

ETHICAL CONSUMPTION IN A FAIR TRADE TOWN: GLOBAL CONNECTIONS IN  
LOCAL PLACES

by

Anne Spice

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**DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY**

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

The undersigned hereby certify that they have read and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance a thesis entitled “Ethical Consumption in a Fair Trade Town: Global Connections in Local Places” by Anne Spice in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Dated: April 4, 2012

Supervisor:

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Readers:

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AUTHOR: Anne Spice

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	vi
ABSTRACT .....	vii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED .....	viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	ix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 WOLFVILLE, NOVA SCOTIA, FAIR TRADE TOWN .....	1
1.2 ETHICAL CONSUMPTION .....	5
1.3 VALUE, PLACE AND RESPONSIBILITY .....	10
CHAPTER 2: VALUE AND MEANING.....	16
2.1 DISCOURSES OF VALUE AND MEANING .....	16
2.2 A FAIR PRICE .....	19
2.3 A DELICIOUS REVOLUTION .....	26
2.4 A LOCAL LIVING ECONOMY .....	32
2.5 VALUE AND VALUES IN THE ETHICAL FOODSCAPE.....	37
2.6 CIRCULATION OF VALUE(S) .....	46
CHAPTER 3: PLACE .....	52
3.1 AGRICULTURE IN THE ANNAPOLIS VALLEY.....	53
3.2 VALORIZING THE LOCAL .....	58
3.3 LOCALIZATION STRATEGIES.....	62
3.3.1 Direct Marketing: Farmers' Markets .....	63
3.3.2 Slow Living: Slow Food and Citta Slow .....	72
3.3.3 Bringing it Together: Food Policy Council.....	75
3.3.4 No Farms No Food .....	77
3.3.5 Fair Trade Town .....	81
3.4 MARKETNESS/ EMBEDDEDNESS .....	85
CHAPTER 4: RESPONSIBILITY .....	90
4.1 NEOLIBERAL GOVERNANCE AND ALTERNATIVE FOOD.....	91
4.2 PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY .....	98

4.3 CONSUMER RESPONSIBILITY .....	103
Chapter 5: Conclusion .....	108
5.1 GEOGRAPHIES OF RESPONSIBILITY .....	109
5.2 ENACTING VALUES .....	113
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	116
APPENDIX A.....	125
LIST OF BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTED IN INTERVIEWS.....	125
Farms and Businesses: .....	125
Organizations:.....	125
APPENDIX B.....	126
MAP 1. NOVA SCOTIA .....	126
MAP 2. NOVA SCOTIA COUNTIES .....	127

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Ethical and gourmet foodscapes.....	31
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## **ABSTRACT**

Much of the literature on ethical consumption focuses on the potential of individual actions, such as buying fair trade products, to produce large-scale change. This thesis instead examines collective actions by exploring the discourses and interactions of alternative food movements in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. Drawing on interviews with members of these networks, it argues that ethical consumption initiatives encourage the circulation of particular social and ethical values through the community. Community identity and place are made and marketed through networks of value that foster responsibility in and for the food system. Collective identity alters daily routines of consumption in order to channel benefits back into the local economy. A sense of place that includes responsibility for the food system sometimes leads to collective political action, but it also creates tension among and between different organizations and individuals who make claims to “the local” as a moral, social and geographical space.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED**

<b>AOC</b>	Appellation d'Origine Controlée
<b>BALLE</b>	Business Alliance for Local Living Economies
<b>BSE</b>	bovine spongiform encephalopathy
<b>CLAC</b>	Coordinadora Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Pequeños Productores de Comercio Justo
<b>CSA</b>	community supported agriculture
<b>FLO</b>	Fairtrade Labelling Organization
<b>INAO</b>	Institut National des Appellations d'Origine
<b>JUDES</b>	Just Us! Development and Education Society
<b>NSFPC</b>	Nova Scotia Food Policy Council
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization



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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 WOLFVILLE, NOVA SCOTIA, FAIR TRADE TOWN**

Wolfville, Nova Scotia is a town of about 3700 people (Statistics Canada 2006: Wolfville community profile) located in the fertile Annapolis Valley, on the shore of the Bay of Fundy. Wolfville is home to Acadia University, as the town's sign proudly displays. In 2007, however, Wolfville's sign displayed another town achievement: "Welcome to Wolfville: Recognized by Transfair Canada as the first Fair trade Town in Canada." I chose to study Wolfville because I was curious about the ways that ethical consumption was articulated through public discourse. Wolfville had collectively sought out and achieved fair trade designation—a process by which the local government, businesses, schools, faith organizations, and others work to achieve a set of six criteria, established by Transfair Canada.<sup>1</sup> This collective approach to ethical consumption struck me as a divergence from the focus on individual consumption I was used to seeing in fair trade advertising and labels. I wondered if organizing ethical consumption initiatives in communities helped to address the sense of helplessness that often comes along with consuming in order to "make a difference." Could Wolfville— as a community—take responsibility for helping to create a more just and fair food system?

As I talked to more people in Wolfville, I discovered that the fair trade town campaign, although still cited as an important event, is only one in a set of alternative food initiatives that people consider linked and overlapping. As an agricultural

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<sup>1</sup> I discuss these further in Chapter 3. I learned later that Wolfville helped to create the sixth of these criteria in partnership with Transfair. The sixth goal suggests that "initiatives are undertaken within the community to promote other forms of sustainable consumption and ethical purchasing. These may include events and programs to reduce overall consumption, and to promote organic, sweatshop-free, energy-efficient, and locally-produced goods, etc." (Transfair Canada, 2009, p.8).

community nestled in an intricate network of farms and farmers, Wolfville's ethical consumption initiatives form one part of a growing alternative food movement that revolves around local social relationships and connection to the land. The links between different alternative food movements are apparent in the space of the weekly Farmers' Market. Every Saturday, year-round, people gather on Front Street,<sup>2</sup> or the Acadia Students' Union building in the winter, for the Wolfville Farmers' Market. The market combines primary and secondary producers (about 60% primary, 40% secondary), and so incorporates both food (vegetables, meat, fish, bread, pastries, hot meals, wine) and non-food (wool, jewellery, soap) products.

The market has the atmosphere of a community gathering place: there is live music, people of all ages stop and chat with each other, and everyone brings their dog. You can buy local fruits and vegetables, as well as fair trade coffee. The market offers food tastings, children's events, and maintains an information booth where people can ask questions about specific vendors, or about local and organic food. It was clear from my visits to the Wolfville market, as well as my interviews with both the market information booth coordinator and participating vendors, that the market functions as more than just a place to shop: it combines community participation, social relationships, and food provisioning in interesting ways. In this multi-faceted space of consumption, concern for distant producers can be articulated through a purchase of fair trade coffee, and the same ethic of "fairness" is applied to support for a vendor selling local strawberries. Global and local scales of responsibility overlap, local farming is cited as a

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<sup>2</sup> On May 21, 2011, the Wolfville Farmers' Market moved to a permanent, year-round location in the DeWolfe building on Elm Avenue. Acadia University offered the Wolfville Farmers' Market a 20-year lease on the building, for \$1 per year. The building also hosts a mid-week farmers' market on Wednesdays from June to December.

good reason to buy fair trade, and there are varying ideas about whether or not the market is a place where people are engaged in “ethical consumption.”

Wolfville is an interesting case study because many aspects of food culture and alternative food movements are at play in a relatively small space. As well as the market, the town of 3700 people has two fair trade cafés, multiple roadside produce stands, several gourmet restaurants, and a burgeoning winery industry. The whole is nestled into the best farmland in the province. I interviewed a variety of producers, owners and consumers, all of whom could be considered part of the “alternative food network” in the Wolfville area. I interviewed several small-scale farmers and ranchers, fair trade café owners, a cheese maker, a tofu maker, winemakers, a chef and slow food advocate, fair trade educators, the mayor, a local grocer, a CSA (community supported agriculture) farmer, and agricultural policy advocates. The interconnectedness of Wolfville’s food culture makes it an excellent site to explore how different food movements interact. My thesis revolves around the interplay of these food movements in three fields: the collective (How are social values around food collectively defined?), the spatial (How are food movements embedded in place?), and the ethical (How is responsibility for the food system designated and shared?). I argue that the alternative food initiatives articulated through the “ethical foodscape” in Wolfville are an attempt to circulate economic and social value(s) to (a) support an agricultural sector in decline, (b) build collective identity around social and physical resources, and (c) reconnect producers and consumers in order to increase consumer responsibility for the food system.

During the summer of 2010, I spent several days a week in Wolfville; I commuted from Halifax to do interviews, attend the farmers’ market, and participate in other

community events. The bulk of my information was gathered through single interviews,<sup>3</sup> which I conducted at people's homes and farms, at the T.A.N. or Just Us! coffee shops (the two fair trade coffee shops in town), in offices and storefronts. I gave all of the interviewees the option of choosing a pseudonym, and all but one chose to have their real names revealed, instead. Because most of the people I interviewed are engaged in political and activist organizing around alternative food networks, their ideas and opinions about the topics we discussed are already well known. I recruited nineteen interviewees by contacting some of the more publicly-engaged people first—the mayor, the information booth coordinator at the market, the owners of the two fair trade cafés in town—and then asking them who they were linked to through alternative food initiatives. I made an effort to interview different kinds of farmers, including meat producers, vegetable growers, and those who produce secondary products such as cheese and tofu. This is certainly not a representative sample of all the types of farming in the valley, and all of the people I spoke with worked, in some way, within an alternative “frame”: that is, when I spoke about fair trade or local food, their names were volunteered as people who “do that stuff.” As a result, my interviews reflect the discourse of alternative food that is circulating among those who are not only engaged in local farming or ethical sourcing, but see themselves as part of a food movement built around a set of ethical and social values.

In addition to these interviews, I attended the farmers' market throughout the summer, and spent one market day at a booth conducting surveys with market-goers. I also attended several food-related local events, including the “Tastes of the Valley” event

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<sup>3</sup> Interviews ran from 30 to 90 minutes in length. I also conducted one interview with a representative of Transfair Canada (called Fairtrade Canada as of March, 2011) by email, and followed up to my interview with Linda Best with a phone conversation in November, 2011.

at the farmers' market (which I explain in more detail in Chapter Three), the incrEDIBLE picnic (which offered local prepared foods and a picnic area), and a Nova Scotia Food Policy Council (NSFPC) board meeting and dinner. My interactions with consumers of local food at these events were much less formal than my interviews with farmers. When I write about ethical consumption, then, my focus is more on how producers hope to influence the system of consumption, and less on how consumers are reacting to ethical initiatives. I did not do any quantitative surveys of money spent at the farmers' market, or percentage of food sourced locally, or contribution of fair trade cafés to the local economy. I am more interested in how the discourse of alternative food—of what it means to be “fair” and “local”—circulates in Wolfville, how this discourse creates Wolfville as a certain kind of place, and whether the various networks that make up alternative food initiatives are able to create a movement to change the food system in Wolfville and beyond. These initiatives are situated in a discussion about ethical consumption in both popular media and scholarly literature. I turn to this discussion to frame the context in which Wolfville farmers, business owners, activists and consumers pursue an alternative food system.

## **1.2 ETHICAL CONSUMPTION**

The ethical consumption of food has emerged from a number of consumer initiatives as a reflection and a response to consumer society, as well as a way to address the globalization of food systems. The use of consumption (or stoppage of consumption, in the case of boycotting) to advance ethical or moral aims can be traced back to the early

20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> Consumer organizations concerned with advocating for workers' rights emerged, and the trend continued through housewives' organizations during the First World War (Sassatelli, 2007, p.185). Early examples of ethical consumption are defined by the way in which they politicized consumption, making it about social relations rather than purchasing things. Sassatelli suggests that the "political framing of the consumer" is "a marginal but nonetheless influential stream across modern history which has appeared, in different moments and guises, to counter the dominant instrumental economic view of consumption" (2007, p.185). The current resurgence in ethical consumption initiatives is coloured by the globalization of commodity production. The changing consumer routines introduced by globalization open a space for the market to become a site of consumer politics (Sassatelli, 2007), as the inequalities and contradictions of the global market economy are distanced from consumers (through global trade), but also brought into high relief (through global communication).

Recent arguments for the ethical consumption of food are in dialogue with the paradigm of the individual, "rational", self-interested consumer, as well as the context of globalization and industrial food production. Writers and journalists in North America have continued to suggest possible alternatives to the current food system. Books such as *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (Pollan, 2006) and films such as *Food, Inc.* (Kenner, 2008) track the source of the food we eat every day and argue that the environmental, ethical, and health costs of production speak to the need for a differently structured food system. Pollan's *In Defense of Food* attempts to lay out some simple rules for eating better ("Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants." 2008, p.1), and suggests that individuals can change

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<sup>4</sup> Or earlier: in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, English women supported abolitionism using their power as consumers (Sassatelli, 2007, p.185).

what they eat to change the system. In *Eating Animals*, Jonathan Safran Foer asks, “Just how destructive does a culinary preference need to be before we decide to eat something else?” (2009, p.243), and puts forward a case for an informed vegetarian approach. Barbara Kingsolver (2007) advocates for local food, family gardening, and a renaissance of home cooking and preserving in *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, and Sarah Elton (2010) makes a Canadian case for local food in *Locavore*.

All of these authors see ways for individuals and communities to address larger food issues. Many of them see promise in the ability of consumers to reshape the food system by consuming food differently, or consuming different food—this is the crux of the current ethical consumption movement. Geographers Barnett et al. suggest that ethical consumption “refers to any practice of consumption in which explicitly registering commitment or obligation towards distant or absent others is an important dimension of the meaning of activity to the actors involved” (Barnett, Cloke, Clarke and Malpass, 2005, p. 29). This definition of ethical consumption is incomplete in a couple of important ways—as Adams and Raisborough (2010) point out, it fails to account for the various layers of doubt and uneven application that are typical of everyday ethical consumption practices. The language of “distant or absent others” perhaps underestimates the ability of ethical consumption to operate, in practice, through familial and community relationships (Adams and Raisborough, 2010). The strength of the definition lies in an exploration of how commitment or obligation is articulated, and how this dimension of meaning is valued, struggled over, and acted out.

Lang (2010) proposes that ethical food “challenges the ‘value-for-money’ ethos which has dominated Western food systems in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The



appeal of ethical food is to move towards a ‘values-for-money’ ethos” (p.1814). Although consumer-driven ethical initiatives are not new, the current form of ethical consumption in the food system challenges both the consumerist frame and the context of global food production. As Trentmann points out, “the consumer is a historical not a universal category” (2010, p.45). Initiatives mobilizing the ethical consumer are an attempt to suggest that consumer choice can be utilized to advance moral aims. The appeal to consumer choice that assumes that consumers are motivated by price, convenience, and choice is challenged by suggestions that consumers act on a different set of values. For the ethical consumption of food, these values have roots in the organic movement of the 60s and 70s, as well as the humanitarian organizations that sowed the seeds of the fair trade movement. These sets of values compose two ways of framing the ethical consumption of food—Morgan (2010) labels these narrative frames “local/green” and “global/fair”, and asks, “to what extent is there a trade-off between the multiple values on offer in the ethical foodscape?” (p.1853). This question is key to my inquiry as well—although both local food and fair trade initiatives challenge and question the global structure of the food system, their response is shaped by different histories and values.

Local food, as a spinoff of the local, sustainable, organic movement, revolves around the health of the land, a brand of agricultural environmentalism, and the local scale. Fair trade initiatives were born of a social justice approach that located distant producers who were struggling to make ends meet under global free trade agreements (Trentmann, 2010). These two value-frames sometimes overlap—as when organic standards are encouraged for fair trade products. They also conflict, especially on issues of scale. The two frames often employ very different discourses of responsibility and

caring, with the local frame emphasizing caring for what is ours—local ecologies, local culture, local farmers, our health—and protecting against global corporate and homogenizing influence. The fair trade frame emphasizes caring for others—distant producers, distant communities, global injustice—and taking responsibility for our unavoidable influence on the people around the globe who produce products for our consumption. These frames influence the way space is conceptualized and organized; local food encourages the protection and sustainability of local agricultural spaces, and fair trade seeks to “bridge the spatial divide” between Northern consumers and Southern producers (Trentmann, 2010, p.49).

Wolfville is a place where both local and fair trade frames are employed in the town’s various alternative food initiatives. The application of these frames influences how different values are employed to build local spaces and community identity. The discourse and practice of ethical consumption in Wolfville illustrates how values are collectively mobilized to create places, and defines the relationship between local and global scales.

As some critics have pointed out, many of the recent appeals to consumers make use of a very individualistic paradigm of social change, while ignoring the food system’s structural issues (e.g. Guthman, 2007a). Ethical consumption initiatives are often described as a way for individuals to make a difference, and the efficacy of such initiatives for enacting larger change is debated in terms of whether alienated consumers can ever act in large enough numbers to alter existing commodity chains. Community spaces like Wolfville allow a different perspective on this picture. The local food and fair trade initiatives in Wolfville are implicitly and explicitly about community building and

collective action. They draw attention to the social relationships maintained by acts of individual consumption, but also suggest the potential for ethical consumption to act as a gateway to other, more collective, forms of political action. The collective approach to ethical consumption in Wolfville inspired me to investigate how cultural and social structures influence and are influenced by consumption. Ethical consumption is more than individual desire and economic calculation; it can also be a platform for collective action, though its social movement potential can be debated and challenged. This platform is built on social geographic places, and the connections between consumption and place-making help map out the values mobilized by producers and consumers in alternative food networks.

### **1.3 VALUE, PLACE AND RESPONSIBILITY**

Both the fair trade town and local food initiatives in Wolfville seem to be concerned with place-making. More specifically, the alternative food initiatives in the area share a strategy of localization—they aim to reshape the food system by strengthening local food networks. By valorizing a local culture of food, by taking responsibility for protecting and maintaining agricultural land, and by building social spaces and relationships through exchange, local food movements ground “placeless” consumption in local places and encourage citizens to take responsibility for the shape of the food system (Feagan, 2007). However, the potential to build a just and equitable local food system depends on how the goals of these initiatives are articulated. Because “localization” and ethical consumption are strategies, not outcomes (Born and Purcell, 2006), they can be used to advance different projects, and the benefits of these movements may not always be evenly distributed. Although a number of Wolfville’s alternative food initiatives are billed as

community development, they benefit different social actors, involve different flows of social and economic value, and are sometimes contested and challenged by people who live in the local area. This thesis will examine how these initiatives interact, what they tell us about Wolfville, and their potential to change the food system in order to bring advantage to local places.

This thesis draws out the variable meanings of value and responsibility in the collective, spatial, and ethical fields. More specifically, I explore how meaning and value are collectively employed to build community identity, how value is extracted from and embedded in place, and how ethical concerns translate into political action and responsibility for others. I also endeavour to explore how these connections are mapped onto space and place—how they are embedded in the physical and social geography of Wolfville. The chapters that follow explore each of these themes (meaning and value in chapter two, place and scale in chapter three, and ethical consumption and responsibility in chapter four). Alternative food initiatives in Wolfville are debated using the language of responsibility and fairness, and at the same time are explained by tracing local social relationships of exchange. The discourse of ethical consumption is embedded in Wolfville’s particular geography, and it is on this discursive and social terrain that participants in alternative food initiatives struggle over the meaning and value of food and farming in their everyday lives. Goodman, Maye and Holloway conceptualize this intersection as the “ethical foodscape,” a term that brings to mind both the social and physical elements of ethical consumption (and production) (2010b).

Through the lens of the “ethical foodscape,” ethical consumption can be considered a collective political act that is embedded in other practices of community

building and place making. Clarke et al. note that ethical consumption organizations “endeavour to articulate consumption and the consumer through a register of ‘ethics’ and ‘responsibility’ that seeks to configure people as political actors embedded in networks of global action,” and that consumption has emerged as an addition to (not a replacement of) other forms of collective political action (Clarke, Barnett, Cloke and Malpass, 2007, p.249). As repertoires of action, ethical consumption initiatives may place responsibility for reforming the food system along different points in the commodity chain—people can act through consumption of particular products, or through food policy initiatives, or as producers offering sustainable alternatives. People in Wolfville can express the importance of a fair price and responsibility to global others through their purchase of fair trade coffee, tea, and chocolate, and they juggle responsibilities to local producers and to their own families as they negotiate prices for local produce, meat, and wine. Moreover, consumers of fair trade products and producers of local food are sometimes the same people. In Wolfville, responsibility and fairness may be markers of personal values and commitments that can be expressed through consumption, but just as often they are tools to keep a small farming project afloat, or to create a market for local cheese, or to attract tourists to the Wolfville area. Economic *value* and social *values* are combined and contested depending on how people are situated within the alternative food network.

Situating responsibility and fairness is key to understanding the impetus behind ethical consumption initiatives. I suggest that behind the burden borne by consumers through ethical consumption is an extensive network of farmers and producers driving alternative food initiatives with both their physical and ideological labour. In Wolfville, where fair trade and local food movements co-exist and combine, these values are

particularly charged. Disagreements over the direction and motivation of alternative food initiatives in Wolfville are grounded in a struggle over value—asking how to determine and express the value of local food and global responsibility is integral to building viable collective approaches to shifting the structure of the food system in ways that benefit Wolfville as a community.

In the struggle over how economic and social values are determined in the ethical foodscape, people and organizations draw on a multitude of strategies for registering and addressing problems with the way food provisioning is organized in Canada. Most of the people I talked to and interviewed in Wolfville agreed that food is an issue, although the specifics of their approaches differed in many ways. For some farmers in the Annapolis valley, producing food was woven into their upbringing, and continues to be their livelihood and their source of income. For many consumers of local food, the issue at play is health and access to quality food at an affordable price. For people engaged in fair trade organizing and local food policy initiatives, the issue revolves around food security and justice. For some consumers and producers of organic food, the issue is environmental stewardship and ecology. Despite (or because of) these different foci, the desire for collective approaches to food issues has resulted in a local food culture in Wolfville that combines pride in place, use of ecological and agricultural resources, consumer awareness, and active debate about the importance of various food initiatives. Through the formation of a collective identity that revolves around farming and food culture, Wolfville builds social and ideological infrastructures that direct the benefits of the food system back into the community. The collective political and creative potential of such a food culture is palpable, but also creates tension amongst and between different

organization and individuals as claims are made to “the local” as a moral, social and geographical space.

Even though both fair trade and local food may be taken up under the guise of ethical or alternative consumption, they may involve different actors and organizations, which may actually compete or conflict. Sassatelli (2007) points out that “while the different practices which contribute to the field of alternative consumption do signal a political problematization of consumer culture, they are nonetheless fragmented and potentially conflicting, rendering the formation of viable collective identities rather difficult” (p.189). Forming “viable collective identities” may be one way to effectively combine different alternative food initiatives and create a coherent ethical movement. Combining the different fragments of alternative food initiatives is difficult when the strategies and goals of individuals and organizations are diverse. People may disagree on where the responsibility in the food chain should lie (with food consumers or producers or policy makers), they may disagree on the potential of ethical consumption to make meaningful change, they may disagree on the most effective strategy to address the issue, and, as I stated earlier, they may disagree on what the basic issue actually is. In Wolfville, these disagreements are certainly at play, but I would argue that a coherent ethical movement is still emerging. What makes it possible for potentially competing and conflicting initiatives to form a collective and creative ethical foodscape? I think the missing part of the puzzle is place, and more specifically a common strategy of localization; ethical food initiatives in Wolfville are engaged in a common project to address global food issues through local scale. Paradoxically, embedding solutions to global problems in local networks draws out the specific strengths of Wolfville as a social

and geographical place *while simultaneously* placing the town in a larger network of social and ethical responsibility.

As the popular books and films documenting food movements make clear, local food has emerged as a way of inserting the values of communities and local social relationships into a food system consisting of far-reaching global food chains. Embedding (or re-embedding) value chains in place (in the agricultural landscape as well as the social spaces where food is grown, bought and sold, and eaten) is one way to reinforce ethical consumption movements by sharing space and encouraging the formation of place-based collective identities. The strategies used to connect place and the ethical consumption of food include labelling initiatives (providing increased information about the place of production) and re-scaling initiatives (best illustrated by the “localization” movement). I will discuss these strategies in more depth in chapter three.

In the chapters that follow, I will explore the interplay between value and values in making meaning in the ethical foodscape, the importance of place and scale in the creation of collective food movements, and the political potential of reforming ideas about responsibility in consumer movements. As a place where a number of different initiatives within the alternative food movement are already well established, Wolfville provides a lens through which to illustrate and explore their interactions, tensions, and potential.



## **CHAPTER 2: VALUE AND MEANING**

### **2.1 DISCOURSES OF VALUE AND MEANING**

During my fieldwork in Wolfville, I interviewed 19 people who shared some connection to the alternative food movement. Included in this group were farmers (of vegetables or livestock) who sold at the farmers' market or ran a Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) operation; a wine maker and a marketer at a local vineyard; secondary producers (a cheese maker and a tofu maker); a chef and Slow Food advocate, the CEO of one fair trade roaster and café and the owner of another, the owner of a small grocery store, a fair trade educator, an activist working to save farmland from development, a food policy advocate, the information booth coordinator of the farmers' market, and the mayor of the town. Many of these people disagreed on the focus of alternative food, as well as the most pressing problems in the food system, but all of them explicitly connected their work as farmers, activists, business owners, politicians and more to a set of ethical and social values. Many of them also shared a number of these values, and participated in organizations or on committees together (including Slow Food International; The Nova Scotia Food Policy Council [NSFPC]; The Business Alliance for Local Living Economies [BALLE]; Taste of Nova Scotia).

For the most part, the people I interviewed who worked in food production or preparation saw their work through the frame of alternative food. This is an important point for a few reasons. Firstly, my research does not include representation of farmers, business owners, or citizens involved in industrial farming or large-scale production and distribution. The information I gathered about conventional farmers and corporate influence in Wolfville is pieced together from what people said (and did not say) about

them. Secondly, because the people I interviewed connected themselves explicitly to alternative food, they are an unusually articulate sample of people who participate in this network. They make connections between social and economic value in how they describe their operations and business, and they are quickly able to frame what they do in terms of ethical consumption. Not all small farmers and local businesspeople would articulate their work in this way—those who are a part of the alternative food network may not see themselves as part of a broader movement. For the purpose of this thesis, I understand the alternative food *movement* to be the broader ideological framework that encompasses more defined alternative food *initiatives* (such as the Fair Trade town initiative, or a local Community Supported Agriculture operation). When I mention alternative food *networks*, I am referring specifically to the social connections and economic interactions that tie people together in local places. Thus, people in Wolfville may be a part of the alternative food network by growing and selling food locally (for example), but they may not buy in to the discourse of the local food movement that sees it as a way to challenge the industrial food system. However, for the most part, the people I interviewed see the social movement potential in the work they do.

Thirdly, as I will explain later in this chapter, these connections between alternative food networks and movements mean that many of those I interviewed have an economic stake in the success of the rhetoric of ethical consumption. Some of them are very aware of this, having had their values and activism questioned and re-evaluated as self-serving by other activists and members of the alternative food network. It is important to note, however, that this connection does not negate the social values they hold—economic benefit is one of many overlapping reasons they have for creating and

supporting alternative food systems. The combination of social and economic values does, however, influence the way value circulates, who benefits from this circulation, and how difference is marked and defined.

The social and economic values associated with food and farming in Wolfville came up in a number of my interviews. When I asked Patricia Bishop, a farmer with a small but successful CSA operation, if there was something particular to Wolfville that made it possible for different movements to co-exist and combine, she replied:

Yeah. There's a lot of things about Wolfville that are different. Number one, it obviously has a very progressive council and leadership in that town. Number two, it's a university town, so a lot of the people living there are highly educated, well travelled, well read. There are factors, Wolfville is a community of people who are *engaged global citizens*, I guess. And there's a population of people who *have the resources* to support that. And I think all those things combined mean that *you can create a community that values these kinds of things*. (Emphasis added)

Patricia alludes to two different ways of talking about value—she mentions the *social values* of the community which come from education and lead them to be “engaged global citizens,” but also the *economic value* (or “resources”) that is necessary to support these initiatives. The mention of both kinds of value together is worth noting—I could add many more examples from interviews that show the same pattern. I think that economic value and social values are conflated and combined in these conversations because they are indeed closely related. David Graeber suggests that social theory has used three approaches to value:

1. “values” in the sociological sense: conceptions of what is ultimately good, proper, or desirable in human life
2. “value” in the economic sense: the degree to which objects are desired, particularly, as measured by how much others are willing to give up to get them
3. “value” in the linguistic sense, which goes back to the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure (1966), and might be most simply glossed as ‘meaningful difference’. (Graeber, 2001, p.1-2)

Graeber (2001) explains that it is no coincidence that the three terms often imply each other; they share something in common. He claims that scholars who focus on one and exclude the others miss a major theoretical opportunity (Graeber, 2001). One of the reasons to avoid focusing on one and not the others is that people allude to them interchangeably in everyday speech. Looking through my interviews, I was struck by how often reference to “value” came up, and how easy it was to read multiple definitions of value into people’s sentiments. The first two of these approaches are the ones most often cited by people in Wolfville, and the third is implicit in statements about distinction and difference. Most often, they seemed to mean both “values” and “value”, that is, both social values and economic value. Linguistic value (which could also be described as symbolic value) emerged as a way of articulating difference between social groups, and more specifically as marker of distinction. The fact that value and values are often mentioned together, and that both are used to symbolically differentiate groups of people, is not a confusion of the meaning of value, but an indication that all three approaches ought to be considered as connected. In this chapter, I delve into the meanings of value and values, where they emerged as concepts in my conversations with people in Wolfville, and which different approaches to food movements these meanings support.

## **2.2 A FAIR PRICE**

The combination of economic value and social values is a site of tension in ethical consumption movements. One of the reasons for this is that most ethical consumption initiatives—though they may propose alternatives to a global capitalist system of exchange—operate through both the provision of information to consumers about the

social values inherent in their purchase, and the manipulation of price and profits to direct a fair amount to producers, community organizations, or environmental groups. Both Jeff Moore, the CEO of Just Us! coffee roasters co-op<sup>5</sup>, and Lay Yong Tan, the owner of T.A.N. coffee, expressed commitment to social justice and fair prices for distant producers of fair trade products, but also emphasized importance of simply selling enough coffee to build a viable business. The two entered the fair trade coffee industry from very different backgrounds—Jeff as a humanitarian interested in ways of promoting solidarity (he started as a member of organizations like Oxfam and Tools for Peace), and Lay Yong as a chartered accountant who started his coffee career as the chairman of the board and production manager at Just Us! before launching his own roaster and café.

Lay Yong Tan spoke about the transition he made from the more “conservative” ideology he learned as a chartered accountant, to embracing fair trade values while working for Just Us!:

In a situation where profit is number one, your focus is different, and there’s exploitation to the farmers...Even here a lot of people won’t pay nine dollars for this [holds up bag of coffee] when they can go to the supermarket and pay five bucks for coffee, and this is the reason why we do this. When we focus on the freshness and the quality, people are willing to pay the price.

Lay Yong demonstrates commitment to the values of social responsibility and fairness through the fair trade network, but emphasizes the importance of price, noting that consumers demand freshness and quality (not just social values) to justify altering economic value in the form of higher prices.

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<sup>5</sup> Just Us! Coffee Roasters Co-op was the first fair trade coffee roaster in Canada, and was started by Jeff and Debra Moore. The original location and roaster is in Grand Pre, and there are cafés in Wolfville and Halifax. As I will explain in Chapter 3, the fair trade town initiative was suggested by Jeff and Debra, and fair trade town events are often partnered with the Just Us! Development and Education Society (JUDES).

When Jeff Moore started researching coffee co-ops in Chiapas, Mexico, he quickly realized the significant investment it would take to live out his social values of solidarity and fairness:

I came back basically from Chiapas and said to my wife, ‘the good news is that there’s a great co-op that would like to sell to us, the bad news is we have to put our house up for security in order to buy a whole container’ because that’s how it works, you buy seventeen tons of coffee. So that’s how we got started, we got started kind of having to make it work or we’d lose our house.

Local farmers with small farming operations also know the economic risk involved in supporting ethical consumption movements—a bad harvest or a failed Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operation may not mean losing the house (although this is not out of the realm of possibility), but farmers are continually struggling to provide food to consumers while monitoring and maintaining an acceptable standard of living for themselves. As Patricia Bishop, a CSA farmer notes:

It’s foolish to think that farmers should just do these things because it’s the right thing to do, because farmers are businesspeople. They’re in the business to produce food. Some farmers do it for different reasons, some farmers do it because they actually feel very connected to the earth or connected to the animal species...but most farmers are doing it because this is their business.

Patricia goes on to suggest that ethical consumption movements can bridge the gap between value and values: “the CSA is so incredibly important, because the CSA is basically saying, I will pay you to do things in a way that I think is right, because I value it.” Patricia deftly balances a desire for people to recognize that farmers, even those who produce products bound for ethical markets, depend on the economic value of their business to stay afloat, and a desire for people to choose farms whose commitment to sustainability they deeply value. It is clear from Patricia’s sentiments that value and values are connected: people need to be willing to pay for things they value.

It may also be easy to support ethical consumption in one area but not another, as

Patricia recounts:

My experience is, however, that a lot of people are living their lives in kind of like a dichotomy, where on the one hand as a business person they want to have a fair price for their cabbage, but on the other hand, they're going to the grocery store and buying cheap coffee...So that's what I see in the community, is that there's disconnect between living what you're asking other people to live. You're asking other people to spend more money on your product and yet you're not stepping up to the plate and paying attention to things like fair trade. (Patricia Bishop)

The social values that connect different alternative food initiatives are not always visible in practice. Although people like Patricia clearly see how supporting local food and fair trade promote justice and fairness across different scales, the meaning of these purchases is not shared by all. As I will explain later, a main challenge to the social movement potential of alternative food initiatives is the ability of different initiatives to cohere, and when this is successful, it is often based around place. Indeed, sometimes the social values that adhere to even a single initiative fail to translate into consumer practice.

Patricia illustrates this frustration:

Even like the guy who works downstairs, every day he gets lunch and he has a banana and he eats a banana and then he eats beans and then he buys plums that are imported! And I'm like, DUDE! You're working on a farm in Nova Scotia; buy local plums! That's bad! If that's happening then we have so far to go, if the people who are working on the farms aren't buying food from the farms, then what the hell. Anyway. We have a long journey ahead of us. (Patricia Bishop)

The tension between economic and social values is sometimes represented by the challenge of pricing "ethical" products. An interview with Carl Oldham, a local grocer in Wolfville, highlighted the difficulty of balancing values with prices. Carl tries to provide as much local food as possible, but that means raising prices, which consumers don't always support. He explains:

So you know, as long as people understand that buying local is going to cost you more. So you go down to the farmers' market and that stuff, it's good but it's not cheap! So if you think you're going down there for a deal, you're not going to get a deal. Because that guy works hard, he's got a small farm, they're not getting rich. So that's a big challenge. And we don't want to lose money. So I try and do my utmost to buy as much as I can get, to find ways to. We have to think about that. We have to take a conscious decision that, ok, let's support these guys. (Carl Oldham)

Michael Howell, a local chef, expressed a similar tension between price and moral values. Like Carl, this has led him to make a conscious decision to support local farmers:

I'm trying my best to get the restaurants into buying ethically and to buy locally. There's no Cisco truck that pulls up to my restaurant. Never. Never. You won't see that. I used to even have a local one, but I don't even buy from them anymore, it is just another food service distributor. So I pay a financial price for that, but I don't pay a moral price for it. (Michael Howell)

Symbolic value is also at play in Michael's statement—the Cisco truck is a symbol of the conventional food system, with its large-scale sourcing and distribution. His decision to buy directly from farmers differentiates his restaurant, Tempest, from others that are served by food distributors. The next section details the way that these kinds of symbolic values operate through ethical and gourmet food movements.

Building ethical movements that combine value and values means a delicate balance of ideology and price—the difficulty of this balancing act is most clear to those whose livelihoods depend on people continuing to pay a fair price for food produced in ethical ways. Ethical consumption initiatives take what economists would call “externalities” (such as environmental costs, infrastructure, certification costs), and internalize them by building their cost into the price. Value is increased through an incorporation of external costs that are deemed important. These costs are incorporated not only through price, but also through the information and labelling that present the commodity to consumers. This is where social values, as well as symbolic values



(distinction) come in—the reasons for incorporating these elements, as well as the reasons consumers have for buying them, relate to social values and how these values are perceived and incorporated into identity projects. This process of “value-capture” is a strategy for producers and companies working within ethical consumption movements like fair trade and CSA to pitch higher prices to consumers by drawing attention to the damage done by mainstream companies when external costs are ignored (for example, waterways contamination at large-scale wet-mills during coffee bean processing, or other fish species caught and killed as bycatch in commercial fisheries).

Marsden and Smith (2005) postulate that value-capture is one way of building more sustainable and environmentally responsible communities by encouraging “ecological entrepreneurship.” They explain that value-capture has three potential dimensions at the level of local agrarian producers:

First, it suggests that local producers and their networks attempt to capture more of the *economic value of their products* in a prevailing context when even more of this value is being lost to the down-stream sectors.... Second, it also suggests...that in order to achieve this it also requires *new innovations in the mechanisms for distributing value* among producers and processors at the local level.... Third, these two types of value capture can lead to new potentialities with regard to *forging synergies* between agricultural practices and different types of multi-functional activities; such as agri-tourism, engagement in off-farm incomes activities and environmental schemes and projects. As a result, these can also stimulate further, *multi-functional forms of value-capture*. (Marsden and Smith, 2005, p.441, emphasis in original)

As many small producers would attest, the ethical consumption movement has indeed created market spaces and ethical discourse to facilitate “attempts to capture more of the economic value of their products.” And, as Patricia noted above, as businesspeople who are struggling to keep small operations afloat, the importance of expanding and maintaining these market spaces for producers should not be underestimated. What

Marsden and Smith's (2005) model does not explain, however, is the complex relationship between social and economic values, and what happens to social values when they are "captured" and translated into economic ones. As Guthman (2007b) points out, the precise mechanisms by which economic value, captured by individual producers through price premiums, deal with the socialized externalities they are supposed to address are often missing from both activist rhetoric and scholarly analysis (p.459-460). As the producers and business owners above articulate, social values are more than an explanation (or an excuse) for higher prices. But what is the effect of incorporating social values into market transactions? And is it possible to change the shape of exchange by privileging social and ethical values over economic ones?

Marsden and Smith (2005) suggest that local value-capture can expand from production to tourism, place branding, and other "synergies" of value in ways that benefit local communities. They are right to suggest that this can be beneficial; later in this chapter I will address the ways that the alternative food movement contributes to building local economies. The way social and economic values are mobilized, however, may involve boundary setting and exclusion as different groups volley for control of popular discourses of value. An example of this occurred after the Wolfville Town Council launched a campaign to become a Fair Trade Town. Some local farmers expressed concern that the initiative would focus attention on distant farmers and not local ones, for whom "fairness" was also important. A similar reaction had taken place in 2000 in Garstang, England; after it became the world's first Fair Trade Town, dairy farmers marched in the town's streets demanding "a fair share of the bottle" (Garstang The World's First Fairtrade Town, 2000-2001). Farmers in both places were demanding their

fair share—both of the value associated with being a part of fair trade networks, and the values of respect, gratitude, and fairness that farmers at home and abroad deserve for the work they do to produce people’s food.

One could argue, as Guthman (2007b) does, that much of the ethical posturing around alternative food movements—especially those that rely on labelling—represents a commodification of values, and functions mostly as a way to collect premiums in niche markets. Guthman (2007b) makes a convincing case that much of the resistance to the globalized conventional food system incorporates more elements of neoliberal governance than it opposes. The detailed work that she has done on the history and current state of the organic movement in California is a comprehensive illustration of how market mechanisms, economies of scale, bureaucratization, and regulatory missteps have purged the movement of much of its grassroots social and ethical value (Guthman, 2004). Her purpose in pointing out such contradictions, however, is not to dismiss alternative food movement goals as impossible, but to caution against uncritically accepting that the social values a food movement strives for are reflected in the structure of the movement itself, or the way it is embedded in markets and particular geographies. We should be asking, then, *who* is capturing value, *how* such value circulates, and *what effect* this has on the economic and social structure of local places. Looking at the symbolic uses of value is one way to trace how value and values can be leveraged as symbolic tools for the maintenance of difference. This is the subject of the next section.

### **2.3 A DELICIOUS REVOLUTION**

The Slow Food organization and movement emerged in Italy in 1986 as a response to the homogenizing influence of transnational food corporations such as McDonald’s (Paxson,

2005; Miele and Murdoch, 2006; Sassatelli, 2007). By presenting local and regional foodways as a delicious and ethical alternative to fast food, the slow food movement has capitalized on ideas about authenticity and tradition, merging artisanal food production with gourmet culture and a critique of global agribusiness. Michael Howell, a Wolfville chef and Slow Food advocate, explained the challenges of addressing the “cultural pathos” that allows people to disassociate the external costs of producing food from its “true value:”

We as a culture, certainly in western society and more specifically North American society, are so wrapped up with the idea of cheap and fast, that the idea of slowing down and paying a little bit more up front for something that actually has less baggage and less long term cost, and effect on our environment and our health, is something we haven't come to grips with yet. Little by little people are making strides, and as the word 'Slow Food' gets into the public oeuvre, people begin to recognize it. Some people are buying in. Whether or not everybody ever does, probably not. We have to have a fundamental shift in the way we get food to ourselves.

Michael's comments demonstrate the way that Slow Food tries to deliberately bring other ideas of value into food consumption and production, to get them to “buy in.” Michael's definition of value includes cost, but also cultural value, environmental value, social value, even nutritional value. Slow Food advocacy is about getting people to slow down enough to both recognize and make the connections between these kinds of value, to discover the ways that they are bundled up together. Michael is a Slow Food advocate, but also a chef; in his restaurant, Tempest, he bundles cultural, environmental, social, and nutritional value into the experience of fine dining. In gourmet culture, these social values converge in the value of “quality”—values associated with ethical consumption are only highlighted to the extent that they produce food that can be considered gourmet. Quality, then, is an important aspect of value (and again one where both economic value

and social values meet). Merging ethical consumption with gourmet food raises the spectre of class—when only those with means can consume ethically, the potential of ethical consumption to address issues of justice is diminished.

Johnston and Baumann's (2010) work on "foodies"—what they call the "gourmet foodscape"—highlights the tension between different values (including "democracy" and "distinction") in foodie culture. Foodie culture has persisted in using "taste" as a way to legitimize the classification of some social groups as superior. The gourmet foodscape, however, has also made a move toward "omnivorous" cultural consumption—that is, a "general trend away from snobbish exclusion towards cultural eclecticism by high-status cultural groups" (Johnston and Baumann, 2010, p.35.). Part of this "omnivorousness" has taken the shape of alternative food movements—foodie culture heaps importance on authenticity, ethnicity, simplicity, and uniqueness, but has also embraced the local and organic food movements and critiqued the industrial food system. Gourmet food culture has incorporated (or appropriated) ethical values, and in doing so establishes symbolic boundaries and contributes to the construction of status distinctions (Johnston and Baumann, 2010). Ethical consumption of food becomes a way of maintaining class status. This symbolic conflation of ethical values (local food is good for the world!) and individual values (local/ organic food just tastes better!) allows ethical food to easily fit into a quality-inflected gourmet frame (ibid). The political engagement possible within this frame, then, is limited to individual cultural consumption—instead of a truly democratic ethical movement, cultural "others" are included only insofar as their "exotic" food can be appropriated by foodies and translated into cultural capital.

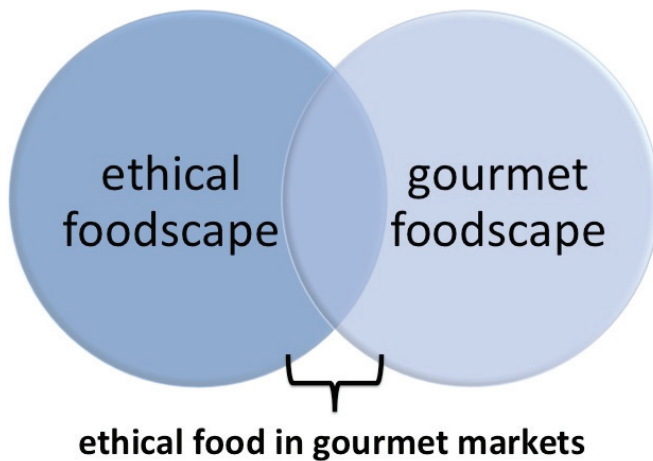
To the extent that a “foodie politics” has emerged, this discourse has been primarily enacted through a “consumer ethics” frame, which “promises easy, market-based solutions where consumers ‘vote’ with their dollar, and where the industrial food system can be readily reorganized to achieve greater sustainability” (Johnston and Baumann, 2010, p.170). Johnston and Baumann (2010) found that the foodie discourse they analyzed had an absence of discussion of labour issues, food sovereignty, food security, and exploitation, as well as an unrealistic view of the accessibility of gourmet food and foodways. This suggests that, despite the democratizing pull or collective political potential of alternative food movements, gourmet food culture is still laced with distinction—taste is still one way to distinguish one social group from another.

According to Bourdieu, “Taste, the propensity and capacity to appropriate (materially or symbolically) a given class of classified, classifying objects or practices, is the generative formula of life-style, a unitary set of distinctive preferences...” (1984, p.173). The discourse of taste that implies that consumption preferences are innate and individual obscures the social positioning that underlies the appropriation of certain classes of goods. Consumption choices are symbols of a classed struggle over the appropriation and legitimation of cultural resources. Although gourmet culture has shifted from very exclusive French *haute cuisine* to encompass “ethnic” and “ethical” foods, the combination of symbolic and economic value still enforce status distinction. The effect is that foodie culture participates in the politics of food insofar as it results in good-tasting, quality consumables, and while the gourmet foodscape appears to include a wider range of status groups through its adoption of ethical consumption initiatives (such

as fair trade), in practice foodies are only minimally aware of the social justice aspects of food production and distribution (Johnston and Baumann, 2010).

I imagine a Venn diagram where the ethical foodscape overlaps with the gourmet foodscape (see figure 1). They are not one and the same, but the circles combine in spaces where “ethical” food crosses into “gourmet” markets as the values associated with ethical consumption are actively merged with individual taste. In restaurants like Tempest, both the ethical and the gourmet are on the menu. Michael strives to use a minimum of 80% local ingredients, and imported products such as sugar and coffee are fair trade and organic. The menu at Tempest is peppered with the names of the various local farms that personally deliver seasonal produce to the back door of the restaurant. Michael’s personal and professional commitment to local farmers, fair trade sourcing, and community accessibility (he also is at the Farmers’ market every Saturday with soup and raspberry lemonade) keeps his restaurant from sliding too far to the gourmet side, but not all chefs are as explicitly aligned with the same values. Michael puts considerable effort into balancing the symbolic and economic value of local food with the social values of community involvement and accessibility. He keeps his menu prices reasonable (for gourmet cuisine), and his connections to local farms and farmers specific and explicit. He also pairs his work as a chef with engagement in a number of other, more collective ethical food initiatives, including (as mentioned) SlowFood Nova Scotia, the Wolfville Farmers’ Market, and the Nova Scotia Food Policy Council (NSFPC). The point here is that without continually supporting the circulation of social values, economic and symbolic value make ethical food the domain of distinction.

**Figure 1. Ethical and gourmet foodscapes**



The potential for ethical food to “go gourmet” raises questions about how different social groups are positioned in alternative food movements. To a certain extent it is the specific values at play, and what they are understood to mean, that determines whether the alternative food movement is moving in a democratic or a snobbish direction. If local food means mostly “quality”, then quality combined with higher prices makes for an ethically branded initiative that is only accessible to the well off. If, however, local food is seen mainly as a way to re-invigorate the agricultural sector after serious economic collapse, as a way to support struggling farmers, as a way to keep money circulating in the local economy, and as a way to bring producers and consumers together in community spaces, then I think the potential is much different. Local food can represent both ethical and quality meanings at the same time, and the potential of the local food movement depends, in part, on how organizations interpret and present these meanings to consumers. Wolfville represents a case where the potential is there for the alternative food movement to re-claim the social values of agricultural production before



corporate control and consolidation. They are building what Larry Yee (in Elton, 2010, p.34-35) calls a “value-based value chain,” one in which social values are combined with economic ones to restructure food chains in ways that benefit the local community and economy. The creation of such a chain has so far been the responsibility of individuals in the Wolfville community—people like Jeff Moore and Michael Howell, who have worked to keep the social values of fairness, justice, and environmental sustainability a part of their business and community. Can these value-based chains be sustained beyond the individuals who have built them? Is continued attention to ethical consumption in Wolfville contributing to an infrastructure of collective responsibility? By tracing the circulation of value and values through such chains I hope to address these questions.

## **2.4 A LOCAL LIVING ECONOMY**

The idea of a “local economy” came up often in my discussions with farmers, activists, and business owners in Wolfville, as did the idea of “fairness” as a way to determine prices and connections between producers and consumers. The local economy fuses the social value that sees local producers as a vital part of the community with the economic value of money flowing in and between community members. Devin, the farmers’ market information booth coordinator, explained, “when they’re spending their money and purchasing directly from producers, keeping that money in the local economy, it benefits everyone” (Devin Loughhead Folks). Michael emphasized the importance of building relationships with the farmers that supply his restaurant:

What I love here at Tempest? Nothing more than when a farmer who I’ve paid good money, fair market value for their product, comes in and has dinner at the restaurant. The money that I gave them, they turn around and spend with me. And then I use that and I buy more produce from them. The whole cyclical nature of the economy is great for our communities. (Michael Howell).

I conducted a small written, self-reported survey at the Wolfville Farmers' Market that asked participants to rate the most important factors in their food purchases. Half the people surveyed (21 out of 41) ranked "locally-produced" and "quality" as the top two factors in choosing food (in decreasing order of top-ranked factors: local, quality, organic, price, fair trade, brand), and several surveys had notes under this question indicating that they thought "local" and "quality" were basically the same thing. Because so many respondents answered this question by ranking "local" and "quality" as key factors in their food purchases, I was surprised by the answers I received for a more qualitative question later on in the survey. The question asked: "Is buying local important to you? Why/ why not?" 38 of the 41 people surveyed answered yes. The most common reason stated (in 23 responses) was support for the community and local farmers. Some of these mentioned wanting to support the "local economy" as well. Although quality ranked as an important factor in food purchasing, the motivation expressed in the surveys confirmed my hunch that local food was also about community support. This small survey indicated something to me about the discourse surrounding the meaning and value of local food. While local means (or demands) quality to some, it also means "our community." Local food is a mixture of consumer demands and consumer responsibility, not one or the other. Consumers demand quality but also give support—my survey was not extensive or detailed enough to determine whether there is a correlation between the two motivations, but some of the literature on ethical consumption and local movements may be instructive in this regard.

Consumers may be willing to support their communities and farmers through the purchase of food, but may be hard-pressed to become more actively engaged. DeLind

(2003) found that for community supported agriculture (CSA) projects in Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana, members were reluctant to get involved in the life of the farms they had shares in. Despite the community-building promise of the CSA model, which invites members to know their farms and farmers, “there is, curiously, little interest on the part of most members to use the farm or local food production as a venue or catalyst to build community” (DeLind, 2003, p.198). It is possible in these cases— and also in the case of Wolfville—that consumers interpret the economic value of their local food purchases as directly transmitting social values into the local food system. This is, in some ways, what local farmers, restaurateurs, and activists are asking for—for consumers to pay the “true cost” of food. Whether this injection of economic value into local agricultural and food economies is enough to build a sustainable food system is another question. If local economies are built with economic value, what becomes of the social-movement goals of ethical consumption? Are these local economies able to function as viable alternatives to the industrial food system? Or, as I discussed in the previous section, is this local economy only accessible to those with the income to buy into the new symbolic capital in ethical food?

My interview with Sarah and Joey Pitoello, two young tenant farmers, demonstrated the tensions that arise over the discourse of local food. If local food is valued because it’s from “around here,” but also because it’s better quality, more healthy, and organic, then it also acquires economic value. This allows the farmers to continue their small-scale operations, but it raises questions about how to make their food accessible to those with lower incomes. The value-added product has moral

implications—farmers deserve a fair price, but the best quality local food is not accessible to people without the economic resources to buy it. Joey explains:

So our challenge has always been that we want people to have healthy, affordable food, but we need to find that ground where that's possible and yet the farmers are actually making some money off of it. It could be to do with the fact that we spend so much money on everything else that we really have a skewed concept of how much too much is for food. We're willing to spend an awful lot of money on cars and things like that, but not on the stuff that builds our bodies in terms of basic needs. It's really quite remarkable that it's so unimportant to people. .... So really the challenge to me is the cultural shift. It's the buyer. You need to get people on board. I don't care if it's organic or not. And I don't care if it's local or not, really. Are you willing to spend the money it requires to sustain your body and to be healthy? And the local part of it is to create that healthy community aspect of our lives as well. Which to me is a natural development, without it I think we're just a shadow of how things would be otherwise. It's a matter of challenging people to really understand culture and what food really means to everybody. (Joey Pitoello)

Joey emphasizes the need for a collective movement toward healthy bodies but also healthy communities. His appeal to consumers to spend money to sustain their own bodies is representative of a general approach to consumption that individualizes motivations for consumptive actions; this is indicative of neoliberal governance as a form of responsibility, which I will discuss in chapter four. However, Joey's suggestion that the local aspect of this contributes naturally to building community implies that there is a relational component of value that might be missed if consumers are assumed to be little more than economic rational actors (See Douglas and Isherwood, 1979/1996; Sassatelli, 2007). When people grow, sell, buy, and eat local food, they see themselves as participating in something more than the exchange of economic value—the social values they see circulating along with this process contribute to the viability of ethical consumption as a social movement. Because these purchases have meaning, and because

that meaning is embedded in social and relational context, these meanings may build capacity for a more solid infrastructure for alternative food systems.

Encouraging economic value to circulate within the Wolfville community is one way of inserting *relational meaning* into the local value chain. The Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE) does this most explicitly by encouraging individuals, businesses and organizations to shift 10% of their purchases to local producers or providers. Michael's story about a local farmer coming to eat at Tempest is a good example of how these local economies can function. Other businesses in the Wolfville area also emphasized their cooperation with other local sectors—at Gaspereau winery, Katie Barbour, the manager, pointed out the various local products that the winery sold alongside their wines, and emphasized their excitement about pairing their wine with local food, and talked with Gina Haverstock, the winemaker, about the connections between local producers and the winery:

Gina= we have all these great communities, we have the university community and the local restaurants and all these different things we can source from. And if you talk to some other wineries if you go to other places they find it as amazing that they have access to the farmers' market where they can access foods of Nova Scotia, or they have all these places that can cater for events,  
Katie= we have a directory in our backyard.  
Gina= and they carry our wine in their restaurants and  
Katie= and gosh, some of them are using the wines to make their products, so it just gets intertwined. It's really wonderful.

The Foxhill farm and cheese shop sells cheese from other local producers along with bread, preserves, and a collection of cookbooks by local chefs. Jeanita Rand, the co-owner, explained that the philosophy behind Foxhill cheese was to market directly to the consumer, but also to cooperate with other businesses:

We wanted to network with other businesses in the area; we felt that it was really important just not to centre all on us. We wanted to work with the wineries that

were just emerging then, and now there's eight or nine of them. So the wineries were a big part of our marketing strategy. B & Bs, restaurants, all things that we thought we could build one on top of the other to bring people here and to enhance other businesses in the area.

She went on to describe the other organizations the farm partners with:

We're part of Slow Food. And we work with a group of almost social activists that want to preserve farmland and promote local. As well as we work with the winery association, we're part of Taste Nova Scotia, so we network a lot of chefs that promote local food. So it builds one on the other, it's layered. (Jeanita Rand)

I saw Just Us! coffee on offer in just about every business I visited (and in the kitchens of local farmers), and Just Us! sources much of the food sold in their café from local farmers and local kitchens. Tracing these connections is one way of outlining how value and values circulate through relational and spatial networks in Wolfville. As this circulation continues, the meaning of the connections is reinforced or remade.

## **2.5 VALUE AND VALUES IN THE ETHICAL FOODSCAPE**

In his efforts to define an anthropological theory of value, David Graeber notes the importance of both meaning and power as value and values are struggled over. He asks, "in what way do the actions of shaping people become embodied in value-forms, that is, forms that reflect the meaning of my actions to myself in some tangible form as some object or action that I desire" (2001, p.69)? For Graeber, then, meaning is reflected and created through value. He suggests that in both gift and market economies, the most important struggles in society are over how to define value. These struggles are important because they are bound up in the collective identity of groups and communities.

One way of approaching value as a form of relational meaning is to explore Marx's concept of labour value. For Marx, relationships between people in the capitalist system are obscured, and appear instead as relationships between things. Social values

are eclipsed by economic value; the system runs on the appropriation of labour, and this is the basis of economic value.

Marx's (1867/1976) argument unfolds as he explains what constitutes commodity value, which makes commodities exchangeable with other commodities. Value is represented in the marketplace by exchange value (manifested as price), but its true source is human labour. Commodities also contain use value, which describes their utility and makes them useful for people who buy them, but utility alone does not explain what gives commodities value. Marx expands, "if then we disregard the use-value of commodities, only one property remains, that of being products of labour" (1867/1976, p.128). Value comes down to "socially necessary labour time," which Marx defines as the "labour time required to produce any use value under the conditions of production normal for a given society and with the average degree of skill and intensity of labour prevalent in that society" (ibid, p.128). Commodities, then, are congealed human labour, and it is the amount of this labour that determines the magnitude of their value. Different societies will have different conceptions of what is "socially necessary," and the question of who determines labour time, and how it is determined, are important questions to ask, especially when the commodities change hands across global commodity networks, and different determinants are at play in different producing regions. Marx sees value as a proportion of "total labour," an abstraction that represents all the labour of a society. The value of a particular "thing" can then be defined as the fraction of this total that made the commodity in question.

Marx goes on to detail how this labour is concealed through the fetishism of commodities. He explains, "the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's

own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers” (1867/1976, p.165). Relations between people appear as relations between things, and the different values expressed by different commodities obscure the social relations of their production and exchange.

I may believe that when I buy a pound of coffee from the grocery store, I am interacting mainly with the claims made by the various brands of coffee competing for my attention. I may buy that pound of coffee and take it home and drink it without considering the social relations it contains or the labour that produced it. It is difficult to connect my own consumption to the labour of others. It is made more difficult because this labour, in the case of coffee, happens across the globe, thousands of kilometres from where I am drinking my coffee. Harvey (2010) describes the fetishism inherent in a grocery-store purchase of lettuce:

Hidden within this market exchange of things is a relation between you, the consumer, and the direct producers—those who labored to produce the lettuce. Not only do you not have to know anything about that labor or the laborers who congealed value in the lettuce in order to buy it; in highly complicated systems of exchange it is *impossible* to know anything about the labor or the laborers, which is why fetishism is inevitable in the world market. The end result is that our social relation to the laboring activities of others is disguised in the relationships between things. You cannot, for example, figure out in the supermarket whether the lettuce has been produced by happy laborers, miserable laborers, slave laborers, wage laborers or some self-employed peasant. The lettuces are mute, as it were, as to how they were produced and who produced them. (p.39-40)

If I am to have a moral responsibility to these distant others, I need to consider how the commodities relate to each other, the specificity of the social relations they contain, how these are obscured, and how my own consumption influences this connection. The bulk



of our social connection to the labourers who produce our things is experienced through commodities. This fact fuels the ethical consumption movement, which attempts to address the inequalities of this system of exchange by changing our patterns of consumption.

Marx's theories of value and commodity fetishism can help to explain the different tactics taken by ethical consumption initiatives in order to reposition our relationships to each other by changing or creating consumption networks. One tactic is to challenge the fetishism of commodities by exposing the labour that went into the production of commodities. The fair trade movement does this by providing consumers with information about the producers of fair trade products; the pound of coffee comes with a story about its producers (e.g. a co-op in Chiapas, Mexico), and a guarantee that the producer was paid at least a minimum price for the product. There is disagreement among fair trade activists and scholars, however, about whether or not this information is adequate to actually build relationships between producers and consumers, or to change the unequal relationships of production that are entrenched in the global capitalist market.

Gavin Fridell explains:

The fair trade network does provide an important symbolic critique of the fetishism of commodities, although always with important contradictions. Fair trade goods do reveal the conditions under which they are produced and traded, and important bonds of solidarity between fair trade partners in the South and North have been forged, which have helped to somewhat shorten the symbolic distance between producers and consumers. At the same time, however, the capitalist market remains the ultimate coordinator of economic life. (Fridell, 2007, p.16-17)

Harvey (2010) describes the ultimate purpose of unearthing and critiquing commodity fetishism:

The problem, therefore, for socialist, communist, revolutionary, anarchist or whatever, is to find an alternative value-form that will work in terms of the social reproduction of society in a different image. By introducing the concept of fetishism, Marx shows how the naturalized value of classical political economy dictates a norm; we foreclose on revolutionary possibilities if we blindly follow that norm and replicate commodity fetishism. Our task is to question it. (p.46)

The difficulty for the fair trade movement, then, is to not only identify the social relations behind production, but to build an “alternative value-form” that does not blindly reproduce the same unequal relations it claims to oppose. Critics of fair trade and other labelling initiatives describe the difficulty of doing this, suggesting that social and ethical values are simply commodified through the sale of “ethical” products (see Guthman, 2007b), re-fetishizing ethical value. The information passed along through product labels and advertisements again obscures the actual social relations of production. In this case the otherwise laudable values of fairness and justice associated with the purchase of fair trade products are terribly vague—the mechanisms through which value is actually delivered to producers render both the ethical and economic contribution to justice meagre. The most clear and obvious transfer of value in fair trade purchasing is the symbolic value associated with buying ethically. This is not the radical alternative that was first imagined by fair traders.

The fair trade movement was consolidated in the 1980s when alternative trade organizations selling goods bought directly at above-market prices from small producers, and banded together to label their products as “fair trade” (Raynolds and Long, 2007, p.16). The movement’s roots go back to humanitarian and faith-based operations in the 1940s (including Oxfam in Europe, and the Mennonite Central Committee in North America), but the current manifestation of fair trade can be traced to its consolidation under the Fairtrade Labelling Organization (FLO) in the 1990s (ibid; Fridell, 2007, p.41).

The re-orientation of fair trade in the 1980s (from a humanitarian project to an ethical labelling initiative) was due, in part, to a global shift from state-interventionist policy to neoliberal globalization:

[A]s states have increasingly signed on to neoliberal agreements like those of the WTO, which impose strict limits on their ability to intervene in the market for social and environmental considerations, activist groups have responded by focusing their campaigns on private corporations whose hands are not officially tied by such agreements. (Fridell, 2007, p.46)

In this time, the fair trade network also shifted from selling mostly craft products to agricultural ones as well. This history sets up what is now a key tension between the more activist elements of the fair trade movement, and the business-orientation of the fair trade network; in fair trade circles this tension often emerges in a discourse about the “dilution” of fair trade values through “mainstreaming” fair trade (Barrientos and Smith, 2007), and whether this mainstreaming should be sought after (scaling up) or discouraged (selling out) (Bacon, Mendez, Fox, 2008, p.359). The dilemma of fair trade is reflected in other alternative food initiatives as well—the case of organic food in California shows how success in expanding the market for ethical food can be interpreted as defeat by people who see this as a co-opting of values (Guthman, 2004). The symbolic value of both ethical labels has changed as the market share has increased.

Coffee, as the first certified fair trade product, retains symbolic and economic dominance in the fair trade market (Jaffee, 2007, p13). Jaffee (2007) suggests that coffee was the “ideal fair-trade product”:

from the point it is picked to the moment of grinding, it remains a discrete physical commodity; it undergoes relatively few transformations and changes hands fewer times than many other commodities; it is not perishable (green, or unroasted, coffee beans can be stored for up to a year); and it is produced in large part by peasant farmers on small plots that they own. Thus consumers can visualize a more or less direct link with the producer and imagine (even if

inaccurately) that every fair-trade-certified bean in their morning cup was picked by democratically organized, fairly paid farmers in one particular coffee cooperative. (p.14)

Before coffee was the “ideal fair-trade product,” it was the ideal gourmet, capitalist product (Roseberry, 1996). An oft-overlooked part of fair trade history is the growth of the gourmet coffee industry, which allowed the symbolic value of gourmet coffee to be easily transferred to fair trade coffee. Gourmet coffee emerged from the efforts of industry players to re-market coffee to different market niches in the 1980s. By pitching “quality” gourmet coffee to yuppie consumers, the marketing of coffee drew upon, and reproduced, class distinction (Roseberry, 1996). The acceptance of fair trade standards by mainstream gourmet coffee companies (Starbucks is the key example, see Fridell, 2007, p.252-263) is indicative of the power of these niche markets—Starbucks caved to the demands of fair trade advocates not only because it was the ‘ethical’ thing to do, but because it made good business sense, and because fair trade fits into the already-class-differentiated market of gourmet coffee. My point here is that Starbucks is not an exceptional case of niche marketing; fair trade builds on the already-existing class framework of gourmet coffee, and as such it inherits the symbolic distinction surrounding the discourse of taste.

In 1996, Roseberry wrote that the continued success of gourmet coffees “will depend upon the processes of social and cultural differentiation they mark, even as the social locations of groups of consumers are blurred. It will also depend upon a world of exploitative relationships...” (p.174). Gourmet coffee has, indeed, continued to be successful, and the integration of fair trade into gourmet markets has been a part of that success. The power of fair trade lies in its ability to unmask some of the unequal relations

of production that go into products like coffee; its weakness is its inattention to the “processes of social and cultural differentiation” created by the exclusivity of fairly traded products. Roseberry’s critique applies to the ethical foodscape as well as the gourmet foodscape—the ethical aspects of initiatives like fair trade sell well precisely because they contribute to the blurring of social locations. Wealthy consumers are able to purchase products that give the illusion of solidarity across class lines, but the consumption of these products *reinforces* class distinctions. The social values associated with alternative food—justice, environmental sustainability, local relationships—are easily transformed into tools of social distinction. Economic value and symbolic value are deeply implicated in the ways that these social values are put into practice, or the ways that they are (often unintentionally) undermined.

The fair trade network, then, is a messy combination of organizations pushing for social and economic justice in producer communities, and businesses creating a market niche for ethically branded products, and is also a good example of the symbolic and structural issues most alternative food movements face. Although fair traders like Jeff Moore and Lay Yong Tan may be committed to recognizing and compensating the labour that goes into coffee production, they also are fully aware that they operate within the mainstream market. Jeff and Lay Yong have forged relationships with their suppliers around the world, but the consumers of the coffee experience this relationship from a distance and, more importantly, it remains an economic relationship mediated by market capitalism. In Wolfville, however, the collective aspect of fair trade may offset some of the elements of gourmet distinction that make the network less accessible. Fair trade coffee was on display at many of the roadside markets, the grocery store, bookstores, and

other locations around town. Of the consumers I spoke to who buy fair trade coffee from Just Us! or T.A.N., many knew Jeff and Lay Yong personally. People in Wolfville may buy fair trade products to support distant producers, but they are also aware of the effect this has in circulating value within the community.

This public recognition, though it challenges the fetishization of commodities, is only one part of the actions required to change the system in Marx's terms. Fair trade, as an ethical consumption movement, echoes Marx's critique of capitalism, but stops short of proposing a true alternative. By tracing the commodity chains that connect producers and consumers, the fair trade movement exposes the relations of production and identifies the source of products in human labour. The movement is constrained, however, by the "structural imperatives of capitalism," which place the power and the responsibility for maintaining the movement in the hands of Northern consumers and companies (Fridell, 2007). Both Jeff Moore and Lay Yong Tan are working to empower producers cooperatives and small farmers by encouraging alternative labelling initiatives spearheaded by the producers themselves, such as the small producer labelling initiative recently started by Coordinadora Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Pequeños Productores de Comercio Justo (CLAC). Fair trade initiatives like these attempt to balance a Marxist conception of value—in which "the individuals who produce objects should have the right to determine their meaning" (Graeber, 2001, p.39)—with a conception of value that emerges as the relationships of exchange are reworked and reformed. New labelling initiatives like CLAC attempt to further shift the power to shape the direction of ethical consumption to small producers. These initiatives point out a weakness in the fair trade

movement in that the organizational structure of the network still privileges Northern companies over the wishes of Southern producers and communities.

Although fair trade as a movement may fall short of accomplishing its originally very lofty goals of global justice and equality, the fair trade town initiative in Wolfville illustrates some of the ways that collective attention to ethical consumption can result in a multi-pronged approach to social values. Jeff and Lay Yong fully realize the limits and paradox of fair trade, while recognizing that it still presents a more equitable alternative to conventional food systems. The fair trade town initiative in Wolfville represents not only a relationship between consumers and distant producers,<sup>6</sup> but also a way of building and circulating social and economic values within the community. I want to suggest that understanding value as *relational meaning* can help to explain how people in Wolfville combine economic value and social values to redefine their relationships of exchange.

## **2.6 CIRCULATION OF VALUE(S)**

Graeber (2001) suggests that anthropological theories of value have ping-ponged back and forth between understanding value in its economic sense (as desire for certain objects) and its linguistic sense (as meaning gained from being placed in abstract categories in relation to other categories). This back-and-forth has occurred, in part, as scholars have attempted to define value in systems where market capitalism is dominant, as well as societies where other forms of exchange are prevalent. As Marilyn Strathern argues, Marx's theory of value is less useful in contexts where the concept of individuals controlling their own labour is foreign to a society's worldview (in Graeber, 2001, p.38-40). Graeber argues instead that value be understood as a theory of action, one that takes

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<sup>6</sup> In Chapter 4 I will explore how negotiation of responsibility over distance presents an important challenge for an alternative food movement that has a distinctly local focus.

into account how social values influence possible actions. Drawing on the work of Nancy Munn, Graeber sees value as potential action, as opposed to a reflection of social relations or individual desires:

Rather than value being the process of public recognition itself, already suspended in social relations, it is the way people who *could* do almost anything (including, in the right circumstances, creating entirely new sorts of social relations) assess the importance of what they do, in fact, do, as they are doing it. This is necessarily a social process; but it is always rooted in generic human capabilities. (2001, p.47)

By approaching value as the *importance of actions*, Graeber insists on the relational aspects of value, as well as its manifestation as meaning. It is not about judging the value of things, but the meaning of actions, and how societies collectively assign meaning to actions. Meaning is created as values are circulated between people.

Graeber, following Jane Fajans, differentiates between exchange (of property), and circulation (the transfer of values or valued qualities). The two processes usually overlap in market capitalism, but may not in other contexts (e.g. values may circulate through performance, rumours, or knowledge in some contexts) (Graeber, 2001, p.81). We can look, then, at which values are circulating, through which media they are circulating, which objects they are connected to, and how people struggle over what this circulation means. In short, we can track value as relational meaning by examining the social relationships through which value is defined. In Wolfville, a number of different social values circulate within the alternative food movement—quality, community support, sustainability and fairness emerged countless times in the interviews I conducted. Some of these values circulate through the exchange of products; for example, “quality” is often associated with local food, farmers’ markets, or fresh-roasted coffee. Sustainability, as a value, may circulate through the same exchange, although it might



also enter other spheres of action, like political organizing through the Nova Scotia Food Policy Council, or advocating for the protection of farmland.

The ways these values circulate, and the power they have to change behaviour is based on how they are defined, what importance they are given, and what they mean at the collective level. For example, “fairness” became part of the political discourse that initiated the fair trade town movement in Wolfville. The value of fairness gained enough traction in Wolfville to frame the collective identity of the town. Through the fair trade town movement, however, fairness circulated through the exchange of certain fair trade goods, notably coffee, tea, sugar and chocolate. Local farmers intervened to claim that value in their own networks of exchange, and consumers assert fairness as a value as well; as Linda Best (a member of the Nova Scotia Food Policy Council) put it, “It needs to be fair for the farmer, it needs to be fair for the consumer.”

The circulation of value and values, then, is one way of building collective identity through relational networks. In the ethical foodscape, inserting values into the exchange of food products may help to create viable alternatives to industrial food; people making purchases based on community building or ecological stewardship contribute to producer livelihoods (allowing people to “just keep farming”), and this circulation might spiral outwards to other spheres of social and political participation. Value cannot be reduced to economic desire for objects—just as often value and values are incorporated in the ways people express their solidarity with a movement, or they are the catalyst for future action. As I will discuss in chapter four, the struggle over value, although sometimes expressed as ethical consumption through the market economy, has the potential to be a springboard for other political engagement.

When people in Wolfville insist on inserting social values into economic transactions, they push for spaces where values can circulate beyond market logic. The slogan for Just Us! coffee makes this clear: “People and the Planet before Profits.” The Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE) encourages people to choose local businesses to build local community. This is value as relational meaning; as people choose values that support a local economy, they define what it means to be an economic and social community. Graeber (2001) suggests that the “politics of value” is a struggle for freedom that:

demands *both* resistance against the imposition of any totalizing view of what society or value must be like, but also recognition that *some* kind of regulating mechanism will have to exist, and therefore, calls for serious thought about what sort will best ensure people are, in fact, free to conceive of value in whatever form they wish. (p.89, emphasis in original)

The politics of value in the food system include a struggle over value between powerful food companies and agribusiness, and small farmers. Roberts (2008) suggests:

that in the case of food, there are incompatibilities between system and product, and more precisely...the attributes of food that our economic system tends to value and to encourage—mass producibility, for example, or cheapness, uniformity, or heavy processing—aren’t necessarily the attributes that work best for the people eating the food or the culture in which that food is consumed or the environment in which it is produced. (p.xv)

The alternative food movement has the potential to conceive of and encourage alternative values that protect cultural, ecological, and social relationships where purely economic values have failed. At the same time, people run the risk of over-stating the link between the qualities of products and their social values in ways that create status distinctions based on naturalized “ethical” products.

By injecting local food with social values of community building and fairness, people insist that the things that are important to them are reflected in the food system,

and that the food system continues to benefit their community. Roberts (2008) argues that “food itself is fundamentally *not* an economic phenomenon” (p.xiv, emphasis in original), and that the food industry has had to deal with food’s material imperfections by making it suitable for mass production through genetic modification and the technology of agribusiness. The value of food has shifted to the extent that it is processed, more often than not, using non-food ingredients. When the values of cheapness, processing, and uniformity become the *raison d’être* of the food system, they replace both basic nutritional value and the social values that saw farmers as the people who feed us. This is why, when Wendell Berry (2009) reminds readers that “eating is an agricultural act,” or when Michael Pollan (2008) instructs consumers to “eat food,” it comes as a disturbing surprise that we even need reminding. The commodification of food is incomplete—the commentators and activists in the alternative food movement are working in the gap between biology and economy; they are trying to draw the social and cultural aspects of food production, distribution, and consumption back into the food system.

As Miller (2008) states, the “creative potential of value lies not in what it is, nor how it is conceived, but rather in what it actually does” (p.1130). Two of the people I interviewed in Wolfville said that, when it comes to creating an alternative food system, “you’ve got to put your money where your mouth is.” With this statement, they stressed the power of money and price to advance the values and political agenda of different groups. In the ethical foodscape, however, money is not the only thing that circulates. Values can (and do) circulate outside of economic transactions, and the freedom to imagine and create other value-forms makes the ethical foodscape a place of political possibility. The example of the “gourmet foodscape,” however, sheds light on the way

that power and class already influence how values are circulated and defined. If local food becomes the purview of the gourmet food industry, it loses its ability to change the structure of the food system for everyday consumption. The success of the movement depends on a process of meaning creation that would not split along class lines. One of the ways this becomes possible is to ground the movement in *place*. Marsden and Smith suggest that local food systems can address this challenge as “ ‘Local’ then becomes potentially a social space (*a place to share some form of disconnection*) for the re-assembling of resources and of value: a place for evolving new commodity frameworks and networks; a place of defense from the devalorisation of conventional production systems” (2005, p.442, emphasis in original).

In the following chapter, I will explore the ways that ethical consumption, and the local food and fair trade movements in particular, can maintain coherence through connection to specific places, and the challenges they face in building a diverse and accessible localized food system. By embracing roots in the social and physical geography of the region, the local food movement in Wolfville stands a real chance of solidifying an alternative approach to the food system that values community cohesion, fairness, social relationships, and pride in place.

### CHAPTER 3: PLACE

In the last chapter, I used the metaphor of the ethical foodscape to describe how values are articulated through the food system. The term ties geography to social and ethical relationships, highlighting the importance of place in alternative food movements. *Place* is a way of describing how concrete locations, locales, and senses of place combine to make human meaning out of abstract space (Cresswell, 2004). As a concept, it helps to connect material landscape, social identity, and relationships. It is particularly important for this thesis because place is also about social value, economic value, and distinction. The discourse surrounding local food tells a story about what is valued about particular ideals, how that value is expressed, and who controls its expression. Distinctive places can be sold to outsiders through tourism, and sold to insiders as collective identity (Kearns and Philo, 1993).

Weiss (2011), in an exploration of the local pork industry in North Carolina, explains that “the local” mobilizes locality to direct the production of social space—“local food” invokes spatial relations to solve economic and environmental problems. Weiss describes how place is made as people learn how to properly appreciate pork—these modes of discernment link taste to place, and the discourse of local food is “a specific orientation to how space is produced” (p.456). Socio-spatial relations are made through the local—a distinction that, according to the pork producers Weiss interviewed, trumps all other ethical labels (ibid). The point is not simply that places have value, it is also that specific conceptions of place are valued, and it is through these conceptions that place is (re)made. Ethical and social relationships are formed and maintained in and through space, and they are built as specific places are built. This chapter is about how

locality is mobilized in Wolfville, the spatial relations involved, and the way this creates Wolfville as a certain kind of place. I start by exploring some of Wolfville's agricultural history to elucidate why local food has garnered economic, social, and symbolic value as an alternative to the industrial structure of the food system.

### **3.1 AGRICULTURE IN THE ANNAPOLIS VALLEY**

For the farmers of the Annapolis valley, local food is more than a new ethical trend. Agriculture has a rich history in and around Wolfville. Small farms, however, have faced a number of significant challenges, both in the region and across the country. The history of economic development in the twentieth century has seen Atlantic Canada dominated by a small number of powerful companies, which has led to a crisis of dependency and underdevelopment in the primary sectors (Burrill & McKay, 1987). Farming has been a precarious occupation in recent decades: in Nova Scotia 85% of farms failed between 1941 and 1981 (Burrill & McKay, 1987, p.16). The decline has continued in recent years—Kings County alone lost 40 farms between 2001 and 2006 (Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture, 2010, p.17). The underdevelopment of Atlantic Canada has left it vulnerable to corporate takeover in the farming sector, with many small family farms now gleaning their income from contracts with large companies like McCain and Sobeys (Burrill & McKay, 1987; Winson, 1993). The rise of agribusiness in the 1950s resulted in rapidly decreasing numbers of farms across Canada, while the size of the remaining farms continued to grow (Winson, 1993, p.91). The amalgamation of canning companies and consolidation of meatpacking left mid-sized farms little choice but to expand and sell to larger distributors, or sell their produce directly to consumers (Winson, 1993). The emergence of large supermarket chains shifted the locus of power in the

industry to retailers who charge for shelf space, location, and advertising (Winson, 1993, p.179).

Particularly devastating in the Annapolis valley were the loss of local vegetable and fruit canneries, and the closure of the local poultry and pork processing plants. These closures, coupled with the increasing tendency of large supermarket chains to source the cheapest products nationally and internationally, have led to an economy of scale in agriculture that leaves many small farmers without an accessible market. Because Nova Scotia has a high proportion of small farms,<sup>7</sup> this issue is especially pertinent to agriculture in the province.

George Pickford grew up on the farm where he now grows vegetables and soybeans for his tofu business. He has witnessed the closure of the canneries and processing plants, and continues to find distribution a difficult part of selling his tofu products. “We’re narrowed down here to what the retail sector will buy,” he explains, “and with the mass ordering in those retail sectors we don’t have much choice but to sell small and sell directly to the small franchise stores and do the local markets” (George Pickford). For some small farms, marketing produce directly to consumers and branding it as “local food” is more necessity than a new ethical trend.

The difficulty of distributing local produce is rooted in issues of scale. Carl Oldham, city councillor and owner of the Wolfville Save Easy, expanded on the structural difficulties of sourcing local food for sale in the grocery store. He pointed out three obstacles to the sale of local food: the demand for farmers to supply a large quantity

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<sup>7</sup> Average farm size in Nova Scotia in 2006 was 106 hectares; the national average was 295 hectares, and the average in Kings County is 80.5 hectares. See Appendix B for a Nova Scotia County map. A majority of the farms in the province are classified as “small farms” by gross farm revenue, with 77% under \$100 000 gross farm revenue, and 36% less than \$10 000 gross farm revenue (Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture, 2010b, p.19-20).

of produce of blemish-free produce (ensuring that local strawberries are high enough quality that they will sell next to strawberries from California), the technological barriers to packaging and sales (all products need a UPC barcode), and the ability of the franchise to insist on selling the lowest-priced items (sourcing them from other places in Canada where they are produced in larger quantities and more cheaply). The large supermarket chains benefit from an economy of scale where they are able to find the cheapest products to stock in their warehouses. In order to make local produce competitive, smaller local grocers must raise the prices for warehouse produce; in so doing they lose customers to the bigger supermarkets (such as the Superstore in New Minas, just down the road from Wolfville). The large supermarket chains hold the power in a system in which small farmers cannot offer the quantity, consistency, or low prices to participate. As I explained in the previous chapter, inserting values other than cheapness, uniformity and mass producibility into the food system is an important strategy for small producers to continue their operations.

Awareness of the availability of local food and the plight of small farms has increased due to the conscious work of local food advocates and the very visible decline of several prominent agricultural industries. Public consideration of the need to shift social values in the agricultural system may have increased after the collapse of the pork and beef industries, and the closure of processing plants across Nova Scotia. The beef industry collapsed during the “mad cow” (BSE—bovine spongiform encephalopathy) scare in 2003. The pork industry has faced an even more serious decline of 79.3% in revenue over the last ten years, with the biggest drop in hog production occurring in 2007 (Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture, 2010, p.25). The number of hog farms in the



province has plummeted along with hog prices, as farmers have struggled to break even. The closure of chicken processing plants and abattoirs--and the downsizing of remaining ones-- has meant job losses in the region, and many remaining poultry producers now ship their chickens to be processed in northern New Brunswick. Lance Bishop, a small sheep and beef producer, described his perception of the pattern:

As a farmer selling local food in Nova Scotia, it seemed to me like awareness jumped ahead somewhere between the fall of 2007 and February 2008 when the people who were involved in pork production in Nova Scotia faced—that was the time that the industry sort of collapsed—Somehow I think that catalyzed a big jump in the awareness amongst the people that I deal with. And that was kinda right on the heels of, or right in the middle of the beef industry collapse, which started in 2003. So those two issues, those were pretty much the two really visible examples of farmers not being able to get fair prices for their products, and that definitely fed into the rise in the awareness around here. Public farmers' markets got seen as one of the ways that people could actually go and support local farmers and know what they were buying.

Lance links public awareness of local food and agricultural issues with the collapse of the beef and pork industries, suggesting that the visible public spaces such as the farmers market were integral to the maintenance of support for local farmers. Both the visibility of the issues and the availability of direct ways to help influenced the growth of a discourse around buying local food.

In my discussion with Bob Stead, the mayor of Wolfville, he cited similar structural challenges to the agricultural sector as part of the impetus for the fair trade town initiative, and pointed out that the Wolfville organizing committee developed an extra goal for the fair trade town movement which incorporated local food into the values of fairness and justice already espoused through fair trade. He explains:

We had a chicken processing plant closing at the time, and there were about 180 people that were unemployed as a consequence of that and then we had a pork processing plant that was about to close as well. So, the farming region—and this is one of the richest ones in the province—was under duress, so we said what we

needed to do was to link the fair trade concept with the buy local concept. Because that says, simply, that we're interested in the principles of fair trade, but we don't need to go to South Africa for apples, we don't need to go to another place, we don't need to go to Napa Valley for wine, because we've got some of that locally, and let's marry the concept of fair trade to the concept of buy local. (Bob Stead)

Both the expansion of the local food movement and the fair trade town movement in Wolfville emerged from a need to address the local effects of an agricultural system in crisis. In both cases, alternative food is presented as a way to support local community. I invoke the word "community" as an umbrella term to describe the social networks that make up Wolfville. I often refer to Wolfville as a "community" instead of a "town" or "area" to highlight the way social relationships weave around and through political and geographical boundaries. I am also aware that community can have rather warm-and-fuzzy implications, and when people in Wolfville referred to "community building," I think they often meant reinforcing common identity, and getting along better with each other. Although this is an important goal for local organizations and town leadership, I hope to show some of the ways that building collective identity through "community" can also be exclusionary. The questions implied in the discourse of community building are: "whose community is being built? Is this community for everyone? Are there multiple communities? Are they all included in the discourse of 'local'?" The discourse of community building sometimes belies the fact that places are often built through social networks that are not inclusive.

In the eyes of the small farmers and producers in Wolfville, a shift occurred in the wake of the collapse of the pork and beef and poultry plants—local food came to mean not only "quality" and "sustainability", but "community support" and "pride in place". In Wolfville, a number of different strategies have emerged within the local food

framework to create viable markets for farm products. Some farmers, like Patricia Bishop, have adopted a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model, and sell produce directly to people who buy shares in the harvest before the seeds are in the ground. Others sell at the farmers' market, or are working on different ways of delivering orders of produce directly to consumers. Some of the farms do farmgate sales, or have a storefront at the farm. Larger farms in Wolfville have permanent roadside markets. There are partnerships made to supply local restaurants (like Tempest), and some local produce is usually on offer in the Save Easy grocery store in Wolfville. Many farmers and secondary producers go further afield, to the farmers' market in Halifax (the largest and oldest continually-running farmers' market in the province), to sell their products to the larger numbers of people who gather there. Most of these strategies depend on consumers making conscious choices to buy local food. This choice is both highly personal (what should I feed myself and my family?), and relational (who benefits from my choices?). Imbuing "local" with other values, such as community support and fairness, makes the choice of "what to buy" mean more than simple provisioning.

### **3.2 VALORIZING THE LOCAL**

Localization movements call for "a realignment of human social interaction in the context of place and food" (Feagan, 2007, p.33). Not all localization movements are cut from the same cloth, and (somewhat obviously), not all local places are the same. The meaning of "local" shifts in different places, as does the character of the local food movement. The viability of a local food movement is tied to the productivity of the surrounding area, making geography and ecology a crucial factor in the production of local food. The agricultural environment, the quality of the land and the health of the ecosystem can

change the meaning and the focus of local food systems. Particular movements may focus on environmental sustainability, while others may shift their focus to creating thriving local economies, or supporting farmers (both organic and conventional). Localization movements can present ways to challenge the damaging effects of neoliberal globalization by valorizing local products and places while providing an alternative to farmers facing an increasingly consolidated and inaccessible agribusiness sector.

It is important, however, to avoid empty valorization of the local over the global without practical analysis of the infrastructures and relationships involved in sustaining local food systems. The local/global dichotomy hides the workings of class and power within local food movements, and avoids criticism so as not to stem the growing enthusiasm and demand for local food. Hinrichs explains, “making ‘local’ a proxy for the ‘good’ and ‘global’ a proxy for the ‘bad’ may overstate the value in proximity, which remains unspecified, and obscure more equivocal social and environmental outcomes” (2003, p.35). Knowledge of the potential pitfalls of parochial and hierarchical local movements can help encourage local food initiatives and communities to move in more democratic and inclusive directions. This is not to say that localization movements cannot be successful in meeting progressive goals, only that identifying the goals and outcomes of particular scalar strategies is imperative. Hinrichs asks, “what is the transformative potential of current efforts to promote the production and consumption of foods earmarked by locality or region?” (2003, p. 33). The “conceptual compression” that assumes certain desirable social and environmental characteristics map neatly onto the spatial “local” needs to be challenged (Hinrichs, 2003, p.35). There are a series of complex relationships between land, people, taste, and place.

“Local” can connote sustainability, environmentalism, as well as geographical area and a social sense of community. Local food is often marketed as organic, as family farmed, as fairly priced, and as healthier and better quality; I saw many of these features advertised at the Wolfville Farmers’ Market, and they emerged through interviews with farmers as well. All of these attributes are rarely at play at once (conventional farmers can still be local ones, poor harvests might produce poor quality produce, farmers might overcharge in different markets, etc.). The “transformative potential,” then, depends on what kind of localization movement is at work. Hinrichs (2003) highlights the emergence of a “defensive localism,” which can be elitist, reactionary, and nativist as it narrows the breadth of people we choose to include in our circle of care. Defensive localization movements may limit the potential for collective political action and challenge to unequal power structures. As Holloway and Kneafsey (2000) note,

The valorization of the ‘local,’ in this case, may be less about the radical affirmation of an ethic of community or care, and more to do with the reproduction of a less positive parochialism or nationalism, a conservative celebration of the local as the supposed repository of specific values and meanings in much the same way as the countryside has itself become powerfully symbolic. (p.294)

The goals of localization movements and the values that people hope to advance through the process of localization can mean the difference between an “unreflexive localism” in alternative food movements in which the local is appropriated and fetishized as intrinsically more just (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005), or a “diversity-receptive localism” which “sees the local embedded within a larger national or world community, recognizing that the content and interests of ‘local’ are relational and open to change” (Hinrichs, 2003, p.37). Localization movements can move between defensive and diversity-receptive localism as they grow and change; defensive local food initiatives can

move toward an open and diverse local food movement that not only protects local places but encourages care for distant, global others. Massey (1993) suggests that localization need not be reactionary; local places can learn “how to hold on to that notion of spatial difference, of uniqueness, even of rootedness if people want that, without being reactionary” (p.64). The key, for Massey, is to conceptualize place as process, as a network of social relations—as such the identity of local places is necessarily in flux. Avoiding reactionary localism is then less about “the local” reacting to globalization, and more about local places building identities that recognize the relationship between local place and global space. Massey advocates a “global sense of the local, a global sense of place,” one that celebrates local community but also recognizes how local places are embedded in global economies and connected to global communities (ibid.).

Alternative food movements in Wolfville, including the fair trade town movement and the local food initiatives, are embedded in spatial networks. These movements are situated in the social and physical geography of the region, and they are presented and enacted using a language of scale that often celebrates the local. The growth of the Wolfville farmers’ market, the rise of CSAs and farm gate operations, the adoption of fair trade as a collective municipal project, the cooperation between gourmet restaurants and local farmers, the emerging Annapolis Valley wine culture; all of these initiatives use “local” as a way to spatially embed their efforts in Wolfville—and the surrounding region—as a place. The remainder of this chapter explores some of the localization initiatives that are shaping Wolfville’s identity as a place. The potential for these initiatives to cultivate a “progressive sense of place” is explored in chapter four, as place-making, social relationships, and value intersect through the discourse of responsibility.

### 3.3 LOCALIZATION STRATEGIES

Born and Purcell (2006) warn against the “local trap,” which:

refers to the tendency of food activists and researchers to assume something inherent about the local scale. The local is assumed to be desirable; it is preferred a priori to larger scales. What is desired varies and can include ecological sustainability, social justice, democracy, better nutrition, and food security, freshness, and quality. (p.195)

The authors argue that the local is not inherently good; in fact no scale is inherently anything (Born and Purcell, 2006). To avoid the reification of the local in food systems and planning research, Born and Purcell suggest a theoretical approach that understands *scale* as a strategy (ibid). According to Born and Purcell, any scale (local, global, national, etc.) should be considered socially constructed and contingent on the political and social struggles in particular places, and scholars should look to the particular social context that has led to localization as a strategy and point to the specific goals and outcomes of localization. The authors explain:

This principle of social construction means that the best way to think about scale is not as an ontological entity with particular properties but as a strategy, as a way to achieve a particular end. Thus, localization is a scalar strategy that can result in a range of outcomes—for example, social justice, oppression, food security, ecological destruction—depending on which agenda is advanced as a result of the strategy. (p.197)

Scale is a socially-constructed strategy, and it is also relational—a definition of “local”, for instance, would be incomplete without a reference to its relationship to “global” or “national” scales (Born and Purcell, 2006). Born and Purcell (2006) assert that one reason that the “local trap” has become so prevalent in food systems activism and research is that the effects of global capitalist industrial food production on the environment, rural communities and human health have spurred a counter-movement that sees localization as the most promising alternative. Goodman et al. (2010a) explain how

this also applies to consumption: “the relationalities among space, place and consumption, *in particular*, are littered with those that are and have been decidedly unequal and exploitative of people and nature; these are relations that are material in their very essence, power-full in their production and practice, political in their constitution and cultural in their deployment and engagement” (p.5-6, emphasis in original). The challenge for food systems researchers and activists is to recognize the import of this struggle while being descriptive and particular about the scalar strategies involved and their political, economic, and social goals. All of the following initiatives use scale as a strategy to advance a kind of localization. I will describe the main characteristics and goals of each strategy in Wolfville, as well as how each fits in the literature on local food movements.

### 3.3.1 Direct Marketing: Farmers’ Markets

Gillespie, Hilchey, Hinrichs and Feenstra (2007) describe farmers’ markets as keystones for building localized food systems, a function they accomplish through a number of processes:

- (1) making local food products and producers regularly visible in public settings,
- (2) encouraging and enabling producer enterprise diversification,
- (3) incubating small businesses, and
- (4) creating environments where market transactions and nonmarket social interactions are joined. (p.66)

Using these criteria, the Wolfville Farmers’ Market certainly functions as a keystone for building a local food system in the region. Most of the primary and secondary producers I spoke with had some past or present connection to the market, and several remarked that without the farmers’ market, their small businesses and farms would have floundered.

Others spoke about the importance of speaking directly to customers to create diversified



niche products without the difficulty of conveying information through labelling. The importance of the farmers' market, however, goes beyond niche marketing. The visibility and heterogeneity of the space of the market itself is integral to building demand for and access to local food. Linda Best, a prominent food activist and founder of the Nova Scotia Food Policy Council (along with a number of other major local food initiatives in the Wolfville area), adamantly stated that marketing of local food is integral to the success of local food systems. And, as Lance Bishop explained earlier in this chapter, the visibility of the farmers' market encouraged people to use it as a venue to support local farms after the decline of the pork and beef industries. By providing a highly visible public space where local food is sold and celebrated (often explicitly through local food tastings, festivals, and events), the Wolfville Farmers' Market links producers to consumers, and commercial space to social space.

As Gillespie et al. (2007) note, the market seems to “offer something for nearly everyone. Producers may look to farmers' markets as a profitable alternative to the low prices of commodity markets in an industrial agricultural system. Consumers seek farm-fresh food and regional specialties, and local officials hope to enliven public areas and stimulate business development” (p.65). The multifaceted nature of the market was evident in the enthusiastic support for the market voiced by Bob Stead, Wolfville's mayor, as well as the producers and consumers I chatted with while conducting surveys and participant-observation at the market. Indeed, the market organizers' ability to raise the support and funds necessary to move into (and renovate) a year-round permanent space is testament to the central place of the market in Wolfville's local food scene.

By mixing social and commercial space, the market provides a meeting place for consumers and producers, and is celebrated for its festive and upbeat community atmosphere. A number of farmers and business owners suggested that the interaction with consumers at farmers' markets provided an essential boost to their business, and their ability to convey the values behind their product (Lay Yong Tan, T.A.N. coffee; Lance Bishop, Wild Mountain Farm; Juanita Rand, Foxhill Cheese; George Pickford, Acadiana Soy, to name a few). The market welcomes visitors and tourists, and is billed as a "starting point" for tourists wanting to explore the local area (Devin Loughead Folks).

The economic and social values brought together in the space of the farmers' market make it an important site of creative action in the food system. As a space where values are circulated and exchanged, and where displays of symbolic value are visible through such exchange, the farmers' market is an ideal space to build a discourse around local food. As a meeting place and tourist site, the farmers' market also builds Wolfville into a place defined by support for "the local." Farmers' markets function as localization strategies with a wide range of possible goals and outcomes, from improving individual health and eating habits, to supporting local producers, to promoting tourism, to highlighting sustainable farming practices and linking them to the health of local ecosystems. The Wolfville Farmers' Market incorporates all of these goals, but the focus seems to be on supporting local producers and building a cultural snapshot of the region that celebrates local food, drawing in local residents and tourists, alike. The danger of falling into the "local trap" is evident, here; critical discourse around what values are advanced through local food is notably absent. The farmers' market does, however, provide a space for people with diverse ideas about the stakes, purpose, and direction of

the local food movement to mingle. In the space of the farmers' market, producers, consumers, and activists may find common ground beyond the strategy of localization, and the market is a jumping-off point for collaboration beyond the market grounds.

By linking food to Wolfville and the Annapolis valley as social and geographical places, the market encourages pride in place by marking the agricultural products of the valley as quality, healthy, diverse, and valuable. This symbolic distinction is naturalized through a discourse of connection to the land. The "Tastes of the Valley" event held every summer is demonstrative of the links between geographical area, taste, and support for local producers. The Tastes of the Valley event is billed as a "culinary celebration of fresh local food," during which "Valley Chefs will create dishes using fresh Valley-farmed ingredients to create \$3 taste concoctions that will tantalize your taste buds" (Wolfville Farmers' Market). The event is about local food from the Annapolis valley, and incorporates elements of the "gourmet foodscape" (Johnston and Baumann, 2010), highlighting the overlap between "ethical" and "gourmet" foodscapes. Through events like Tastes of the Valley, the Wolfville Farmers' Market integrates gourmet culture into the local food system and community identity. This may be beneficial to local farmers, whose products are then associated with high-status gourmet cuisine. Culinary tourism is growing in Wolfville, and the presence of local wineries at the market and at the Tastes of the Valley events shows how the pairing of wine and food advances the gourmet side of local food. The discourse circulating, in this case, is that local food is "quality," and that not only the food itself, but skilled preparation of it, are worth celebrating.

The Tastes of the Valley event brings to mind the discourse of *terroir*, which Trubek (2008) describes simply as the "taste of place." This discourse suggests that the

land that food is produced on gives it unique (and profitable) tastes. Through the discourse of terroir, *taste* is used to link food to place, and becomes a tool for localizing food. It is the frame through which a sensory link is formed between the land/region/area of production and the physiological taste of food and drink in such a way as to discern authenticity in the product's origins. In France, where the concept of terroir originates, the *Institut National des Appellations d'Origine* (INAO), part of the French Ministry of Agriculture, takes applications from groups of producers to confer *Appellation d'Origine Controlée* (AOC) status on different products (the most well-known are types of wine: *Bordeaux, Champagne, Medoc*). According to Trubek, "from the point of view of the INAO, places create distinct tastes. The mission of the institute, which uses an essentializing definition of terroir, is to be a steward of the relationship between locale and flavor, and to encourage everyone to agree that they can taste place" (2008. p.31). In France, then, terroir is one way to protect and support farmers and producers of agricultural products by conferring legitimacy on the producing region, as well as alerting consumers to the unique taste a particular kind of product offers. Terroir is about creating a sense of place through one's sense of taste.

In places beyond France, where the discourse of terroir does not have such cultural recognition, taste and place are still being linked in interesting ways. Paxson (2010) suggests that, in the United States' artisanal cheese culture, cheese producers are "reverse-engineering terroir":

Drawing on the holism of terroir—what one cheesemaker described as 'everything that goes into the cheese'—artisans argue that the commercial value of their cheese is derived from underlying assets that cheese sales also protect: independent family farms, unconfined dairy animals, and working landscapes. Moreover, these assets have potential to become collective patrimony, constitutive of place—if they are valued as such. (p. 445)

Weiss (2011) similarly suggests that “the local” has become a signifier of value through production of local pork, and that place is built through the symbolic and material interaction between pigs, landscapes, and social relations. Through events like Tastes of the Valley, the Wolfville Farmers’ Market builds gourmet taste and discerning palates into the identity of Wolfville. The gourmet-inflected discourse of local food that emerges through the farmers’ market does not simply reflect place, it creates it. The visibility of this discourse is important for local farms, restaurants and businesses, but it is worth noting the absence of more social-justice or political symbolism from the Wolfville Farmers’ Market. The gourmet side of local food garners the most attention and excitement, with events like Tastes of the Valley drawing in hundreds of extra people from around the region. This gourmet appeal may not be accessible to people with lower incomes—it emphasizes the economic requirements of participation while encoding them in a symbolic framework of distinctive taste.

The Wolfville Farmers’ Market also runs seasonal events, such as the “Pumpkin Palooza” celebrating the fall harvest. During the Christmas season it hosts a “Get Un-Scrooged” campaign, during which participants exchange a five-dollar donation to the Wolfville Food Bank for a ballot (the prize is their “wishlist” of items from various stalls at the market). The market does, then, strive to find ways to reach out to the community beyond farmers and consumers. It does this in other ways, as well, by making the market space a socializing opportunity as much as a commercial space. There is always live music, and the market building hosts cheap yoga classes and music on other days of the week. The space of the market hosts a wide range of actors with various social, cultural, and economic goals. Devin Loughhead Folks, the farmers’ market information booth

coordinator, also pointed out that many of the lower-income people in the Wolfville area are the farmers themselves. By providing a space where they can price their products higher and scrape out a profit, the market contributes to the stability and sustainability of local food production. Devin explains, “I don’t think there’s very many of our farmers who could afford to charge less for their food, in fact probably some of them are undercharging compared to what their costs are and what the food really is valued at” (Devin Loughead Folks).

Despite her suggestion that the “true value” can (and should) be integrated into price in order to deliver a fair price to farmers, Devin also asserts that the value of food as a necessity should make it available to everyone who needs it. The idea that local food “should cost more for those who can afford it, and food should be available to everybody” (Devin Loughead Folks) is a common theme in food localization discourse, and raises the question of whether farmers’ markets can really offer something for everyone. One way to examine this theme is to suggest that the symbolic aspects of gourmet culture that allow farmers to improve their profit margin without expanding the scale of their operation perform an important redistributive function in local economies. Farm security and food security are increasingly highlighted as common goals in alternative food networks (Guthman, Morris and Allen, 2006). Guthman et al. ask, “Is it possible to simultaneously make fresh, nutritious food affordable to low-income people while providing a decent return to small-scale, sustainable farmers through farmers’ markets and CSAs” (2006, p.664)? In the course of their research, they concluded that most alternative food institutions are not equipped to meet food security goals or to subsidize low-income consumers. The rhetoric of “win-win,” or the “something for

everyone” approach, works best when the consumers are affluent (Guthman et al., 2006, p.682). Clearly, although market organizers may strive to incorporate the values of food security into the discourse of the market, if local food is to become an affordable option for low-income people, it cannot be subsidized by low-income farmers. Localization initiatives that lobby regional and provincial governments to subsidize and support local food programs fill an important gap in the alternative food movement.

The social and economic values that come together in the Wolfville Farmers’ Market highlight the complex and varied meanings that can be made from and in the market. As Holloway and Kneafsey (2000) note, farmers’ markets are potentially liminal spaces where the alternative and the reactionary overlap (p.292). Hidden within the localization strategy is a range of actors with different goals. The farmers’ market used as a case study by Holloway and Kneafsey demonstrated elements of alternative space (challenging the homogeneity and commercial space of the supermarket), as well as reactionary nostalgia. In Wolfville, the farmers’ market functions as both an alternative space and a gourmet foodscape. The geographical landscape is mobilized to challenge global industrial agrifood, and cited as the distinctive source of quality food for gourmet markets and palates. The same dialectic is at play in the Slow Food and Citta Slow initiatives, which I will discuss in the next section. By emphasizing the social side of the market, the Wolfville Farmers’ Market has become more than a commercial space. It is important for vendors and local farmers, and provides a community atmosphere that is a visible symbol of what it means to consume local food and build local community. In this way, it does act as a keystone for the local food system. It is also apparent, however, that the localization of the food system requires more than a thriving farmers’ market, and

that the market can play a larger role in food security and justice initiatives. If the market is the keystone, many more initiatives are necessary to build a true gateway to local sustainability.

Holloway and Kneafsey suggest:

the association of FM [farmers' markets] with the rural and the local may be read as a search for localized identity, an attempt to fix identity or build a sense of community within a context of perceived threats to local identities and communities in the face of the power of multi-nationals associated with, for example, food retailing and new and diffuse forms of risk, such as genetically modified crops. (2000, p.295)

Farmers' markets work to create alternative spaces, but in so doing sometimes replicate the boundaries to good food that are present in the conventional market. As spaces where non-commercial and commercial interactions are combined, and as hosts to events that shape the meaning of local food, farmers' markets have the potential to become important drivers of rural revitalization, local food systems, and community building. Connecting the value of local food to community identity is a powerful way to build support for a localized food system. It also requires more attention to goals and outcomes than a typical "market"—if the farmers' market is indeed the keystone of the Wolfville food system, it needs to grapple with its own values—is it an inclusive space? Who does not attend the market? Why not? Who feels most comfortable in the market space? Whose community is it building? As Guthman (2008) points out, market spaces are defined by invisible social boundaries that often welcome white, middle class consumers, and discourage lower-income and racialized groups from attending. The Wolfville Farmers' Market has shown a tremendous ability to shape the relationship between Wolfville and its food, and to add social, economic, and symbolic value to local food through the discourse of taste and place. For many, the farmers' market is a cultural asset to



Wolfville, and a way to build and maintain community. Wolfville, as a place, is built through the social space of the market, which makes it a powerful space of social connection and shared identity, and also a potentially exclusionary space if the emphasis remains on higher income consumers. As Weiss (2011) puts it,

If place is made through the recognition of critical qualities (skills and tastes, objectified and embodied), it's important to ask what, and more importantly, who, is not recognized in such place making.... issues of race and class are uneasily incorporated into the politics of 'local food.' (p.456)

Indeed, it is important to acknowledge that local food involves local politics, and that projects of identity-building around local food celebrate some people and exclude others. Localization initiatives introduce a local discourse that defines community identity as well as builds and reinforces power and status distinctions. As repositories for this discourse, farmers' markets are spaces charged with struggles over the value and meaning of local food and *at the same time* can be experienced as friendly, welcoming, and fun social spaces.

### 3.3.2 Slow Living: Slow Food and Citta Slow

Michael Howell, the chef at Tempest Restaurant and the director of Slow Food Nova Scotia, was quick to point out that joining the Slow Food organization is a personal choice: "a company can't join, a business can't join, only a person can join." Slow Food International created a category of membership called "Citta Slow" (Slow City), through which municipalities could adopt Slow Food goals as a collective. Michael pitched this vision to the Town Council and was received warmly, although the process of achieving Citta Slow designation has stalled due to concerns over funding. Michael sees the Citta Slow designation as drawing on already-existing progressive values in Wolfville, and he

suggests that it may be a way to encompass fair trade organizing and sustainable living in a broader set of values. He explains, “it’s about modernizing a community in a way that citizens understand, and that forward-thinking people recognize as a good way for us to be growing and living” (Michael Howell). A Citta Slow initiative would presumably follow the goals of Slow Food Nova Scotia, which are: “To promote good, clean and fair food from local producers; To encourage the best growing practises [sic] especially organic and sustainable methods; To preserve our culinary history and culture so that we have diversity in our food choices; To reconnect producers and consumers so they can educate each other” (Slow Food Nova Scotia, 2009-2011).

The Citta Slow initiative takes the more individual, consumer based approach to food that the Slow Food movement utilizes, and widens its scope to include community sustainability and improving quality of life. The challenge in Wolfville is getting past the idea that Slow Food is just for “foodies.” Mintz (2006) articulates the way modern industrial developments have eroded taste in local food systems—a connection important to understanding how Slow Food functions to critique modern industrial food production while simultaneously advocating food as pleasure:

The cumulative, selective process of modernity in action—whether of food, cooking method, cooking medium, plant variety, animal breed, or taste—has repeatedly picked as criteria such things as standardization, efficiency, preservability, convenience of packing and shipping, and underlying it all, the desire for profit.... Hence there are grounds for a growing conviction that such advances will eventually destroy local taste and cooking, rather than sustain or improve it—by first establishing and then maintaining what can become, in effect, a global baseline of mediocrity. (p.7)

Slow Food’s focus on “good taste” attempts to resist (some of) these modern developments in the name of tasty food, prepared and savoured slowly and deliberately. The unintentional effect of such resistance is that it tends to reinforce nostalgic ideas

about the way things were before the advent of industrial agriculture. Food tasted better, the butcher cured his own meat, and the milk was delivered in glass bottles with the cream floating on top. The oft-ignored back-story is that women prepared the meals, as they were not involved in the public workforce, and a whole infrastructure supported local food production (including canneries, local vegetable processing co-ops, abattoirs). This infrastructure no longer exists, and most women are not keen to return to a life of domesticity (although some are advocating for a movement of “radical homemakers,” in Hayes, 2010). Re-creation of this golden age of food requires time, skill and money for food preparation on the consumption side, and a host of small producers with the specialized knowledge and support to develop diversified artisanal products. The sense of nostalgia that accompanies Slow Food discourse is not always shared; as Mintz suggests, societies “do not do the changing monolithically; the people in such societies do not always *know* what they are giving up. And then, too, not everybody laments the losses as losses but welcomes them as gains” (2006, p.9, emphasis in original). As such, it is unlikely that Slow Food has the capacity to address the challenges of food globalization as a collective movement—not only do some people welcome and enjoy “fast” food, many rely on it, or do not have the resources to focus on food for pleasure. For a localization movement to build an inclusive and accessible local food system, a food program needs to “have to do with far more than the foods themselves, where they come from, and how we prepare and eat them” (Mintz, 2006, p. 10).

A recurrent critique of the Slow Food movement is its reliance on gourmet niche marketing, which tends to exclude people without the means to purchase artisan cheese and organic wine. The Slow Food movement was built on a radical critique of industrial,

globalized fast food and support for local, artisan production, but its North American contingent has abandoned its more anti-capitalist leanings (Paxson, 2005). As Paxson suggests, “Slow Food, capturing the imagination of virtue-hungry Americans, promises a set of scales on which consumers with means might balance a cornucopia of social and ethical concerns” (p.17). The problem is that consumers without means are left out of the balance. As a collective movement, it requires much more attention to social relationships, to differing sets of values, and to a vision of food security that encompasses more than maintenance of good taste. This is not to say that the development of a local cuisine is a bad thing, indeed the development of a culture of food can feed into support for ecological sustainability, as well as boost local businesses and contribute to more vibrant social spaces. The Citta Slow initiative shows some promise by taking into account the already-existing culture of a community and building in an emphasis on environmental sustainability and responsible consumption. If people in Wolfville see the Citta Slow designation as more than empty place branding, it may prove to be an effective frame for integrating different aspects of localization in a more inclusive community setting.

### **3.3.3 Bringing it Together: Food Policy Council**

The Nova Scotia Food Policy Council (NSFPC) was formed in 2010. Its mission states: “NSFPC is a citizens’ group working with communities, organizations and governments to develop and implement policies and programs that ensure an equitable, healthy and sustainable local food system, responsive to the economic, environmental, social and cultural needs of Nova Scotians” (Nova Scotia Food Policy Council, 2011). The NSFPC

board has representatives from restaurants, farms, and organizations who are interested in building a sustainable local food system.

The council is important for several reasons. It brings together various alternative food frames (environmental, health, agricultural) and works to connect the dots between different alternative food discourses. And it applies these frames to policy, communicating between community organizations and governments to shape policy related to the food system. Perhaps because of the complexity of the different goals and demands of council representatives, the NSFPC has had a rather slow start. After its formation in 2010, attempts to establish a viable structure for the council left it mired in bureaucracy, limiting its ability to make decisions and produce policy recommendations. When I attended a meeting of the board in the summer of 2010, I was struck by two things: the extraordinary potential of an organization that brought together people with stakes in so many different aspects of the food system, and the difficulty of deciding on how to act with so many different opinions on where the council's focus should lie. There were debates and disagreements about the wording of the mission statement and about how to make sure that the council did not get too drawn into any one issue, making it a "one-trick pony". In this sense, the council is a sort of microcosm of the local food movement—everyone agrees that the current food system does not benefit local places, but there is fundamental disagreement over what constitutes the biggest problem, and what strategies should be used to fix it.

Linda Best informed me in November 2011 that the council has undergone some restructuring to make it less bureaucratic, and she is optimistic that it will be able to "move forward" and get to work on informing policy decisions. The council is

representative of what Stevenson, Ruhf, Lezberg and Clancy call “weaver work” in the food system, making “intersectoral linkages” that get various players together to discuss contested issues (2007, p.47). This work is important because councils explicitly outline, question, and re-form their conception of which values should guide the food movement. As a localization initiative, food policy councils also counter the neoliberal governance that pervades other localization initiatives by encouraging a shift of responsibility away from individual consumers, farmers, and local businesses, to local and provincial governments. The Nova Scotia Food Policy Council presents one model for demanding a more just food system from larger-scale governing bodies, while attending to local realities and providing a space where food issues are debated and solutions are proposed.

#### 3.3.4 No Farms No Food

When I spoke with alternative food advocates, their worries about the status of food security in Wolfville and Nova Scotia more broadly were often coupled with the suggestion that the Annapolis Valley actually does have sufficient agricultural resources to sustain the local population. Some went so far as to suggest that consumers may need to be “scared into” supporting local food, by convincing them that, in the event of a major emergency that shuts down food supply chains, everyone will be more food secure if they build a stronger local food system. Essentially, this tactic engenders support for local food by appealing to people’s self-interest. To me, the emergence of this “disaster” dialogue speaks to the frustration of food activists with the progress of the local food movement. Despite significant gains in visibility and the presence of local food in public discourse, in Nova Scotia the majority of money paid for food is still flowing out of the province—an Ecology Action Center report released in 2010 states that less than 13% of

the food dollars spent by Nova Scotians make it back to Nova Scotian farmers (Scott and MacLeod, 2010, p.9). Organizations like Select Nova Scotia are working to counteract this trend by encouraging people to buy Nova Scotian produce through a labelling and marketing initiative. Others are worried, however, that the efforts of consumers may not be enough if farmland continues to be developed into residential and commercial space.

More direct political action has emerged in spheres where ethical consumption has little influence. In the summer of 2010, signs reading “SOS Save Our Farms” were distributed to residences in Wolfville and around the region. The “No Farms No Food” campaign was organized to prevent the approval of development applications (submitted by several farmers with large land holdings in Greenwich) and re-zoning of farmland to make way for residential and commercial development. The dispute had the town a-buzz, especially after a number of the signs were plucked from people’s lawns and dumped into the river. In March 2011, the Nova Scotia provincial government denied the amendments that would have allowed development of the land, and as of October 2011, that action has been appealed by a group of Kings County farmer-developers, and that appeal is under review through the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia. The dispute between the members of No Farms No Food and local farmer-developers highlights the tension apparent when different visions of “local” are brought forward—in this case with a physical and political struggle over the farmland itself.

The No Farms No Food initiative uses localization as a strategy to challenge the development of farmland. In doing so, activists mobilize a scalar strategy that uses the rhetoric of “local” to link geographical space (the Annapolis Valley and its farmable land) to social responsibility and community sustainability (the whole community has a

stake in the land that provides it with food). This tactic is contentious, because larger conventional farmers— especially the farmer-developers who would like to sell their land for commercial development— also lay claim to local space, and see their land not as a community resource, but as a commodity. Pauline Raven, a spokesperson for No Farms No Food, describes the differing approaches to farmland:

I think King’s County farmers are quite divided on the issue. Land is something they all own, and politics being what they are and I think social values being what they are, there are a lot of people in our society who think that if they own a piece of land they should be able to do whatever they want with it. And there’s certainly a lot of that kind of conservative thinking within the farming community. Whereas others do see themselves as stewards of that land, they see it as something that’s come through their families for many years, and it’s their responsibility as members of this generation to make sure it’s there for the next.

I talked to a number of people who hinted at the apparent tension between these two groups. The values mobilized in the debate over farmland revolve around responsibility to community, the environment, and “future generations”. This debate mirrors the conceptual divide that Hetherington (2005) describes as a defining feature of the social landscape of the Annapolis Valley in 2000. The organic movement in the Annapolis Valley was built around maintaining local places, and the landscapes constructed by conventional growers were conceptualized very differently. As Hetherington explains, “we have two landscapes, two visions of community and two understandings of the world inscribed in the same geographical space” (2005, p.30). In 2010, “local” food has usurped “organic” as the steward of sustainable landscapes, and the divide is quite literally coded into the geography of the Valley. Not surprisingly, conventional farmers have reacted negatively to attempts at building a vision of landscape and community that they do not share.



The No Farms No Food initiative uses a food security frame to justify their actions, so I was surprised when Pauline cited the *tourism* sector as a major source of support:

Because they want the vistas. The history of the valley is strong, many tours are historical tours, they come to see the culture of an area. So they don't travel to see subdivisions. It's a major source for the accommodations sector in the Valley. When they polled their members it was almost 100 percent for protecting the farmland. So that's a whole other thing. It's more aesthetic than anything else. (Pauline Raven)

The emphasis on culinary tourism seen in the farmers' market and Slow Food organizing also demonstrates the interconnection of movements framed by sustainability and food security goals and those built around place branding and tourism. Even movements that seem most explicitly about food security are caught up in the project of place making and spatial competition. This side of localization can dissolve into defensive localism, as local places are held up in spatial competition with other nearby locales. In Wolfville, this discourse often emerged in statements about Wolfville being a "leader" in the province.

Bob Stead, the mayor of Wolfville, put it this way:

I can take you to a number of towns, looking at specific things like property maintenance, pride in place, opportunities to socialize culturally, opportunities for art galleries, and for our size, we're gonna outperform most of the towns in the province, so it's all of that together that makes us different. (Bob Stead)

Despite the language of "performance," Bob characterizes the relationship between Wolfville and other towns in the province as closer to "leadership" than "competition." He talked about the progressive initiatives in the town as potential resources to other places, as the "pivot around which other communities" build their own movements. He went on to suggest that Wolfville was more aptly described as the "Wolfville area," because of the interconnectedness of the towns around it and their tendency to want to

join Wolfville's successful tourism initiatives. Thus even though the spatial competition in the area is considered relatively benign (or downright beneficial in the eyes of Wolfville's mayor), the tendency toward defensive localism is definitely present. Continued efforts to cooperate with other locales in order to build a stronger regional food network are required to maintain a form of localization that is inclusive and diverse.

### 3.3.5 Fair Trade Town

On April 17, 2007, Wolfville achieved the first fair trade town designation in Canada. The fair trade town concept was born in Garstang, England, in 1999, and more than 630 towns in 18 countries have followed suit. The criteria for recognizing a town as fair trade are:

1. The local council uses Fair Trade certified products and supports the Fair Trade Towns campaign
2. Stores & restaurants serve Fair Trade Certified products
3. Workplaces, faith groups, & schools use and promote Fair Trade Certified products
4. Public awareness events and media coverage held on Fair Trade and the campaign
5. A steering group created for continued commitment
6. Other ethical and sustainable initiatives promoted within the community (Fairtrade Canada)

In Canada, there are now 16 recognized fair trade towns, and many more municipalities that have active fair trade town campaigns. In Wolfville, the campaign started as an idea pitched by Jeff and Debra Moore, the founders of the Just Us! Coffee Roasters Co-op (which, incidentally, was also Canada's first fair trade coffee roaster). Andrew Fry, then the director of community services for the town council, was enthusiastic about the idea, and quickly brought the Town Council on board. According to Bob Stead, the mayor of Wolfville, the town was already very close to meeting the criteria set out by Transfair

Canada (in no small part due to the success and recognition of Just Us! coffee, and the work done to promote fair trade through its partner organization, the Just Us! Development and Education Society [JUDES]), so the designation was quickly and easily achieved, making Wolfville Canada's first fair trade town.

The fair trade town initiative is a good example of spatial competition that aims to encourage other municipalities to follow suit—it is a symbol of the community's values and its fair trade moniker adds to the ways the community marks itself as distinct from others. While those involved in achieving the fair trade town distinction are proud of Wolfville's status as the *first* such town in Canada, they also realize that the fair trade movement as a whole is strengthened by other towns pursuing the same distinction. For the fair trade town movement, copycats are a sign of progress. There are skeptics, however, who hold that the distinction functions less as a social movement, and more as the ethical flavour-of-the-week. I talked to some farmers and activists who were worried that by this token, both the fair trade town initiative, and the local food movement are embraced by the citizenry more as fleeting fads than deep ethical commitments.

The fear that the fair trade town initiative is actually self-interested consumption suggests that the movement may be more about defensive localism than community responsibility to others. Defensive localism can be an effective strategy for subaltern groups to protect and defend local places and the livelihoods and environment they share a connection to (Escobar, Rocheleau, Kothari, 2002). Creating “particular” places can be a form of resistance against global capitalism (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003; Cresswell, 2004), but it can also create privileged and parochial enclaves. This process can also be a way of engaging (not resisting) global capital through the politics of place

as different localities find leverage for creating themselves as distinctive in a global marketplace. Harvey (1990) states, “the active production of places with special qualities becomes an important stake in spatial competition between localities, cities, regions, and nations” (p.295). Cities and towns compete with each other to attract people and capital to unique and distinctive places. Other authors also suggest that place marketing has become an important part of how place is used as a political and economic manoeuvre in spatial competition (Kearns and Philo, 1993; Bell and Valentine, 1997; Aguiar, Tomic and Trumper, 2005; Wilk, 2006; Bell, 2007).

Kearns and Philo (1993) note that place is also marketed to insiders, and to cultural “others” living within urban spaces. Place marketing serves to attract outsiders, and at the same time to reinforce collective identity (ibid.). McKay (1994) describes how this pattern has emerged in particular ways through cultural consumption in Nova Scotia through the image of rural Nova Scotia “Folk:”

The category of ‘Folk’ was, from the start, commodified. From the beginning we find people looking for the marketable story, the money-making song, the winning image. And yet the cultural producers were also playing brilliantly to a local audience in search of identity, in search of something to be proud of. (p.273)

The category of “Folk” was powerful because it seemed to represent a simpler, more authentic Nova Scotian identity, and this identity was simultaneously marketed to outsiders and insiders. The ways that places are branded in order to appeal to tourists are incorporated into the ways that meaning is made by local people in relation to the places they live in.

The tourism spin of much of Wolfville’s food culture suggests an approach that sees a thriving local food system as a mark of distinction—a way to help the community stand out in a manner that mobilizes both ethical values and economic ones. This is a

good example of symbolic value—Wolfville differentiates itself from other communities by seeking labels that define it as a responsible entity upholding certain principles of global citizenship.<sup>8</sup> This symbolic value cycles back into economic value with the hope that these labels will help attract tourists. By applying the value of “fairness” to farmers at home and abroad, the fair trade town initiative makes the global goals of fair trade into a local community development strategy, but it does so only if responsibility to distant others remains a focal point of the movement. Adams and Raisborough (2010) suggest that fair trade can serve as a way for consumers to ease their ambivalence about class—instead of dealing with local class distinctions, they “outsource” ethical responsibility to more distant and less threatening working classes. This may be one of the outcomes of the fair trade town movement in Wolfville; in a sense, it is less threatening than focusing on local social justice and food security.

Even the owners of the fair trade cafés in Wolfville admitted that the movement has lost momentum, and that this was due, in part, to its inability to expand a framework of values beyond the purchase of coffee. The pursuit of the fair trade town distinction suggests willingness to support distant others, but the movement is advanced through the consumption of a relatively small selection of consumer products: mostly coffee, tea, chocolate and sugar. In terms of global commitments, the movement in Wolfville has lost steam. However, the combination of local food values with fair trade ones provides fertile ground for the analysis of responsibility for the food system at multiple scales. The melding of the fair trade and local food movements has the potential to knit together the

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<sup>8</sup> This aspect of distinction is evident in Transfair Canada’s (now Fairtrade Canada) approach to the Fair Trade Town initiative as well: On Fairtrade Canada’s website one of the reasons listed for becoming a fair trade town is “to distinguish your community as a leader and to confirm your commitment to supporting the principles of Fair Trade” (Fairtrade Canada).

various values at play in the food system localization by contributing to the discourse of values that go into the maintenance and shaping of community boundaries.

### **3.4 MARKETNESS/ EMBEDDEDNESS**

Localization, as a strategy to transform the food system, relies on embedding the production and consumption of food in local social relationships. The embeddedness of alternative food movements is one model for determining their transformative potential. Jaffee (2007) turns to Block's scale of marketness and embeddedness—adapted from Polanyi—to look at the effectiveness of the fair trade movement in light of the global capitalist economy. Polanyi's central tenet is that all markets are deeply embedded within society and culture (Jaffee, 2007, p.18). Polanyi lamented the disembedding of production from social structure during the Industrial Revolution, and saw the institutional responses (including FDR's New Deal and labour parties in Europe) as a “great transformation” back towards a more socially and culturally embedded moral economy (Jaffee, 2007, p.19-20). The accelerated pace of globalization through capitalist deregulation and neoliberal policy enacted through the WTO and the IMF has spurred a counter-movement (often referred to as “anti” or “alternative” globalization) to once again re-embed the economy in social processes (Jaffee, 2007, p. 21).

The marketness/ embeddedness scale is a function of price; on the marketness side, price is the dominant factor in an economic transaction, eclipsing other considerations or values. Along with marketness goes instrumentalism, as a transaction focused on price is more likely to be self-interested. As economic transactions move toward the embeddedness side of the scale, they become more embedded in social relations—price diminishes as an important factor, as other relational values become

more important (Jaffee, 2007, p.22). Hinrichs (2000) notes that the relationship between marketness/instrumentalism and embeddedness may not be as straightforward as it seems, indeed interactions that display “high marketness” may also be deeply socially embedded, and ones that display “high embeddedness” may also be self-interested and price-oriented. Hinrichs warns that a tendency to equate high-embeddedness economic situations with a rosy picture of community cooperation fails to recognize the extent to which marketness and instrumentalism are also at play in face-to-face market transactions (2000, p.297). According to Hinrichs,

among activists, proponents and many early academic researchers of these forms, there has been a tendency to celebrate social embeddedness—particularly in the guise of social familiarity, trust, civic engagement and the like—and to minimize any evidence of marketness or instrumentalism on the part of actors in the local food system. (2000, p.297)

Hinrichs (2000) notes that in both farmers’ markets and community-supported agriculture schemes, consumers and producers display a wide range of different reasons for participating in that type of market exchange, including more or less instrumental and price-related ones. The same can be said for localization initiatives—localization as a strategy may not necessarily connote alternative values. Embeddedness and marketness are helpful ways to conceptualize local social relations, if one keeps in mind the need to be detailed in description and critique of alternative markets to avoid conflating spatial and social relations. Winter (2003) offers a reminder of the need to not only classify alternative food movements, but to examine critically what specific values are at play: “if embeddedness is to do with local social relations of consumption based on trust relations between producers and consumers, it is also surely to do with the meaning that these relations hold” (p.24). Winter suggests that embeddedness cannot uncritically be equated

to alternativeness, and echoes Hinrich's warning that power is at play, even in local, face-to-face relationships (ibid.).

The challenge, then, is to discern the *meaning* of social relationships, the specific *values* internalized and embedded in local markets, the *integration* of different social actors, and the location of *power* both within local food systems, and between local systems and global ones. Some factors might signify a weak or even destructive challenge to global capital accumulation (nativism, exclusivity, defensive localism, appropriation by large corporations), while others may enhance the alterity of local food systems, but not without alienating members of the agricultural community, or failing to incorporate marginalized groups within the town.

Alternative food initiatives that use localization as a strategy are a tricky blend of opposition to dominant structures in the food system, and attempts to build collective identity. In rural centres, this inevitably leads to tension within local food systems. As this chapter demonstrated, localization proceeds with different goals through different initiatives, and not all of these are strong alternatives. The challenge for food systems localization is that for the movement to maintain its alterity in relation to the industrial food system, it cannot be absolutely inclusive. In Wolfville, some local farmers use organic methods, others use conventional ones. Some farmers rely on the farmers' market or direct-to-consumer schemes to sell their products, others are large operations that are able to sell to food distributors or processors. A key question to ask is: Who are these initiatives built to benefit? Many of the localization movements at play in Wolfville revolve around securing markets for small producers, and building a culinary destination for affluent consumers. These dual aims reflect one of the main tensions in alternative



food movements—localization movements build alternatives for small farmers and challenge the industrial food system, but they do so through consumer movements that provide relatively little challenge to standard ways of consuming. Through these initiatives, farmers, activists and consumers in Wolfville are building a local food system that is grounded in place—they are forming a new local landscape. It is important to ask what this landscape looks like, and who is welcome within it—by doing this we avoid the “local trap” that assumes that all localization has positive outcomes. Initiatives that focus on food security and policy are integral to this landscape, as they redirect responsibility for the food needs of local people, and draw attention to issues of justice and sustainability. The success of such movements depends on whether they can mobilize values that speak to Wolfville citizens, and whether they can do so in a way that “builds community” without alienating large segments of the rural sector.

The food localization initiatives in Wolfville are embedded in place. The social geography of the area, the productive landscape of the Annapolis Valley and the culinary culture of Wolfville, are all highlighted through these initiatives. The value of place is that it carries particular social histories: if the pitfall of ethical consumption is its tendency to default to individual consumption and distinction, place-based movements answer with an attempt to create collective identity through both consumption and social organizing. Social networks are folded into new understandings of place. DeLind points out the danger of an individual consumer approach to the local food movement in which “the public-at-large is not being asked to re-connect to context—to the social, to work (and labor), to history, or to place—but to self-interest and personal appetite” (2010, p.279). In Wolfville, the social and geographical context is almost unavoidable. The

network of farms and people involved in local food production are clearly a part of the social and geographical fabric of the region. Even the social tensions that arise when local landscapes are contested are indicative of the ways in which the localization movement is fully embedded in place. DeLind asserts that local food “is also about restoring ‘a public culture of democracy’ and engaging in the continual creation, negotiation, and re-creation of identity, memory, and meaning,” and that “Protecting the commons, recognizing the virtue of necessity (Vitek 1996), assuming and sharing public responsibility, and empowering community residents and sets of interconnected communities all belong to the work of creating local food systems and vice versa” (2010, p.279). The fair trade town initiative, Slow Food, No Farms No Food, and the Wolfville Farmers’ Market all take individual consumption decisions, and make them into collective ones. In different ways, these initiatives highlight the ways that building an alternative food system through localization also builds Wolfville as a place. Producers, consumers, politicians, and activists have different stakes in the success of alternative food movements, and there are myriad ways to get involved through consumption and political organizing. Can the circulation of value through local food networks increase the sense of responsibility people have for the food system if that value is used to create place? The food localization initiatives in Wolfville have the capacity to build place through infrastructures of collective responsibility that value supporting local producers, and encourage civic engagement. This public responsibility is the topic of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4: RESPONSIBILITY

When I asked Bob Stead, Wolfville's mayor, what made Wolfville unique, he suggested that people in Wolfville possessed a palpable "conscience of the community." Could this conscience, this sense of public responsibility, actually influence the way that the food system is structured in Wolfville, and in Nova Scotia more broadly? This chapter explores how discourses of responsibility shape the way that the alternative food movement has materialized in Wolfville.

Locating responsibility in the local food system is integral to understanding how the movement functions as an alternative and which groups are likely to benefit. Some ethical consumption movements promise a fundamental reorganizing of exchange relationships, but the potential alternatives are limited by the structures of power and responsibility that order consumption. In order for more equal relationships of exchange to take shape, responsibility in and for the food system needs to circulate differently. Examining the geographies of responsibility (Massey, 2007) in Wolfville is one way to locate the promise and potential within its localization strategies, as well as the pitfalls. For the farmers relying on the success of local markets to continue to farm, to keep their land, and to make a liveable income, the stakes in the alternative food movement are high. Many of the small farmers I spoke with desperately hope that local food is more than a consumer fad. For them, the success of alternative food initiatives could mean breaking even. Shifting responsibility to consumers is, then, an important discourse for those operating on the production side of ethical consumption.

In my conversation with Lance Bishop, who is struggling to make his farming operation "viable," he turned the question back to me:

I'll ask you a question...in general, do you think that humanity in this age right now will be able to do what they gotta do in order to lead a shift towards farmers becoming viable along the lines of fair trade...? Do you think that ethical informed consumerism in this world can actually play a role in saving the world?

These farmers hope that ethical consumption is part of the answer, not only for the sake of their farms and families, but because they want to believe that all of their efforts to grow the local food movement are making meaningful change. Patricia Bishop of Taproot Farms described her broad vision of success:

Success for us, definitely a component for us is continuing to keep doing what we're doing. If we can't keep doing it, then it's not for me success. But it's not just balancing the money well enough to keep doing it. Success for us is having happy employees. Success for us is having employees that have health benefits. It's about making sure that we have really excellent crop rotations that are working out really well, that we have a good system of fertility, that we have a reduced impact on the environment by getting as much solar or wind power as we can, it's about stuff like that. Definitely for Josh [Patricia's husband] and I both, that whole-system thinking is really important to us. We have a long way to go with that. (Patricia Bishop)

Patricia's comments demonstrate the responsibility she feels for the success of her operation, not only for her family, but also for the people she employs and the sustainability of the environment she farms in. For ethical consumption to go beyond consuming food to changing the structure of food systems, consumers also need to adopt "whole-system thinking." The discourse of responsibility found in ethical consumption movements, however, often favours individual consumption decisions, not whole-system collective infrastructures. The individualization of responsibility is the topic of the next section.

#### **4.1 NEOLIBERAL GOVERNANCE AND ALTERNATIVE FOOD**

The discourse and practice of responsibility is a key juncture for theorizing the political potential of ethical consumption initiatives at the local scale. Increased responsibility may

not always be a positive factor in the development of ethical consumption initiatives, however. Some scholars have interpreted ethical consumption as a product of neoliberal governance (Guthman, 2007b; Shamir, 2008). As the state “rolls back” policy in agriculture and food provisioning, alternative food movements have stepped in to provide governing structures in the absence of state ones. Thus, even though ethical consumption initiatives such as fair trade are often painted as a challenge to the global capitalist market, they stem from the same process (or at least incorporate some of its main tenets), as states back away from responsibility and other organizations fill the void, including auditing, evaluating, and governing alternative markets (Guthman, 2007b). A number of authors have advanced the theory that neoliberal governance is a factor in both localization movements and ethical consumption labelling schemes, providing a critique of both the “local trap” and the potential barriers to entry into alternative food movements (Guthman, 2007b; DuPuis, Goodman and Harrison. 2006; Lockie and Goodman, 2006).

As local governing bodies become increasingly responsible for resource management and agricultural policy, the “ethics of care” in regional spaces replaces the governance of the state (Lockie and Goodman, 2006). As DuPuis et al. (2006) argue, this devolution of responsibility poses real problems when the ecological and social issues reach beyond local boundaries. They cite the case of pesticide drift in California as a cogent example of how local governance represents a failure to recognize ethical and moral connections that reach beyond the local (DuPuis et al. 2006). The outcomes of such a shift may include a reproduction of uneven development instead of resistance to neoliberal globalization, especially in cases where communities slip into defensive localism and the boundary setting it engenders.

The localization movement in Wolfville has facets that both resist and reflect neoliberal governance. The breadth of “local” allows a number of different groups to lay claim to local food as a label and as a marker of quality, community, and difference. Both small, organic, farmers who sell through the farmers’ market or Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, and large, conventional farms who sell through grocery stores or private roadside stands can label their food as “local.” The barriers to entry in the case of Wolfville local food are relatively flexible. The farmers’ market has no official boundary that delineates local food; for the most part, produce and meat vendors are a self-selected group who are close enough to Wolfville to drive in once a week to sell their produce. Some of the larger farms in the area operate their own roadside farm stands. Conflicts such as the development of farmland, however, illustrate the tension between local governance and larger-scale intervention. Both farmer-developers and the opponents of the proposed developments used scale as a strategy in the dispute—farmer-developers citing the right to determine the use of local spaces by petitioning the municipal council to change zoning regulations, and opponents of development by introducing a discourse of local food security to highlight the effects of losing farmland to development. In this case, however, opponents of development reached beyond the local scale to engage the provincial government, calling for intervention into the dispute, and expanding the debate to detail the consequences for agriculture and food security in Nova Scotia as a whole. Although support for local food is a key polemic in the debate, the politics of the No Farms No Food campaign demonstrate the ways that localization movements might expand to jump between different scales, keeping the boundaries of local movements porous and flexible.

The devolution of responsibility from state bodies to *individuals* is also indicative of neoliberal governance. Guthman (2007b) argues that ethical labelling, in its attempt to embed social, ecological and place-based values, may actually be typical of neoliberal governance. Ethical labels encourage a voluntary approach to regulation, facilitating a slide from government to governance (Guthman, 2007b). Guthman sees labels as a commodification of moral and ethical values, adding that the resulting value-capture does not map on to the “true cost” of production (ibid). By devolving regulatory responsibility to privileged consumers, Guthman proposes, ethical labels incorporate elements of neoliberal governance at the same time as they push against it. As a result, the protection offered by ethical labels is very uneven, and often contradictory. Despite this critique, Guthman allows for the possibility that labels may produce political openings for more radical mechanisms of governance that are better able to address the social and environmental challenges introduced by ethical labelling (ibid.). “The best hope for these labels...” she suggests, “is that they could help produce more collectivist political subjects who in time would develop forms of governance more commensurate to the socialized problems before us” (Guthman, 2007b, p.474).

In Wolfville, ethical labels function differently than in larger urban centres, as they are often accompanied by the opportunity to speak directly with the owner, farmer or secondary producer who has chosen to market products with certain labels. Indeed, many choose this direct marketing route over labelling initiatives in general. Jeanita Rand, the co-owner of Foxhill Cheese, described why direct marketing was so important to her:

And we felt that was really important, that we would connect with people and we would sample so that people could taste the product and we knew if that we went

to a chain store we wouldn't be able to do that. Our product would just be in a display case along with every other product, there'd be nothing to differentiate it. (Jeanita Rand)

Being able to differentiate the product by talking directly to consumers appears to be a benefit of building a personal relationship with consumers instead of selling through a grocery store. This relationship is not always easy to build. When I asked Lance Bishop whether he enjoyed selling at the Wolfville farmers' market, he replied:

Yeah, I love it. At first I hated it, actually. I grew up here and I really didn't interact that much with people my whole life, and to go to a farmers' market it's almost like for quite a few hours straight you have to be really engaged and passionate, and I found it stressful. I guess in five years I've actually got to a point where I look forward to it, and sometimes I think I'm the last one packing up to leave there, I just really like people. I say these days I get my social fix there, it's nice. My sense of community I guess now, the place where my customers are and I see the same faces every week, it's really nice.

Lance's statement reflects how the social side of farmers' markets can be interpreted as both a burden and a gift—it requires them to engage with gusto in the community. For some farmers, being as “engaged and passionate” as food consumers demand is a stressful exercise. Speaking directly with consumers is one way to avoid product labelling and certification, while still building up knowledge about farm products. As Lance demonstrates, the community side of market transactions can be enjoyable, as well. The fact that Lance included consumers in his “community” suggests that local food does open up non-economic spaces of value, even as it relies on economic value to function. The infrastructure supporting local food, including the farmers' market, may facilitate further cooperation—one of the issues with organic farming is the isolation often experienced by new organic farmers (Hetherington, 2005). Local food initiatives, by shifting some responsibility for maintaining these spaces to the community, may sustain both the social and the economic values needed to produce viable small farms.



A number of farmers in the Wolfville area have either certified organic operations, or started the certification process and then abandoned it. Both groups expressed some skepticism about the benefits of the organic label, agreeing that direct sales made it possible to explain their production methods in more detail, making labelling less important. At least one farmer suggested that labelling farm products as organic may actually be a disincentive, as consumers often assume they are being overcharged for the label. Wolfville's fair traders also expressed some dissatisfaction with the function of the fair trade label; both Jeff Moore and Lay Yong Tan suggested that the farmers' market was an integral way to get direct access to consumers and explain their operations, and both have pursued more specific value-labelling through support of a small-producers' label. The relational dimension of ethical labelling in Wolfville is due in part to the potential for more direct communication between owners, farmers, and consumers.

Inclusive localization, combined with labelling initiatives and direct marketing, may provide a platform for a more collective governance of ethical consumption. According to Guthman, ethical labelling redistributes wealth and resources through boundary setting and verification—this process creates exclusionary networks where value is captured by creating scarcity in niche markets. It is this exclusion that worries Guthman; when privileged consumers are handed responsibility for regulating networks, the benefits of redistribution of value are unevenly spread and difficult to access due to the various “barriers to entry” incorporated into the standards and verifications involved in certification (2007b). There is evidence in Wolfville, however, that shifting responsibility to consumers has contributed to a wider collective movement that

recognizes citizens' responsibility to support local producers as well as the need to address social and economic justice in the community's connections to other people and places. By avoiding certification schemes and incorporating support for local producers as a crucial part of place making and community building, alternative food movements circulate both economic and social values through the exchange of "ethical" food. When communities build identity around spaces like the farmers' market, they provide a more stable base for ethical consumption—instead of relying on individual consumption acts by alienated consumers, the localized food movement in Wolfville reinforces the collective responsibility of the community to its farmers. Through initiatives like No Farms No Food, activists also underscore the responsibility of farmers to the food needs of the community. By grounding ethical consumption in place, by making it about food culture, food security, and community building, the food movement in Wolfville is building an infrastructure for its local food system. If the farmers' market is the "keystone" of the local food movement, the farms and farmland of the region form the foundation of the movement, and the relationship between farmers and consumers form the struts that maintain these geo-social spaces.

In Wolfville, ethical consumption often involves a concrete and direct social connection between producers and consumers (and business owners). Support for local producers is mobilized through the discourse of the "local", and the creation of a culture that celebrates food as an integral part of Wolfville's social and culinary landscape. The values that are encouraged when consumers take responsibility for building the local food network are *relational* values. This is the strength of Wolfville's alternative food network—these relational values help to create collective infrastructures of responsibility

that provide ways for people's individual consumption decisions to connect to broader political projects. The question remains, however, whether these infrastructures rely too heavily on the work of producers, or whether responsibility can be shared more equally with consumers and citizens.

#### **4.2 PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY**

All of the farmers I spoke to had attempted (with varying degrees of success) to tap into the "alternative" food market by adopting new and creative strategies to engage consumers. Patricia Bishop has a CSA operation, and invites members to the farm for events; during our interview she mused about having "movie nights," to open up discussion about sustainable farming. She operates a blog and email list where members can learn about the life of the farm. Lance Bishop had an initiative designed to incorporate "fairness" into attitudes towards farming (along the lines of fair trade labelling), but it never came to fruition. He is now thinking about a box-delivery system where consumers can band together and buy a large box of meat, in addition to his sales at the farmers' market. Joey and Sarah Pittoello run a box delivery program for their produce, and Joey has been working to get an online ordering website up and running. These farmers, by relying on direct-to-consumer sales, bear the burden of selling both the values of local food and the food itself. In essence, small farmers using ethical attributes to sell their produce rely on the commodification of social values to create successful operations. In addition to the hard work of running a farm, they are involved in marketing their produce, designing and putting up posters for their CSA, building websites and ordering systems, and talking to consumers at farmers' markets. They offer cooking tips and recipes, knowledge about how food is grown and how the farm is run, and they are

often the ones bringing it from the farm to consumers' doorsteps. Running a farm is, as Patricia reminded me, a business, and a tough one at that.

The farmers that provide food for local markets bearing the brunt of both the risk and the effort of building a localized and sustainable alternative food movement and they are doing so not only because consumers have demanded it, but because they have been pushed to offer more to stay afloat as small operations in a rapidly industrialized global agricultural arena. Farmers are left to create their own market niche and then fill it. Responsibility for maintaining the ethics of food consumption is placed in the hands of those whose livelihoods rely on this circulation of value. Many have risen to the occasion, but the structural forces they are up against mean this is a large burden to bear.

In an article in *The Walrus* magazine, Chris Turner (2011) describes this pattern:

In the absence of concerted action, intrepid farmers have been left to innovate for themselves. Farmers' markets have proliferated across the country, and most Canadian cities now have a small clique of stellar small farms that cater to hardcore locavores. (p.41)

As Turner goes on to explain, the problem can be located in the space between what consumers ask for (food that is both ethical, sustainable, quality, and cheap), and what farmers are able to provide:

Food is a perpetual hot topic—it is, after all, one of the few consumer products that become part of our bodies. But even as food security, safety, and health have risen on the public agenda, the conversation has focused entirely too much on the contradictory lines of what we want—more local, fewer chemicals, more options, greater convenience—and far too little on how to get it. We don't talk about whose job it is to provide it, how they should be compensated, and, in particular, how to close what turns out to be a yawning gap between our needs as consumers, at one end of the supply chain, and theirs as farmers at the other. (2011, p.36)

In short, consumers have offloaded a good deal of responsibility for creating the actual and ideological infrastructure of local and sustainable food movements onto

farmers themselves. As Turner (2011) points out, there are a number of “stellar small farms” that are able to cater to these demands, as well as a number that fail trying, and many large farms that, despite their conventional practices, likely still supply much of the food in the pantries of locavores and fair traders, alike. Lance Bishop describes the direction small farming needs to take to support farmers, saying that farmers may need to start “businesses devoted to solving that problem of making local food convenient to consumers. Patricia Bishop’s box thing to the city, that’s an example of the farmer herself, again, going and figuring out what it’s going to take to make a living selling their stuff. That kind of ingenuity.” Lance expressed less optimism that a wave of ethical consumers could keep small farmers afloat: “And then everybody has to become an ethical consumer who goes out of their way to... (laughs). I have less hope in that.” Underlying Lance’s statement is the belief that despite the rise of local food as a desirable niche market, the values of convenience and cheapness that drive consumers are unlikely to be usurped by values of fairness and sustainability, even within the alternative food market. In this sense, winning over consumers’ hearts and minds will not be enough to uphold the local food movement unless producers and intermediaries step in to make local food convenient and accessible. The values of cheapness and convenience that undergird the conventional food system have not been replaced; instead, the responsibility for maintaining these values has been passed directly to small producers. Even as an alternative to industrial food, initiatives based on ethical consumption are still very unbalanced. If the ethical values associated with local food are not embedded enough to make consumers re-consider their demands for convenience and cheap prices,

is it possible to sustain the movement without relying solely on the extra work of small farmers?

When small farmers decide to sell their produce directly to consumers, they are up against a very efficient industrial infrastructure, including a slick marketing machine and ubiquitous distribution networks. If convenience trumps the value of local, how are small farmers to compete? Part of the answer lies in the creation of local infrastructures of food provisioning, local organizations that advertise the benefits of local food, and activists who lobby governments for greater support for small farmers. The localization initiatives cited in the last chapter, though flawed, are still integral to the local food movement; they make local food visible, provide spaces to sell it, celebrate it, and make meaning of it. They shoulder some responsibility for the health of local food systems, and provide support for farming operations. They embed local food networks in the social histories of local places, and provide spaces and forums for the practice of food production to meet the discourse of a more equitable food system. These connections help to create a public responsibility, a collective infrastructure of responsibility, that is embedded in local institutions and organizations.

Some initiatives and organizations, however, still fall into individual modes of consumption, and replicate neoliberal governing strategies. Responsibility for maintaining ethical farming practices has materialized through various initiatives that rely on product labelling—in Canada this is most often the case for organic foods, and abroad this “audit culture” (Strathern, 2000) has also emerged in concert with the development of fair trade networks. The fair trade certification process requires producers to pay fees to cover inspections and annual re-certifications (these fees were transferred to producers

in 2004—they were paid by Northern distributors before that), and producers are subjected to audits in order to prove their fair trade status (Jaffee, 2007, p.226-228). Fair trade certification, despite its goals of justice and fairness, propagates a system based on surveillance (Dolan, 2010). Fair trade producer groups have been vocal in their opposition to a top-down system where they have minimal input into the organization of the fair trade network, bear the brunt of the responsibility for meeting fair trade standards, and still receive marginal benefits in terms of fair trade prices (Jaffee, 2007). Freidberg (2004) has described a similar system at work between English grocery chains and African producers of vegetables, in which the responsibility for meeting ethical labour requirements and food safety demands has been offloaded to African producers, while grocery chains reap the benefits of producers' compliance and advertise ethical claims. Both of these examples speak to the complexity of food networks, and the difficulty of monitoring and enforcing ethical standards without the risk and responsibility falling to the most vulnerable people in the supply chain.

In order to be successful in ethical niche markets, producers either have to prove their adherence to standards of ecological and social responsibility through labelling schemes, or they have to “get creative” by finding ways to communicate the values they are pitching along with their food. Some producers, along with marketing tactics, are building their market through direct relationships with consumers—by engaging consumers in the life of the farm and building personal connections, they hope that they will receive the support they need to continue to farm. Sarah, who had just launched a produce box delivery system, expressed the importance of relationships with consumers: “I think the relationship piece is so key. I think it’s actually at the heart of whether people

will decide to support you or not, the relationship you have with them. And if there's no relationship they're not that likely to want to support. And I really think that's huge" (Sarah Pittoello). Producers expect different levels of commitment from consumers, but all of them expressed some hope that consumers would realize the importance of local support. The discourse of responsibility is one way to engender this support.

### **4.3 CONSUMER RESPONSIBILITY**

The irony of placing the bulk of the responsibility for advancing and maintaining alternative food movements on *producers* is that many of these movements fall under the rubric of ethical *consumption*. The extent to which consumers are willing and able to create change in the food system has been hotly debated in ethical consumption literature. The debate has not only revolved around the potentials of a market-based social movement (Fridell, 2007; Jaffee, 2007), but also around the ways "the consumer" as a subject is mobilized. Goodman and DuPuis (2002) argue that, in agro-food studies, consumers have been glossed as passive, divorced from "real" politics, and fully "duped" by the commodity as fetish. Whereas producer knowledges about growing food have been described and theorized, consumer knowledges, values, and subjectivities have failed to attract the same treatment (Goodman and DuPuis, 2002). By studying the links between these knowledges, "we begin to see the politics of the food system as involving alternate 'modes of ordering' in which food is an arena of contestation rather than a veil of reality" (Goodman and DuPuis, 2002, p.15). Goodman and DuPuis cautiously argue that a balanced approach to production-consumption in food systems is needed—one that "sees the political possibilities of consumption as less than the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism but more than merely a niche marketing opportunity" (2002, p.18).



Consumption as a political act carries the power to alter the food system, though perhaps not to overthrow the capitalist market.

Barnett, Cloke, Clarke and Malpass (2010) endeavour to challenge theories based on the individual agency of consumers, arguing instead that ethical consumption is embedded in daily practices, and influenced by a variety of political actors and organizations. The authors turn to governmentality theory to explain how the individualization of responsibility is part of a broader set of neoliberal projects, but they conclude this discussion by suggesting that the end-result of such responsabilization is not the creation of individualized consumer subjectivities (Barnett et al., 2010, p.43). Instead, they suggest that ethical consumption campaigns may create infrastructures of consumer choice, which are then embedded in daily practices—consumption is less a function of individual choice, and more a moment in practice (ibid., p.68). Consumers, then, are exposed to collective infrastructures that make taking responsibility for the effects of consumption an accessible part of daily routines. For example, the fair trade movement in Wolfville has made fair trade coffee much more available to Wolfville consumers: it is sold in many small businesses, as well as the local grocery store, and some of the roadside produce stands. One can easily choose fair trade coffee instead of gourmet roasted coffee or a grocery-store brand. Along with the coffee itself comes an infrastructure of consumer choice that links consumers to collective political movements. Staff at the local fair trade cafés can detail where the coffee comes from, and the roaster's relationship with the coffee farmers. From the Just Us! website, people can link to other fair trade initiatives. The fair trade cafés have posters and books about food justice issues, and they host events drawing attention to these debates. In short, consumers can access

these networks of ethical and political action *within their already-existing daily practices* and through places and landscapes with which they are already familiar. They can, if they choose, engage in this network beyond an individual purchase of coffee. These networks of consumption can become embedded in the political and social landscape of place. And, these networks can become embedded to the extent that peoples' daily practices change to reflect ethical or political aims, as when consumers build their weekly provisioning around a trip to the farmers' market.

This account of consumptive practices unsettles common approaches to ethical consumption. Descriptions of "consumer society" (see Sassatelli, 2007) presume that "the consumer" is an identity that is actually claimed by people, and ethical consumption campaigns address this identity by providing information with which consumers can make ethical consumption choices. As Barnett et al. point out, some information-based ethical consumption campaigns "presume that when people *consume* stuff, *consuming* is what they are doing" (2010, p.69. Emphasis in original). Consumption may instead be a moment in different chains of provisioning, and ethical consumption campaigns that encourage *shifting practices* may be more successful than ones that focus on the rational choices of individual consumers (ibid). Attempts to shift consumer practices do so by articulating consumption through a discourse of responsibility and ethics, as a way of connecting consumption to broader collective political projects. Barnett et al. explain:

The organizations involved in ethical consumption simultaneously make it possible for people to recognize themselves as *consuming subjects* and as *responsible subjects*; that is, to recognize themselves as bearing wide-ranging, spatially extensive responsibilities *and* having the potential for action-in-concert with others by virtue of their capacity to exercise discretion over whether or not to buy and invest in particular goods and services. (2010, p.97)

Responsibility, then, is one of the registers through which consumption can be articulated in order to shift consumptive practices from individual choices to collective acts. This tactic is certainly at work in Wolfville, where the fair trade movement, originally based on individual consumption of specific goods, has been taken up as a town initiative. The language of responsibility utilized by fair trade organizations has also been used to frame local food—by suggesting that the ethic of fairness applies to both distant and proximate producers, the responsibility of consumers is defined using criteria that combine both local and global connections to others. As Barnett et al. note in their discussion of the Fairtrade town campaigns in Garstang and Bristol, “Fairtrade Town and City campaigns therefore couple global and local fair trade, using the scale frame of place to bring diverse interests together” (2010, p.193). As I discussed in the previous chapter, scale is a strategy used to advance certain ends—the same is true of consumption. Both ethical consumption and re-scaling initiatives use the discourse of responsibility to embed everyday practices in collective political action.

The interconnection of the various food movements in Wolfville contributes to the success of ethical consumption in a community setting. Local farmers buy fair trade coffee, the owners of fair trade cafés source from local farmers, and local chefs sell at the farmers’ market. The spaces and practices of consumption carry much more potential for politics than individual consumer subjectivity does. In Wolfville it is easy to see that consumers are not just consumers. Responsibilities to the local community are easy to trace—in spaces like the farmers’ market, the relational meaning of food purchases is clear in the social and cooperative elements of the market. The relational and social elements of consumptive practices in Wolfville may make it easier for responsibility for

the food movement to be held, in part, by both consumers and producers of food. The expansion of ethical consumption to include collective political engagement (such as Food Policy Councils and the campaign to save farmland) is an important part of expanding consumer responsibility to include more than economic exchange value. If producers currently bear the burden of changing the food system, shifting some responsibility to consumers by creating collective infrastructures of responsibility through practice may be one way of altering the networks of provisioning.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

I began this thesis by asking whether Wolfville could take responsibility for a more just and fair food system *as a community*. I believe the answer to this question is yes; people in Wolfville are building collective infrastructures of responsibility that connect food consumption, civic action and gourmet culture, and these infrastructures are embedded in local places and institutions. The alternative food initiatives that have shaped Wolfville's food network are articulated through place, through the farmers' market, through the farmland that surrounds the town, and through the relationship between rural and urban Nova Scotia. The social geography of Wolfville is changed as the culture of food infuses the collective identity of its residents, and as they negotiate its meaning for their daily practices. The alternative food movement in Wolfville has the potential to grow in progressive ways, to become a more inclusive movement, to address environmental, social, and political concerns with the food system. The potential for collective political action stems from the way people in Wolfville connect food culture to specific places, the way they use it to define and enrich their understanding of community.

In the first chapter, I suggested that ethical consumption initiatives are often grouped into two value-frames: local/green and global/fair (Morgan, 2010). These frames are sometimes held up in opposition—the values at play in the alternative food movement are attached, through discourse and practice, to different scales. The reach of the ethical foodscape seems constrained by how far certain values can be extended. If these values are defined and struggled over through social relationships, the scope of ethical food depends on people's ability to demonstrate responsibility for maintaining relationships with both proximate and distant others in the food system. Farmers, consumers, and

activists in Wolfville are working on these relationships, and in so doing, they muddy the distinction between the local/green and global/fair frames, by applying both to local relationships and collective identity. Indeed, the food movements in Wolfville may be working toward a “master frame,” (Stevenson et al., 2007) one that incorporates local and global responsibility into the “conscience of the community.” By paying attention to the ways that value circulates within alternative food networks, by making efforts to ground these networks in local places, and by altering daily practices to include acts of consumption that express social and political sentiments, people in Wolfville create new “geographies of responsibility” (Massey, 2007).

### **5.1 GEOGRAPHIES OF RESPONSIBILITY**

Massey (2007) advocates a spatial politics that recognizes the role of the local in creating the global, a politics that addresses the “global positioning of places” (p.167). Her research on London reveals a “power geometry” through which London, far from being a victim of global forces, has significant control over global flows of information, people and commodities. As such, she argues, the city has a responsibility to acknowledge its connection to other places, and especially the ways in which it benefits from its power over the process of globalization. She explains, “the assertion of local agency in a global context, here, arises not only from the need to reinvigorate and reinvent the economy *within*, but also from the need to recognize this place’s implication in the production of the global itself, and what that means for other places” (p.170-171). For Massey, the counterposition of local and global obscures the ability of local places to influence distant others; removing the agency of the local also absolves local places from responsibility for their position in the global economy. A local politics that claims this responsibility has

the potential to invite cooperation and solidarity into the relations between places, and in doing so can reinvigorate local space. This re-working of spatial and relational connections is what Massey (2007) means by “geographies of responsibility.”

A thriving discourse of global responsibility can link collective values, social relationships, and space. In chapter two I examined concepts of value and values, and suggested that understanding value as relational meaning illuminates how symbolic values and social values are balanced and counterposed. Massey (2007) emphasizes the social construction of space, demonstrating how social relations can build collective identity through and across space. The conflicts and cooperation involved in the “negotiation of place” are indicative of a politics that challenges local places to direct their gaze outward, to a “global sense of the local” (Massey, 1993, p.68). By asking about the “real geography of relations through which any particular identity is established or maintained,” (Massey, 2007, p.179) a space is opened to shift and alter those relations, to challenge the dominant framework, and to do so from a sense of collective responsibility. Value as relational meaning is integral to responsibility—values that are collectively held can contribute to place-making and community-building projects. These values are inscribed spatially, through social relationships, and they influence ideas about who and what we are responsible for. Enacting this responsibility, in turn, forms new connections and relations.

While Wolfville is certainly not a “world city” like London, the food localization initiatives in the town are a step toward a more progressive “geography of responsibility.” Producers, consumers, and citizens of Wolfville are cultivating responsibility for the food system in a number of ways. Firstly, relational meaning is linked to economic value and

geographical space through the consumption of food and through efforts to preserve farmland in order to preserve a viable local food supply. Land, food, and value are also linked as social relationships are built between farmers and consumers, and as public spaces are created where these relationships are celebrated and made visible. Secondly, responsibility is built into the identity of Wolfville as a place through the making of a culture of local food, the promotion of tourism that combines the landscape and the foodscape, and the town's efforts to demonstrate thriving local food markets and new initiatives to other municipalities (and the rest of the province). Initiatives that further link space, collective values, and responsibility would strengthen Wolfville's commitment to global issues; for example, partnering with a town where coffee is grown for Wolfville's roasters, building farm-to-school programs to link children and farming practices, evaluating the fair trade town initiative and looking for ways to expand fair trade activism from individual consumption to collective responsibility. The localism around Wolfville's food initiatives need not be "defensive." The town has already started initiatives that begin to look outward to global responsibilities, although these have been less successful in terms of town identity than the initiatives that look outward as far as the Annapolis valley. The discourse around local food, however, can help to connect these localization initiatives to Wolfville's place in the wider global economy. The food policy council links local to provincial food politics. The fair trade town movement suggests the need to take responsibility for connections to global others. These movements look inward and outward at the same time, and they start a dialogue about "what does this place stand for?" (Massey, 2007). In so doing, they can integrate global responsibility into local identity. This process is not always convivial; "This, then is different from



those new localisms that appeal to place as the hearth of some unproblematic collectivity. On the contrary, ‘place’ here is not taken as given; it is an ongoing product of an agonistic democracy” (Massey, 2007, p.208). She goes on:

To be wary of certain forms of localism, and certain arguments for a place-based politics, is not to deny their potential *tout court*. Rather it is to require their reformulation. This is a localism turned inside out, and one that has to be struggled over internally. And as such ‘place’ would seem to have real and, maybe ironically in this age of globalization, even increasing potential as a locus of political responsibility and an arena for political engagement. It is one base, among many others, for collectivity. It is, for instance, a potential forum for going beyond the politics of the individual. (Massey, 2007, p.208-209. Italics in original)

The internal struggles over the direction of the food movement, the disagreements between conventional and organic farmers, the disputes over farmland, and the competition for regional tourism: these are examples of an agonistic democracy working through place, and they form spaces for a “progressive sense of place” to emerge. The spatial character of localization movements and the politics of farmland is what connects the values of citizens to the identity of Wolfville as a place. This identity is up for challenge and debate, and the people involved in the local food system in Wolfville are engaged in this dialogue.

When I asked the people I interviewed and surveyed to describe Wolfville, a number of patterns emerged. Nearly all of them mentioned the university community and the richness of the agricultural land. And nearly all referenced the social life of the community in a way that situated it in terms of responsibility. Bob Stead, the mayor of Wolfville, suggested that the “conscience of the community” contributed to the support received by the Fair Trade Town initiative. The people in Wolfville were described as “creative” and “socially-aware.” “Wolfville is definitely a town full of critical thinkers,”

one respondent explained. Another suggested that Wolfville has “a very social consciousness.” Others suggested that Wolfville attracts “forward-thinking modern-day citizens that are concerned for global culture,” and that “Wolfville is a community of people who are engaged global citizens.” The capacity is there, it seems, for Wolfville’s citizens to think in terms of global and local responsibility, and in many cases they are already doing so. Grounding responsibility in place may be one way to bring the diverse responsibilities and values together in a way that also builds local community. Geographies of responsibility that link farmland, the space of the farmers’ market, local businesses, provincial agricultural policies, local ecology, and connections to fair trade producers are already in the making.

## **5.2 ENACTING VALUES**

The articulation of global and local responsibility through local spaces introduces “moral dilemmas” into the public oeuvre (Barnett et al, 2010). Politicizing consumption has the potential to expose connections between local actors, and between the local community and other places. For the local food and fair trade movements to truly work together, the goals and values of their composite initiatives must be publicly debated and defined.

Wolfville has made some important steps toward this; by celebrating “fairness” at home and abroad, by sharing spaces (like the farmers’ market) that combine local and global food systems, and by making global responsibility a source of local pride through the Fair Trade Town initiative, producers and consumers and politicians in Wolfville raise ethical dilemmas, build on their physical and cultural resources, and build place by debating what and who and how to value in the food system.

By inserting social values meant to inspire action beyond the act of exchange, and by exposing the challenges and contradictions of both local food and fair trade, business owners, activists, and producers are building local infrastructures of politics, consumption, and dissent. By engaging with producers and not just their products, making food an issue of both provision and policy, and supporting the “food culture” of Wolfville and Nova Scotia, consumers and citizens take responsibility for building an equitable and just food system. This infrastructure of collective responsibility alters the social geography of Wolfville, “reverse-engineering” (Paxson, 2010) it to reflect values of sustainability, fairness, and support for local economies. This infrastructure also connects local places (the farmers’ market, local restaurants, town hall, nearby farms) through networks of responsibility, and these connections influence daily routines of consumption and political action.

In chapter two I cited David Graeber (2001), who suggests that value can be understood as the *importance of actions*. Value is not only about ethical food, it is about people’s participation in these infrastructures of responsibility, about their ability to see value in their daily routine. If going to the farmers’ market is understood to be important, and if the circulation of that value is seen as beneficial to the geographical and social community of Wolfville, then the local food movement has value as an action, and active debate over the value of specific places feeds into the movement’s power. Other ethical consumption movements can be evaluated in the same light: is fair trade an action? The fair trade town initiative in Wolfville has stalled partly because the purchase of fair trade goods is such a limited part of people’s daily lives and routines. However, it has benefited from connection to the local food network, and has strengthened this network

by expanding the geography of responsibility from local spaces to global ones. Ethical consumption in Wolfville is successful when values are enacted in local spaces, when people are concerned with not only “what to eat” but “how to live.” The initiatives at play in Wolfville have done much to expand and support a collective infrastructure of responsibility that builds identity around these enacted values, and there is still room to strengthen this infrastructure, to deal with its exclusions and contradictions, and to keep the movement dynamic and responsive to emerging challenges. Wolfville has a strong foundation for future initiatives, and is a promising example of how community identity can be built around sustainable and equitable food production and consumption. The challenge is to discover how these initiatives can cohere to form a movement that will be able to support small farmers, include low-income consumers, and address both local and global injustice. As CSA farmer Patricia Bishop explained, “We have a long journey ahead of us.”

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **LIST OF BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTED IN INTERVIEWS**

#### Farms and Businesses:

**Gaspereau Vineyard:** Katie Barbour and Gina Haverstock

**Wild Mountain Farm:** Lance Bishop

**TapRoot Farms:** Patricia Bishop

**Tempest Restaurant:** Michael Howell

**Just Us! Coffee Roaster Co-op:** Jeff Moore

**SaveEasy:** Carl Oldham

**Acadiana Soy:** George Pickford

**Stewart Organics:** Sarah and Joey Pittoello

**Foxhill Cheese:** Jeanita Rand

**T.A.N. Coffee:** Lay Yong Tan

#### Organizations:

**Nova Scotia Food Policy Council:** Linda Best

**Slow Food Nova Scotia:** Michael Howell

**Wolfville Farmers' Market:** Devin Loughead Folks

**Wolfville Town Council:** Carl Oldham

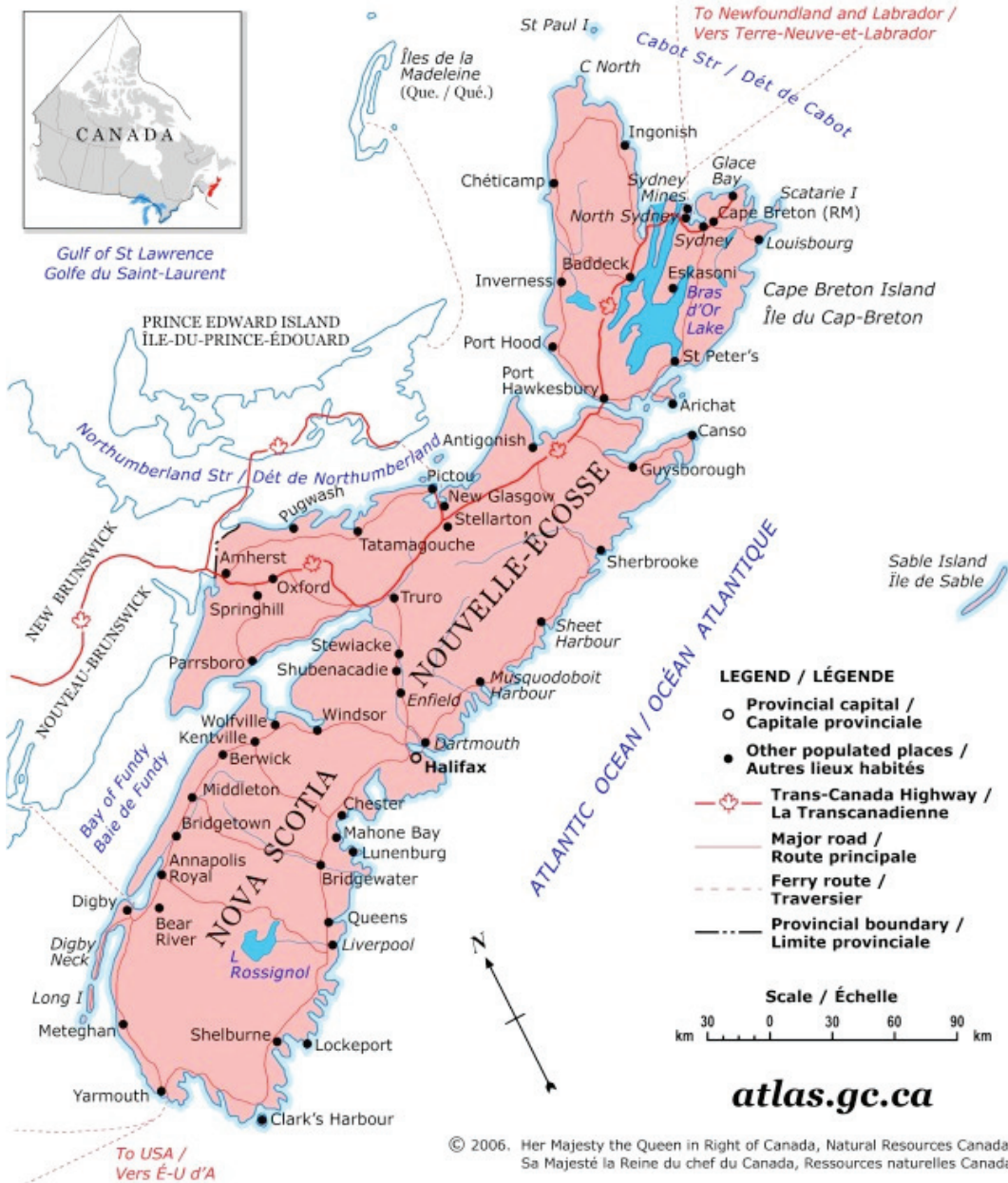
**Mayor's Office:** Bob Stead

**No Farms No Food:** Pauline Raven

**Transfair Canada:** Shannon Sutton

## APPENDIX B

**MAP 1. NOVA SCOTIA**

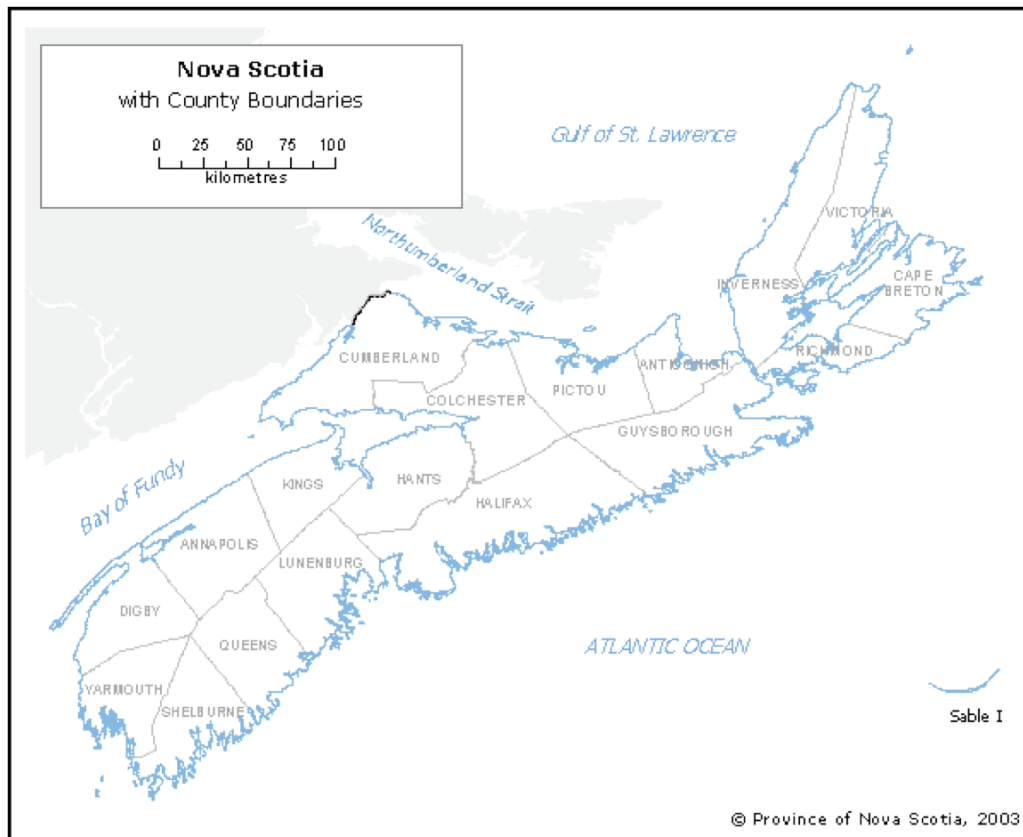


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on March 25, 2012

## MAP 2. NOVA SCOTIA COUNTIES



Retrieved from: <http://www.gov.ns.ca/snsmr/freemaps/> on February 23, 2012