they would attend carefully to her response” (Berry, 2009, p. 8, italics in original).

Berry (ibid.) further notes that

in a conversation, you always expect a reply. And if you honor the other party to the conversation, if you honor the *otherness* of the other party, you understand that you must not expect always to receive a reply that you foresee or a reply that you will like (italics in original).

Farmers’ willingness to submit to the limits imposed by the natural environment of their farms indicates their efforts to receive and accept nature’s reply.

In order to better understand the nature of this dialogue and how occupation mediates it, we must study those who are so occupied. Community based ecological farmers are an example of a group engaged in dialogue with the natural world by securing

the necessities of life through their direct engagement with the natural world. We can suggest then that their experiences of hard work, engaging capacities, seeking harmony, spirituality, and contextual awareness characterise the experience of being occupied in dialogue with the natural world. Further, the macro-themes of connection and humility describe qualities of the dialogue. Studying other groups of people engaged in different forms of occupation in the natural world would contribute further to understanding the experience of being in dialogue and to describing the qualities of this dialogue. Although those intimately involved with the natural world in other ways, such as biologists, conservationists, rangers, or wildlife artists, may have much to offer this exploration, it is here proposed that the experience of being dependent on nature for the necessities of life, which are secured through direct engagement with the natural world, as through ecological farming, hunting and gathering, sustainable fishing, or sustainable forestry, contributes to a deeper humility and awareness of participating in an ecosystem.

All occupation takes place in and has an effect on the natural world because “nature includes us. It is not a place into which we reach from some safe standpoint outside it. We are in it and part of it while we use it” (Berry, 2009, p.7). How could we be other than alienated from this reality when all our technology serves to remove us from nature? When we travel in climate controlled vehicles from climate controlled homes to climate controlled offices and shops, buying “fresh” raspberries in January? Under such unnatural conditions, how is it possible to “hear” a response from the natural world? The farmers interviewed for this study have a very different experience of communicating with the natural world through occupation. Their questioning of the place of people in

relation to the natural world arises out of their direct engagement with the natural world on their farms.

Even in circumstances designed expressly to be removed from nature, the form of our occupation communicates something to the natural world. Some forms of occupation may be characterised as a dialogue with the natural world while others more closely resemble a monologue. As in the case of the farmers in this study, occupation may communicate an awareness of ecological concerns and represent an effort at developing a more balanced relationship with the natural world. Other forms of occupation may not be based in the same concern and may communicate an entirely different message, such as denial of ecological concerns. Some forms of occupation may have goals that have nothing to do with relating in a balanced way to the natural world and everything to do with exploiting and dominating it. All occupation communicates something about our relationship with nature.

Defining occupational ecology as the dialogue between human being and the environment points to a research focus on the observation, reflection, and study of the qualities and characteristics of this dialogue. What is the experience of being occupied in dialogue with the natural world? What are the qualities of this dialogue? How can occupation be used to more consciously engage people in this dialogue? How can we ensure the preservation of forms of occupation based on securing the necessities of life from engagement in dialogue with the natural world? What health and well-being benefits might there be for communities and populations of such conservation efforts?

Summary

This exploration of the experience of community based ecological farmers raised a number of implications for theoretical constructs in occupational science. A common thread throughout this investigation is the transactional perspective that none of the areas of interest in this study - dimensions of farmers occupational experience; experiences and conditions of injustice and oppression; people, their occupations, and the natural environment; and the health and wellbeing of individuals, groups, communities, and populations - can be viewed in isolation. All of these areas are interlocking pieces of a bigger puzzle and cannot be meaningfully understood in isolation. Awareness of occupation as situated in the natural environment is sorely lacking in occupational therapy and occupational science and is a neglected aspect of occupational justice. Similarly, awareness of the human need to be meaningfully and productively occupied in ways that challenge human capacity and forge relationships with people and place is lacking from environmental conservation efforts. As quoted earlier, Hudson and Aoyama (2008) merge humans' occupational needs and environment conservation needs by observing that "bringing an occupational perspective to the problem of [environmental] conservation also raises the question of the extent to which human occupations should themselves be subject to conservation measures. Many traditional human occupations are disappearing before their role in the maintenance of human health and wellbeing has been fully documented." (p. 546). Aside from their role in the maintenance of human health and well-being, the role of these occupations in the bigger picture of maintaining ecosystem health is similarly undocumented and poorly understood.

Highlights of the implications for theoretical constructs of occupational science raised by this exploration of the experiences of community based farmers using ecological farming methods include:

- Contributions to theoretical constructs of doing, being, belonging, and becoming including the experience of being merged with doing, temporal and especially spatial aspects to the experience of belonging, and spiritual aspects of the experience of being.
- The suggestion that discrimination and oppression associated with occupational injustice may be directed at occupation, rather than at the person performing the occupation, and the importance of considering the impact on communities and populations of discrimination and oppression of forms of occupation, especially those associated with securing the necessities of life through dialogue with the natural world.
- Identification of qualities of the experience of being occupied in dialogue with the natural world, which may include humility and awareness of oneself as situated in broader systems and cycles.

This is an area with rich potential for further exploration and development. Follow up studies might integrate occupational science theory with concepts from other disciplines such as ecology, eco and transpersonal psychology, philosophy, aboriginal studies, outdoor and experiential education, community development, natural sciences, and anthropology. Potential exists for theoretical development as well as for pilot

projects focused on building ecological literacy and involving people in dialogue with the natural world.

Strengths and Limitations

This was a small study with a small and culturally homogeneous sample in a particular geographical region. Farmers who volunteered to be interviewed likely comprise a group that is highly reflective about their farming and their place in their communities and that embrace a high level of commitment to sharing the values reflected in their farming. The context – including the natural environment and the socio-politico-economic environment – in which farmers operate will strongly influence their practices and experiences. There is great diversity of beliefs and practices among organic farmers and within local food movements. Thus, one must be extremely cautious about applying the findings of this study to other populations of farmers.

However, the purpose of qualitative research is not to be able to develop generalizable findings but rather to develop greater insight into the depth and breadth of human experience. The experience of these farmers offers a starting point to exploring the experience of community based farmers in other regions or the experiences of other occupations related to deriving sustenance directly through interactions with the natural world. Further exploration might illuminate contextual factors that influence differences in farmers' practices and experiences. Much of what these farmers revealed is reflected in the published writings of other farmers (Berry, 1995, 2009; Brett, 2009; Salatin, 2007), suggesting that there are commonalities in the experience of being a community based, ecological farmer.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Occupational science claims as its domain the study of human occupation in all its diversity. Food-related occupations are among the most basic of daily survival occupations. Occupations related to food procurement – agriculture and hunting and gathering – are undeniably and inescapably rooted in the natural world, a reality which is obscured for most urban-dwellers in the industrialised world. Awareness of a relationship between the natural world and occupation is woefully lacking in the field of occupational science.

This phenomenological inquiry into the experience of community based ecological farmers sought to contribute to addressing this lack. Community based ecological farmers use farming methods that are based on and enhance cycles and systems of the natural environment of the farm. They support their local communities by providing food directly to eaters and are in turn supported by their local communities. The results of interviews with farmers suggests that their experience is characterised by hard work for little pay, opportunities to engage a full range of human capacities, seeking to live in harmony with their surroundings, a sense of spirituality associated with their engagement with the natural world, and an awareness of their farming as situated in a social, historical, and temporal context. These themes correlate with dimensions of experience of occupation as identified in the occupational science literature: doing, becoming, belonging, and being, respectively.

The experiences of these farmers have implications for a number of important occupational science concepts. For one, farmers' experiences highlighted the artificiality

of considering aspects of experience separately. In farmers' experience, the dimensions overlapped and enhanced one another. This was particularly notable in relation to doing and being, which are often contrasted. Farmers described experiences of "being through doing", where they felt most in tune with their essential selves when engaged in action. Further, farmers' experiences highlighted the overlap between secular conceptualisations of spirituality and the dimension of being, leading to the suggestion of including more sacred conceptualisations of spirituality as parts of the experience of being.

Farmers' experiences also have implications for occupational justice and occupational ecology, two emerging occupational science concepts. In relation to occupational justice, farmers' experience of injustice related to their farming occupations can not be neatly captured using the proposed classification of occupational imbalance, deprivation, marginalisation, or alienation (Townsend & Wilcock, 2004). It was suggested that in considering conditions of occupational injustice, the focus be shifted from individuals or groups of individuals subject to conditions of injustice to marginalisation, oppression, or discrimination against certain forms of occupation. Further, it was proposed that the consequences of discrimination against certain forms of occupation may be visited on communities and populations as much as on individuals.

In relation to occupational ecology, the study found engagement in dialogue with the natural world to be a useful definition of this term. Occupation is our means of communicating with the natural world; all forms of occupation are situated in the natural world and communicate something about our relationship with the natural world. In the industrialised world, our alienation from nature has too often led us to engage in a

monologue, rather than a dialogue. Engaging in dialogue with the natural world is associated with securing the basic necessities of life directly through this interaction. Engagement in this dialogue is characterised by experiencing oneself as a small part of a bigger system and humility arising from being subject to unpredictable and uncontrollable conditions. Further study of other forms of occupation that promote engagement in dialogue with the natural world would help to develop this concept and help to integrate theories of justice, ecology, and occupation.

Endnotes

¹Community supported agriculture is a model where “members” (i.e. community members) pay the farmer at the beginning of the season and receive a weekly allotment of the harvest. The CSA model is intended to bring farmers and their supporters together while providing up front and predictable cash flow for farmers.

²The supply management system in Canada was developed to stabilise markets for commodities such as eggs, milk products, and chickens. Farmers are required to purchase a certain amount of “quota” and then are allowed to produce and sell that amount of a particular product. The quota system is overseen by marketing boards, such as the Dairy Farmers of Ontario and one of its purposes is to stabilise supply in relation to demand and ensure farmers a fair and predictable price for their product (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs, 2010).

³See above

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Appendix A: Researcher Subjectivity Reflection

Through the research, the researcher maintained a reflective journal in which she recorded thoughts and impressions, including connections with her own experience that arose from her contact with farmers and immersion in the data. The following is a description of the researcher's personal position in relation to the research. It is based on the personal reflective process carried out throughout the research process and is formatted as a "self-interview", carried out after the analysis process.

How did you become interested in this topic?

I did not grow up with any farming experience. My maternal grandfather grew up on a farm in the prairies and maintained a community garden plot until he died. My paternal grandmother always made a point, during the growing season, of buying produce from a local grower. My dad always grew a variety of things and berry-picking was an annual family event. In the summer, we bought cases of tree fruits and preserved them. I remember in my very young years getting milk directly from a farm and for as long as I can remember, my dad kept chickens – mostly laying hens but at times we also raised meat birds. I remember my dad cutting the heads off the chickens and them flapping around the yard with no heads. So I had an early introduction to where food comes from and indoctrination on the value of self-sufficiency and an appreciation for food in its rawest forms.

I grew up in a region where the economy was primarily natural resource based. As a result, an awareness of factors and conditions associated with the natural world were just part of the general consciousness and I absorbed a sensitivity to the tensions between

conservation and exploitation. I was also surrounded by communities deeply affected by irresponsible exploitation of natural resources – once-thriving communities that struggled to reinvent themselves once the local natural resource was depleted and the associated businesses shut down. This was the foundation for my later questions about how to live more sustainably, not only in terms of natural resources but also for building thriving and stable communities.

I grew up on the edge of the world at the end of time, or so it felt. Estranged by distance from extended family, I never had roots – “I had been raised without religion by parents who had broken with their own pasts and moved to the West Coast – who had raised their children clean of any ideology in a cantilevered modern house overlooking the Pacific Ocean – at the end of history” (Coupland, 1994, p. 178). I had no history and no philosophy of meaning to give form or direction to life. So this interest in farming brings together longstanding interests in environmentally sensitive ways of living, food, natural resource stewardship, community sustainability, and belonging or “rootedness”.

What is your involvement in the local food and local farms movement in Kingston?

The farmers market in Kingston is a major event in the summer and it was a feature of the city that I eventually discovered. Over time, I learned to distinguish between the farmers and the resellers and became a regular customer. Over more time, I began to develop relationships with some of the farmers, becoming acquainted on a first name basis. I attended several of the Fall Gatherings, an annual feast and gathering hosted as part of a community development project sponsored by the local chapter of the National Farmers Union. Many of the farmers host interns through the growing season and

through my discussions with farmers, I learned about the Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (CRAFT) and became increasingly interested in and curious about food production and particularly about the political situatedness of food and farming. As I learned more about food miles and feedlots, I increasingly came to believe that good local farming is the crux of environmental stewardship and community building.

For several years I had discussed the possibility of doing an internship season with one of the market farmers and eventually the stars aligned and I was able to arrange my life to make this possible. In 2010, I spent the growing season, from April through October doing an internship on a biodynamic farm north of the city. It is a rustic, pioneer style farm, with pigs, goats, and chickens and an intensive 1 acre market garden. It is operated by a single woman. Horses are used (in addition to the tractor) for some of the ploughing and other such labour. During the time I was there, I stayed in a camping trailer. I prepared my food in advance and transported it in coolers, sometimes using the stove in the farmer's cabin to cook. I showered in the hose and used outdoor toilet facilities.

In going into the internship, I was looking for several things. For one, I was looking for some practical experience in the world. The vast majority of my learning had been through book learning and academics and I craved an opportunity for some direct experience of something real. Perhaps associated with that, I felt a deep longing for an experience of being situated, to experience being part of natural rhythms and natural cycles. Farming held, and still holds, a certain idealistic, romantic appeal for me and I went into the internship questioning for myself, is this something I would like to do? I

was looking for roots and what can be more grounding than growing food? Other than perhaps hunting and gathering, what human occupation is more basic and more situated in a particular place?

Throughout the internship, I maintained a journal, recording my experience, reflections, and observations. On the one hand, the internship disabused me of some of my romantic ideals of farming. I was exhausted – the physical demands were far beyond what I could have conceived. My back hurt, I got blisters, I got sunburned, I got heat rash, I got poison ivy, I got mild heat exhaustion, and I got bitten by mosquitoes and black flies and deer flies. The demands were relentless – the manger needed to be scrubbed and cleaned and repaired, the pig's feed trough needed to be re-built, the granary needed to be constructed, the fencing needed to be repaired, the escaped goats needed to be found and retrieved (on an almost daily basis), and all the while, the weeds advanced and the zucchini needed to be harvested sometimes twice a day. On the other hand, I felt like I was fully engaged in the work in a way that I had not experienced before with clinic based work. It was physically demanding but it was equally mentally and emotionally demanding. All of my senses were engaged and active. I went to bed each night feeling exhausted but whole. And even by the end, I could still look around and be overwhelmed by the idyllic scene of pigs grunting in the mud, goats bleating, birds chirping and flying about overhead.

The internship solidified my burgeoning relationships within the farming community. Other farmers shared their experiences with me more freely and treated me like an insider. In response to my question going into the internship, I answered that I

would not like to jump in to farming that way for a livelihood but I became more committed to growing more of my own food and gradually expanding my own production capacities.

How do you think your own experiences and expectations influenced your approach to this research and your analysis and interpretation?

I tried to be conscious of this to the extent that I am able to be aware of how I influenced myself. For one thing, this research grew out of my own longstanding interest in food, health, and environment as well my growing, but still peripheral, connections with local farmers. The research arose somewhat organically out of bringing these areas of interest together and that helped to infuse the whole process with energy and interest and commitment. I am aware that I can have a tendency to idealise and especially before doing the internship, I think I did idealise these farmers and this way of life based on my interactions with farmers at the market and being peripherally involved in some of their community events.

Partly I think this idealizing stems from being a bit in awe of what they do. They seem to do things and know things that are so practical and important. They make things and produce things. There is a concrete and useful outcome of their actions on the world. And they seem to all know each other and be friendly together. In contrast, I sit in front of a computer and have nothing tangible to show for my work and feel socially isolated, having a hard time finding a community of like-minded collaborators with whom to share projects. Over the course of the internship, my idealizing was tempered considerably as I was exposed to some of the behind-the-scenes realities including back-breaking physical

labour, severely frayed nerves and their impact on relating to co-workers, and some of the relationship tensions amongst farmers. But even at the end of the season, I could pause and bring awareness to my surroundings and be dumb-struck by the idyllic beauty of it all.

In my interviews and analysis in particular, I tried to be conscious of my tendency to idealize. In my interviews, I made a point of asking about difficulties and hardships, anything that would counter an excessively rosy picture. Throughout the process, I challenged myself to see and consider aspects of farmers' experiences that were unexpected or that surprised me. In particular, during the analysis, I questioned myself "am I being true to the data? Am I representing all aspects of the experiences farmers reported? Am I leaving anything out?" Further, when member-checking, I had an opportunity to talk to one of the farmers about this. He acknowledged the hardships and difficulties but quickly returned to extolling the virtues of his lifestyle and waxed on about the hopefulness that characterises the local food movement in this area.

Beyond this, I felt a strong responsibility to represent farmers' experiences accurately and with integrity. In some cases, farmers volunteered to be interviewed out of interest in the research but in other cases, they volunteered as a personal favour to me. Their volunteering represented my acceptance within their community and I felt humbled to be entrusted with the task of sharing their stories.

Post-Script: Reflections post-analysis

I have come to see this kind of farming as a way of "right" living, of living in harmony. It is where I see my interest in food and health, environmental concerns, and

interest in stable communities come together. It is a way of being occupied that connects people with the natural world, grounds people in experiencing themselves as part of the natural world and part of a particular place, is in harmony with our occupational natures, and affords opportunities to engage all of our human capacities.

I'm struck looking back over my writing at how many of the farmers' comments I can relate to: Jim talking about feeling alienated and not connecting throughout his childhood and struggling to experience a sense of place; Miss Kier talking about living in apartments high off the ground and keeping plants because she just needed the greenery but didn't really realise it until a boyfriend pointed it out; Ron Bronson talking about playing in the trees and the dirt and the leaves as a kid and how you just absorb it and it is just part of you and that feeling of awakening that comes from being outside; Rudy talking about always wanting to be a farmer but being concerned about social status and income. Although I am not a farmer, they are kindred spirits in a way; I want to belong among them. Without a doubt, my sympathies lie with the farmers. I wanted to be able to bring what they stand for into broader circles and I hope that I have done an adequate job of representing their experiences.

Appendix B: Interview Guide

<p style="text-align: center;">Interview 1 – Focused Life History and Present Lived Experience</p>	<p>The purpose in this interview is to collect background information about the farmer’s experience with organic farming and direct marketing and detailed descriptions of the present lived experience of farming and direct marketing. The interviewer will be looking for detailed descriptions of early experiences and influences that led to becoming an organic, direct marketing farmer. The interviewer will prompt the participant to reconstruct details of day to day routines and experiences pertaining to farming tasks, direct marketing and social relationships, and interactions with and experiences of the natural environment.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you become an organic farmer? • How did you get started doing direct marketing? • How did you get started with your own farm? • What experience did you have with farming and/or direct marketing before starting your farm? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What interested you about farming before becoming a farmer? • Tell me about your farm. • Tell me about what you do as an organic farmer. • What happens in the daily life of an organic farmer? (anticipate/prompt for seasonal variation: April/May, July/Aug, Oct/Nov, Jan/Feb) • What kind of direct marketing do you do? What is involved in this kind of marketing? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What skills, knowledge, qualities are needed to be an organic farmer? For direct marketing? • Describe your interactions with the natural environment. How does the natural environment feature in your day to day farming tasks? • What do you enjoy about your kind of farming? • What kinds of challenges do you run into with your kind of farming? 	
<p style="text-align: center;">Interview 3 – Reflections on meaning</p>	<p>The purpose in this interview is to prompt the participant to reflect on and interpret meaning from their previous descriptions of lived experience. The interviewer will prompt the participant to reflect on and interpret his or her experiences and the information discussed previously. The interviewer anticipates prompting the participant to reflect on his or her identity and how this has been shaped by farming, how farming has shaped the participant’s development over time, and personal values reflected in and shaped by farming experiences.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does it mean to be an organic farmer? • How are organic, direct marketing farmers different from non-organic farmers? From non-farmers? 	

- What is your vision or purpose for yourself as an organic, direct marketing farmer? For your farm? For your community?
- How do you think your awareness and experience of the natural world (seasons, weather, plants, animals, soil) differs from that of non-organic farmers? From non-farmers?
- Based on your farming experience, how would you describe the role of people in relation to the natural environment?
- How has your experience as an organic farmer influenced choices in other areas of your life?

Appendix C: Essence Statement Sent to Farmers

February 8, 2012

Dear farmers,

I hope this letter finds you well and that I have managed to reach you before the intensity of the season's preparations are fully upon you. What a strange winter season we have had! Spring must be nearly upon us (in fact, I saw shoots from crocuses and snowdrops and irises in my backyard yesterday!) and yet it feels like winter never really happened. I have wondered often how the unusual weather might end up affecting your growing.

It has been some time since you so generously shared your time and your life experiences with me. Although I have not been in contact, I have been slowly and steadily working my way through reading and reflecting on the information you shared and at long last, I have something to show for my efforts! I hope that you might have a few moments to look over the information I have included here and let me know your thoughts.

I have enclosed two separate documents. The first is a one page summary which is my effort to describe you based on our conversations. While it is impossible to capture the fullness of all you shared in one page, does this seem like a reasonable, brief summary? Are there any important highlights that I missed? Do you recognise yourself in this description? Does this seem like a fair and faithful representation of what you shared in our interviews?

The second is two pages summarising the ideas that arose out of all of my interviews with farmers. Some of these may be more true to your experience than others but in reading over this summary, do you recognise your experience? Do you recognise these experiences as being within the range of experiences that ecological, local, direct-marketing farmers might have?

Thank you for sharing any feedback or reactions. Your comments can only help me better represent the experiences of farmers like you. I can easily be reached by email at rcabell@sympatico.ca or at my home phone - 613-531-3846.

With thanks,

Rebecca Cabell

I spoke to farmers with different levels of experience, from different backgrounds, and specialising in different types of products. All farmers I spoke to were using organic practices (some certified and some not) and all were engaged primarily in selling what they produce directly to the end eaters. Of course, each farmer's experience was unique, reflecting his or her life experience and circumstances. I had a general impression that a particular group who became farmers in the 60s and 70s were influenced by a hippie ethic of mistrust for establishments and a desire to create alternative lifestyle options. Another cohort who became farmers more recently, seems to be influenced by similar socio-political and environmental concerns but rather than striving to "drop-out" of society, this cohort seems to include community outreach and engagement as central to their farming practices. Nonetheless, reaching out to eaters and giving eaters opportunities to experience a connection with farms and their food was a role you all valued.

As a group, you all expressed a great deal of enthusiasm for farming. I had a sense that farming is fun, it brings joy and pride, fulfilment, satisfaction, a sense of competency, a feeling of contributing something meaningful to the world. I was also humbled by how demanding farming is, with constant physical, emotional, mental, interpersonal, and spiritual challenges. You talked about tasks being "a pain the ass and the back and everywhere else", about working outside in the heat and in the cold and wet, and dealing with biting insects. Financial strain takes a toll, especially between spouses and among partners. You are at the constant mercy of the weather which can favour one crop over another throughout a season, or wipe out a crop in a matter of minutes. Dealing with this unpredictability is a constant juggling act and you have to become good at prioritising to manage risk.

Perhaps partly related to this constant challenge, you spoke about how much creative problem solving is part of farming and it is something that you get great satisfaction from. You enjoy being able to solve problems and make things work or make things work better. Part of what seemed to be rewarding about this kind of problem solving was how practical and applied it is. Solving a real problem in the real world using your ingenuity, your hands, and materials available draws on a wide range of skills and is also a way of learning more about what works and how to make it work, a way of developing your capacity and competence. You seem to take great pride in your feelings of self-sufficiency; in being able to provide and do for yourselves and others, on your own terms.

One thing I learned from all of you is that your kind of farming is built on a foundation of relationships. You all identified yourselves as being embedded in relationship webs based on mutual exchange and inter-dependence. These relationships include those with others in the farming community; those with your customers, members, or "your people"; and not least, intimate relationships with different parts of

your farms. Many of you explicitly identified people who had helped you along the way, by sharing knowledge, equipment, or other resources. A humble group you are – most of you no doubt could easily finish the sentence “I couldn’t have done it without...”. It seemed that although there is an important economic exchange associated with the sale of your product, the financial transaction takes place in the context of a relationship of reciprocity with eaters, especially those who express respect and appreciation for your work. You know and interact with your farms on intimate terms - knowing how conditions differ across a field and knowing how to work in harmony with these different conditions, relating to the soil as a living organism and being well acquainted with the variety of fauna dwelling there, deriving great satisfaction from your interactions with farm animals, reflecting on your interactions with the landscapes of your farms in ways that enhance the health of the ecosystem as well as the human appreciation of the place. You expressed a strong sense of place which seemed to develop from your interactions with the natural environment of your farms and with the farming community.

You talked about experiences associated with farming which were hard to put into words but which seemed to be an attempt to express what might be called transcendent experiences. It seemed to me that this was an attempt to describe an experience of being “small” in relation to that which is great and mysterious. Many of you struggle with existential questions around the nature, the role, and the place of people in relation to the natural world, which seems orderly and harmonious without human interference. Farming offered a sense of meaning in contrast to feelings of being alienated. For some, farming was a calling, a reason for being on the earth. Farming can serve as a sort of spiritual practice through which you develop important qualities like discipline, patience, and humility, or are challenged to transcend your egos. Others described farming experiences in which they felt awakened or a sense of merging with creation. Love, care, and nurturing figured prominently in the way you talked about your farming experiences.

Finally, all of you were highly politically conscious. You are acutely aware and reflective about your place in a broader historical, social, and political context. You are knowledgeable and insightful about the structures of food systems and the implications of these for food and farms in society as well as for rural communities. Many of you see yourselves as role models, as stewards not only of land but of ecological diversity and of knowledge, as beacons for the possibility of alternatives to heavy reliance on petroleum, the wastelands of industrial agriculture, toxic chemicals, and exploitative labour conditions. Some of you explicitly identified issues of justice and fairness especially associated with financial reward in relation to the work involved and the value of the food you produce as well as of the ecological and cultural stewardship role that you play.