Understanding Social Justice Initiatives by Farmers in Manitoba's Local Food System

by

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Dedication Page

This research is dedicated to all those who have and continue to put energy and efforts towards improving Manitoba's food system. It is dedicated particularly to the farmers who work each day to ensure their communities are fed. Thank you for the care that you create and bring into our communities – your efforts are noticed and appreciated.

May we one day know what it's like to see our farmers thrive, and to see everyone in our communities have adequate and culturally appropriate access to growing and consuming food that feeds our stomachs and feeds our souls.

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Abstract

Food production and distribution lies at the intersection of complex socio-ecological issues. In southern Manitoba's agricultural landscape, local farmers are creating and participating in social-justice focused initiatives to address some of the inequities they observe in their food systems. Employing a phenomenological approach, this research sought to understand farmers' motivations and experiences behind these initiatives, and their perspectives on their roles and responsibilities in working towards a more just food system. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and a focus group with both farmers and employees from farmer-involved organizations, and analyzed with a combination of inductive and deductive coding. Transformative learning theory was applied to understand the learning that led to farmers' creation of these initiatives, and a food regimes and movements framework was applied to understand how these initiatives relate to Manitoba's local food movement and food systems change. The findings reveal that farmers are motivated to create these initiatives by personal values and by their desire to increase access and inclusion to food and food production. For many, the learning that leads to creating these initiatives is intertwined with the learning that leads to their choice to become food producers. Though farmers experience benefits from these initiatives, some also experience isolation, exhaustion, and burnout – particularly those who start these initiatives from scratch. Farmers do have a role to play in working towards a more just food system; however, they also face challenges and limitations as food producers, and additional support is required to ensure their wellbeing. The results of this research provide a list of potential roles for farmers to fulfill in working towards a more just food system, and outlines how this work can be facilitated by others in their communities. These initiatives are an important part of working towards a more just food system; however, a more coordinated approach across initiatives is required for transformative food systems change. This research provides important insight into the experiences of farmers as they aim to address inequities in their food system, and how this work can be facilitated by the larger community.

Abbreviations Used

AFM – Alternative Food Movement

AFN – Alternative Food Network

CSA - Community Supported Agriculture

PAR – Participatory Action Research

SAWP – Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Food production lies at the intersection of various complex socio-ecological issues such as climate change, forest and biodiversity loss, poor soil health, and the production of food with lower nutrient contents (Brinkley, 2013; Ramankutty et al., 2018). Access to the means of food production as well as the systems through which agricultural products are distributed intersect with complex issues including unequal access to food (D'Odorico et al., 2019). Overall, the way in which food is produced and distributed impacts the lives of individuals in both direct (e.g., access to nutritious food) and indirect (e.g., climate change impacts) ways as they access this necessary resource. Though Canada is a major agricultural producer, over 14.6% of Canadian households experience food insecurity, which is characterized as the inability to access a sufficient quantity or variety of food (Polsky and Gilmour, 2020). Insufficient access to food can lead to serious health outcomes and compounded over time, can lead to chronic diseases, reduced quality of life, and early mortality (Coleman et al., 2021). Both food-production and food-distribution mechanisms have been further disrupted and eroded by the recent COVID-19 pandemic (Sanderson Bellamy et al., 2020), showcasing further opportunities to improve the resiliency of food systems. As a result, various actors across food systems networks are calling for and working towards transformative food systems change (Baldy and Kruse, 2019; Blay-Palmer et al., 2016; Knezevic et al., 2017; Singh et al., 2021).

In the last two decades, support for local food movements has increased significantly in North America (Newman et al., 2015). These movements to re-localize food production and distribution provide an alternative pathway for producers,

processors, and consumers to interact with food (Jarosz, 2008). Local food systems are viewed as being one means through which people can have greater democratic control over the impacts of agriculture, and as a result, provide a pathway towards more just food systems, particularly during a time of climate change (Coleman et al., 2021). This increased proximity to food producers also gives consumers the opportunity to consciously support farmers who choose farming practices that help address these large-scale socio-ecological issues, including climate change, biodiversity and ecosystem preservation, and food justice (Gosnell et al., 2020; Kremen, et al., 2012; Trauger, 2009).

Localized forms of food production and distribution have the potential to provide a variety of positive impacts; however, critics have identified many inequities within existing local food systems. These include the predominance of white affluence in local food movements, an overall lack of social diversity in these spaces, as well as the limited affordability of locally produced food for low-income households (Alkon, 2008; Alkon and McCullen, 2011; Mundler and Laughrea, 2016; Skog et al., 2018). Such inequities are often identified and discussed in the literature alongside food sovereignty and food justice, two concepts and food movements that aim for greater control over food production and consumption by and for those who are marginalized by the conventional food system (Cadieux and Slocum, 2015). The food producers who participate in these food systems also experience a number of diverse challenges, including limited capacity in their food production and distribution operations, which impacts their ability to provide the benefits that they aim to create through producing food (Laforge et al., 2018; Argüelles et al., 2018). Nevertheless, some farmers are aware of the injustices present in the food system they operate in and participate in initiatives that attempt to address the

system's resulting inequities. Yet, farmers' perspectives on their own roles and responsibilities in addressing inequities within the food system, within which they also experience various challenges, remains under-investigated.

In Manitoba, one of Canada's prairie provinces, the agricultural landscape is dominated by large-scale, export-focused crop and animal agriculture. In recent years, certain farmers in Manitoba have initiated and participated in various initiatives that seek to address some of the inequities that exist in the food systems within which they operate. These initiatives take the shape of food donations, price subsidizations, education and knowledge sharing, resource sharing, and creating spaces for those who less often have a voice in farming. Many of these initiatives can be seen in farming sectors that produce and distribute food locally. Over the last decade, the local food movement in the province has grown and created a network of farmers who continuously seek to improve their production and distribution practices to tackle food systems issues present in the conventional food system and in their communities (Sivilay, 2019). Manitoba's current context represents an opportunity to learn about the experiences of farmers as they attempt to address social issues present in their food systems, even as they continue to face various challenges themselves.

This research was created with the purpose of understanding the reasons behind farmers' decisions to try and address inequities present in their food systems, their experiences when choosing to farm in a way that seeks to address such limitations, and their perspectives as to what the role of farmers should be in addressing inequities within the food system in which they work in. This research has three objectives:

1. Understand the experiences and motivations behind social justice driven, farmer-led initiatives, and farmers' perspectives about their roles and responsibilities as food producers in actively working towards a more just food system.
2. Explore the learning which potentially leads to farmers' plans and actions undertaken to create social justice driven initiatives.
3. Create a knowledge product that is shaped by farmer's needs and aspirations to assist them in their work to improve the food system.

A total of twelve direct marketing farmers, three producer organization farmers, and two non-farmer employees for organizations that run equity-focused initiatives participated in semi-structured interviews, and six of them participated in a focus group. In order to acquire a deeper insight into the experiences of farmers, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to research was applied to meet the first objective. For the second objective, the theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997) was applied to farmers' interviews to understand the process that led to farmers' involvement in these initiatives. Inspired by the concepts of participatory action research (PAR) and community-based action research, I created two knowledge products which were requested by farmers – a list of other existing initiatives across Canada, and a list of potential funding sources for equity-focused initiatives – as a form of reciprocity for those who participated in this research. Finally, to understand where these initiatives stand in relation to larger movements for food systems change, the concepts of food justice and food sovereignty as outlined in in Holt-Giménez and Shattuck's (2011) framework of food regimes and food movements, were applied to the initiatives included in this research.

Though this research began grounded in the local, direct-marketing scene in Manitoba, it expanded to include other farmers in Manitoba that utilize more conventional forms of food production who also create initiatives to address food distribution issues within their own communities. As a result, "local" in the context of this research is defined as food that is produced by farmers in Manitoba who distribute at least a portion of what they produce within the province. Alternative, local, and community-based food movements and initiatives are at times represented in the literature as directly opposed to large-scale, globalized, industrial food actors (Carney, 2012). However, this approach is not necessarily productive in working towards addressing issues of equity in food systems. Food scholars have increasingly critiqued this dichotomy which sees local/alternative as sustainable and industrial/global as unsustainable (Lever et al., 2019). What is "global" and "local" and their unique components and processes are related within an overall system (Hinrichs, 2003), which means they do not exist in mutual exclusion. On the ground relationships in global-local food discussions are nuanced (Carney, 2012), and interacting with actors outside of this dichotomy creates the potential for collaborations to work towards larger goals in relation to improving the food system (Szanto, 2022). As such, this research sought to include existing equity-focused initiatives from farmers who meet the definition of local, regardless of their food production methods.

The results of this research showcase that personal values play a significant role in farmers' decision to create and participate in equity-focused initiatives. The application of transformative learning theory revealed that for many farmers, the learning that leads to the creation of these initiatives is deeply intertwined with the learning that leads to the

choice to farm in the first place, which for direct marketing farmers in particular, is often interrelated with desires to address inequities. The experiences of farmers while participating in these initiatives are nuanced – several participants had positive experiences, particularly in relation to the gift of giving and the social connections that emerged from these initiatives. However, certain farmers – particularly those who create initiatives from scratch – also experienced isolation, exhaustion, and burnout related to their involvement in these initiatives. Farmers provided a spectrum of answers as to whether or not farmers had a role to play in working towards a more just food system; though many agreed that yes, farmers do have a role to play, participants expressed that this role was different from farmer to farmer depending on their capacities and interests. Participants also pointed out the various challenges and limitations already experienced by farmers (e.g., climate change), and emphasized that others have a role to play in this as well. Farmers identified specific roles that they can fulfill at the level of their farm, in their consumer interactions, and in their community to work towards a more just food system, as well as facilitators that could help with these roles. Finally, the application of food justice and food sovereignty to the results of this research revealed that several of the initiatives fall within the category of food justice. This indicates that the initiatives are an important part of working towards food systems transformation, but that a more coordinated approach between these often disconnected initiatives is required to lead towards transformative systems change which could ensure increased equity throughout the food system.

In both the academic literature and on the ground, there is a need for better understanding of how farmers perceive their own identity in relation to the social

networks to which they belong and how this impacts their decision making (Iles et al., 2020). This research contributes to filling these literature gaps by providing a look into farmers' perceived roles and responsibilities in improving the food system in which they work, and their nuanced experiences as they decide how to approach these systemic inequities. Alternative food spaces are also often created without considering farmers' aspirations and capacities, and a better understanding of the lived experiences of farmers is needed to understand the power dynamics at hand (Argüelles et al., 2018). This research provides important information on the aspirations and capacities of farmers in Manitoba, and the unique challenges they face within the province's food system. Overall, the results of this research provide useful considerations for working towards transformative food systems change, the potential ways that farmers can justly contribute to addressing inequities in the food systems in which they operate, and how this work can be facilitated by the larger community and institutions in society.

The remainder of this thesis unfolds as follows. In Chapter 2, I review relevant literature and provide key definitions for the context of this research, including an overview of Manitoba's agricultural landscape. In Chapter 3, I explain the methods I applied to my research. Since historical, social, and political contexts are critical to consider in a hermeneutic phenomenology approach to research, Chapters 4 and 5 provide an overview of my results and my interpretation of them while utilizing the literature for discussion. Chapter 6 ends with my concluding remarks on the results of this research, a review of its limitations, suggestions for future research needed on this topic, and recommendations for action based on the findings of this research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Before I begin my overview of the literature, I'd like to acknowledge that food research is messy – it is complex, and what occurs on the ground while meeting people is not linear and clean cut – but that is also where potential for transformation exists (Szanto, 2022). In this section, I provide an overview of key food movement literature that is relevant to this research, particularly alternative food movements and local food movement literature, which provide useful concepts to understand the findings of this research. I review the concepts of food sovereignty and food justice, which are useful tools to remain critical of food systems. I then go over potential solutions to addressing issues in localized food systems, and how farmers are working towards addressing some of the issues they witness in the food systems in which they grow and distribute the food they produce. In the last section of this review, I provide an overview of Manitoba's historical and current agricultural landscape to contextualize this research.

2.1 Definitions

2.1.1 Defining 'Local'

The term 'local food' is frequently used to describe the geographically-proximate food products that are sold through these alternative distribution systems, however there is no unified definition for what consists of 'local food' (Granvik et al., 2017). Most commonly, the term is based on spatial proximity between where the food is produced and sold (e.g. Nousiainen et al., 2009; Iles et al., 2020), but there is no universal set distance to determine the boundaries of what is considered local. As a result, definitions

of what is considered local changes in different contexts (Granvik et al., 2017). Scholars have also set alternative boundaries to define local food: Robbins (2015) based their definition of local food systems on the character, method of production, and scale of the relevant food system, all the while acknowledging the limitations of this definition. The concept of food sheds is utilized to define and study local food systems in a way that captures the flow of resources and nutrients within a food system in a particular geographic area (e.g. Hedberg II, 2020). From an economic lens, the concept of short food supply chains is also utilized to describe the proximity between consumption and production of food that is present in local food systems and considers the different actors within this supply chain (e.g. Mundler and Laughrea, 2016).

Instead of sticking with the word "alternative", the use of "local" can help provide a concrete scale at which these food systems are able to contribute to an equitable food system at a specific geographic scale such as the community-level (Fourat et al., 2020). This is particularly important when discussing social justice initiatives, which often occur at a community level. That being said, the use of the term local can also create a false binary between that and its perceived global counterpart. On the ground where food is produced, food systems actors that occupy the same place work in ways that delineate clear boundaries between alternative and conventional, between local and global. As a result, scholars such as Lever and colleagues (2019) have examined the possibility of using a place-based approach of looking at food systems, which helps disrupt the oppositional stance between assumingly progressive local initiatives and assumingly harmful global food systems operations that take place in the same place. Creating

connections between diverse food systems actors within a particular "place" may help in creating and maintaining food system reform (Lever et al., 2019).

For the purpose of this research, the term local is utilized to describe farmers who grow and distribute food in the geographic boundaries of the province of Manitoba. Since the decisions of farmers are intertwined with the knowledge they acquire from their local context (Sumane et al., 2018), and since this research aimed to include actors who operate beyond the scope of popular local food systems distribution methods (farmers markets, CSAs), the geographic and place-based definition of local is most appropriate for this particular study.

2.1.2 Farmers: Direct Marketing and Producer Organization

In line with this definition of local, this study involves farmers who participate in two main economic exchange structures in the province's food system: Direct Marketing and Producer Organizations. As reviewed earlier, direct marketing involves channels that involve at most one middleman between the food producer and the consumer (Azima and Mundler, 2020). In addition to distributing the food they producer through CSAs and farmers markets, direct marketing farmers also distribute the food they produce through on-farm pick-ups, house deliveries, meet-ups in central locations, as well as by delivering to local stores who then distribute their products for them.

This research also includes farmers who are part of producer organizations (also known as commodity organizations), which are organizations that represent food producers of a particular commodity (e.g., egg producers) within the province of Manitoba. Farmers who are members of producer organization also have their products

distributed at a local level through the supply management system, which, in short, is a system that regulates intra-provincial trade and ensures farmers receive a fair price for their products (Young and Watkins, 2010) (supply management is reviewed in more detail further in Chapter 4). While they are not present in the AFN literature, producer organizations and their supply management chain can also be embedded within famer's environmental and social values. This can be seen with organizations such as Manitoba Egg Farmers, which have a variety of community-level environmental and social initiatives within the organization (Manitoba Egg Farmers, n.d.). In the remainder of this text, these farmers will be referred to as producer organization farmers.

2.1.3 Equity and Justice

The terms equity and justice are blurred and often used interchangeably. The term equity is favoured in policy and focuses specifically on the distributive dimensions, while justice, which is often used in social movements, considers both distributive and procedural dimensions (Perrin and Nougaredes, 2020). This definition of justice aligns with Loo's (2014) definition of food justice, which considers both distribution and participatory aspects of justice when addressing inequality within the food system. In line with these definitions, since most of the initiatives are focused specifically on distributive aspects of justice, I will be using the terms equity and inequity when referring to initiatives focused addressing injustices related to distribution. The terms justice and injustice will be utilized when referring to the food system as a whole.

2.2 A Review of Relevant Food Movements Literature

2.2.1 Alternative Food Movements and the Local Food Movement

A large body of literature that exists related to discussion on local food is that of alternative food movements, and in particular, the alternative food networks (AFNs) that are created from these movements. Alternative food networks (AFNs) have emerged from this movement to restabilize and resocialize food production, distribution, and consumption (Jarosz, 2008). The local food movement – a form of alternative food movement – emerged in part as a response to the social, environmental, and human health concerns caused by the industrial food system and their associated agricultural practices (Alkon, 2017; Andry, 2017). The process of globalization throughout the 1990s led to changes in rural-urban dynamics, creating opportunity for small farms near urban areas to meet the growing demand of urban dwellers for high quality, organic, and locally produced food (Jarosz, 2008). The re-localization of food is seen as having the potential to help transform the current food system into one that is more ecologically sustainable, socially just, civically engaged, that enhances food security, and is able to provide safe and fresh quality food (Brinkley, 2013), particularly during a time of increased risks and complexities due to climate change (Coleman et al., 2021).

Farmers who are part of alternative food movements (AFMs) seek to "address unequal concentration of wealth and power in the dominant (global corporate) food regime and associated externalities, such as environmental problems and food insecurity, as well as marginalized local food practices," with the purpose of achieving a sustainable food system that is focused on local, self-reliant, small-scale community food systems that help ensure community well-being and social justice in the form of food security and

food sovereignty (Weber et al., 2020, p. 8). This vision is achieved through non-conventional ways of producing and distributing food and through creating networks and knowledge platforms about these alternative modes of food production and distribution (Weber et al., 2020). AFNs are characterized by proximity between farmers and consumers, and alternative distribution venues (Jarosz, 2008). This very clearly overlaps with the local food movement which also utilizes alternative distribution systems such as farmers markets and community supported agriculture (CSA) (Farmer et al., 2014). CSA is a marketing strategy where consumers buy 'shares' in the farm, usually at the beginning of the season, and receive a portion of what is grown on a weekly basis throughout the growing season (Brown and Miller, 2008). Both of these approaches bring food from nearby farms into cities, allow the consumers to be informed about the production methods used to grow their food, and build relationships between farmers and consumers (Andry, 2017). They provide a mechanism through which farmers can sell their produce to sustain a living, and where consumers can purchase the 'local' food they desire.

This increased proximity between producers and consumers is referred to in the AFN literature as Short Food Supply Chains (SFSC), which is a term used to describe these alternative chains of distribution that are built within AFNs (Maye and Kerwin, 2010). One form of SFSCs is referred to as direct marketing, which can be defined as "agricultural marketing channels that involve at most one middleman between the producer and consumer" (Azima and Mundler, 2020, p. 3). This encompasses various forms of distribution systems, including farmers markets and CSAs. These SFSCs are referred to as value chains because the proximity between producer and consumer allows

the social and environment values that are present in the local context where these exchanges take place to be embedded in the economic exchange itself (Bloom and Hinrichs, 2011). Social embeddedness in particular refers to the social connection, reciprocity, and trust that occurs in producer-consumer exchanges of food (Hinrichs, 2000), and recognizes the importance of these element in AFNs, particularly where direct marketing occurs (Maye and Kirwin, 2010).

These networks and the farmers within them often deal with tensions between the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of their work and the objectives they may aim to achieve in all three of these dimensions (De Bernardi and Tirabeni, 2018; Fourat et al., 2020). This tension can be seen in decisions made with CSA where farmers try to "get the prices right" by finding a price point which ideally provides farmers with a living wage all the while keeping food accessible and affordable (Hinrichs, 2000). This is also reflected in Azima and Mundler's (2020) survey of direct marketing farmers responses, where farmer's most widely acknowledged motivations for farming were to satisfy clients by providing a quality product, taking pleasure in their work, and preserving soil and the quality of the environment, and that while direct marketing allows them to satisfy those motivations, it does not necessarily provide them with adequate returns in relation to the work that they carry out. The next section reviews some of the challenges that are experienced by farmers in these food movements.

2.2.2 Challenges Experienced by Farmers in AFNs

To better understand farmers' experiences within the food system in which they operate, it's important to look at the challenges they encounter in their own socio-economic

networks. Scholars who work in this field have established concepts to help explain how these alternative farm models have been able to survive despite the challenges they face as farmers, specifically in a capitalist economy. The concept of moral economies is used in the literature to describe how economic exchanges in AFNs are not reduceable to money exchange but are also embedded with things such as pleasure, friendship, aesthetics, affection, loyalty, justice, and reciprocity (Galt, 2013). This social embeddedness can help increase farmers' income. This is explained by the concept of community economic rents, which explains the fact that consumers who purchase these locally-produced foods are paying more for these products than they would in another setting because of the additional values embedded in the economy exchange (Galt, 2013). It is essentially the commodification of the associated benefits (pleasure, friendship, etc.) that consumers are getting alongside purchasing the product itself.

However, social embeddedness can also lead to farmers earning less overall income. One concept that explains this is self-exploitation, which describes the way in which farmers in AFNs do not receive the appropriate economic return for the labour they have invested into growing their food (Galt, 2013). There are several non-economic reasons as to why farmers choose to farm in these alternative systems, and many of them enjoy their work and do not make decisions based on profit maximization. But since they have to find a way to continue existing within a capitalist system, self-exploitation is one way to keep the farm viable (Galt, 2013). This can lead to consequences such as farmers leaving AFN structures for reasons like insufficient income, and burnout (Galt, 2013). Self-exploitation can also take different shapes on these farms, including increased reliance on non-waged labour like the use of interns, apprentices, and volunteers to meet

labour needs (Ekers et al. 2016). Solutions to self-exploitation include raising the prices of the produce/CSA shares, as well as finding efficiencies in farm management (Galt, 2013), however this may go against other values held by farmers, particularly those who seek to make their food accessible to lower income households.

The experience of burnout mentioned above has received increased attention in the farming sector recently. Burnout, which occurs when the demand for something outweighs the resources available to meet those demands (Jones-Bitton et al., 2019), is associated with negative consequences to both physical and psychological health, leading to social impacts on the individuals experiencing burnout as well (Salvagioni et al., 2017). A study on burnout of various types of farmers across Canada found that farmers were experiencing a higher rate of burnout compared to the national average, and that while financial stressors were positively associated with burnout, social support and interactions were negatively associated with burnout (Jones-Bitton et al., 2019). Jones-Bitton and colleagues call for increased farmer supports through decreasing work demands and increasing resources available to farmers – particularly ones related to positive community and industry support and engagement, to ensure their own long term viability.

Finding ways to earn a living wage which, should include income for benefits and retirement, is a challenge for many farmers who participate in AFNs. In Ekers et al.'s (2016) study of small and medium sized farms in Ontario, farmers reported a mean annual personal on-farm income of $13,629, and that 61% of farmers fell below the after tax low income cut-off (LICO) for rural areas. They also found that 95% of farmers in their sample depended on off-farm income, which is much higher than the statistics for

all farms in Ontario at 48% (Ekers et al., 2016). Similarly, in their survey of direct marketing farmers, Azima and Mundler's (2020) found that 38.5% of their respondents had an annual net revenue between 0 and $20,000, while another 19.5% of respondents had a negative return, and that 75% of their respondents also relied on other sources of income in addition to farming.

The local food movement has created beneficial opportunities for farmers, such as increasing income through social embeddedness, and the opportunity to educate consumers during direct interactions (Argüelles et al., 2018), but many challenges evidently remain. Direct marketing to customers increases the labour and time demands of smaller-scale farmers, leading to new organizational and managerial challenges, longer workdays, and challenges in maintaining quality of life (Argüelles et al., 2018; Jarosz, 2008). Though some farmers experience increased autonomy with the alternative distribution systems, Nousiainen and colleagues (2009) found that many still saw themselves as "at the mercy of external factors like vertical chains, market forces, and authorities that regulate production" (p. 579). These challenges have led farmers to rely on solutions that are not in line with farmers' other values, such as an increased dependence on unpaid labour to get by (Jarosz, 2008). Challenges remain for local food systems as well. The following section reviews common criticisms made about local food movements as a whole.

2.2.3 Remaining Critical of the Local Food Movement

The increased interest in local food has largely been based on the belief that food grown locally is more sustainable (Schmitt et al., 2017); however, that is not always the case. Scholars have identified issues with using the term local to describe food production, as

local does not necessarily mean that it is healthier, more sustainable, or more socially responsible than existing alternatives. In their comparison of food distributed through local and global value chains of certain products, Schmitt and colleagues (2017) found that greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) resulting from pork and bread production were actually smaller in global food chains than in local ones. They determined that though locally processed foods were more sustainable than globally sourced foods in certain criteria like identity, know-how, and governance, they do not necessarily result in less GHG emissions. The way in which locally-grown food is distributed through mechanisms like farmers markets and CSAs can also be exclusionary; gender, education, ethnicity, income, social connectedness, and geographic proximity all intersect to either facilitate or constrain one's access to local foods (Farmer et al., 2014). According to Macias (2008), those who access CSAs and farmers' markets tend to be college educated and middle-class. Utilizing the term local with the uncritical assumption that local is better can result in the fetishization of local food systems, and obscure less desirable aspects of local food systems, such as temporary farm worker labour (Hedberg II, 2020) and other potential injustices located within the system.

A failure to remain critical of the localization of food can lead to the reproduction of issues that already exist within the global food system (Alkon, 2008; Bradley and Galt, 2012; Brinkley, 2013). Local food systems do not exist separate from race relations present in larger society (Alkon, 2017). In Canada, people of colour are underrepresented in the mainstream local food movements (Gibb and Wittman, 2013). Local food systems are also not separate from the land's connection to colonialism; Matties (2016) argues that to create an equitable and sustainable food system that does not perpetuate existing

inequities, it is necessary to recognize the role agriculture played in the dispossession of Indigenous land. This is particularly relevant in Manitoba, where, for example, settlers involved in Treaty 1 were motivated by the prospect of guaranteeing agricultural lands for incoming immigrants (Craft, 2013). Failing to consider these implications can cause the food movement to be exclusionary and, consequently, make the goals of equity and justice within the food system less achievable (Jarosz, 2008; Schupp, 2017). Two concepts that are useful in discussions on existing injustices and inequities in food systems are food sovereignty and food justice.

2.3 Tools to Remain Critical: Food Sovereignty and Food Justice

The food sovereignty movement emerged from La Via Campesina, a transnational agrarian movement that was formally constituted in Belgium in 1993 and has grown mainly with the Latin American peasants' movement (Desmarais and Nicholson, 2013; Barnhill and Doggett, 2018). It is defined as "the right of nations and peoples to control their own food systems, including their own markets, production modes, food cultures, and environments" (Wittman et al., 2011, p. 2). It has seven guiding principles, which define a sovereign food system as one that i) focuses on food for people; ii) values food providers; iii) localizes food systems; iv) puts control locally; v) builds knowledge and skills vi) works with nature; and one that understands v) food as sacred (as cited in Matties, 2016, p. 7; Food Secure Canada, n.d.a). Food sovereignty seeks to shift the control of the food system away from corporations, and towards the food producers themselves.

In peer-reviewed literature, food sovereignty is often mentioned as a framework that can be applied to food systems work in order to provide guiding principles for working towards food sovereignty. The framework is set to oppose the corporate, neoliberal regime of the global food system, and promotes the removal of corporate control of food production (Robbins, 2015). It has been adopted by Canadian organizations like Food Secure Canada, the National Farmers Union, and by movements for Indigenous food sovereignty (Rudolph and McLachlan, 2013; Desmarais and Wittman, 2014). This concept is now often favoured over the concept of food security to achieve social equity; like food security, food sovereignty seeks to provide access to food. In addition, it also seeks to create opportunity for food-insecure groups to participate and achieve self-reliance and ownership over their food systems (Carney et al., 2012). This offers a more participatory, permanent, long-term solution to issues surrounding access to sufficient, culturally appropriate, and nutritionally adequate food.

The term food justice is also often used to identify and address injustices within food systems. Alkon and Mares use food justice to describe "the multiple ways that racial and economic inequalities are embedded within the production, distribution, and consumption of food" (2012, p. 348). According to Alkon (2017), food justice activists are most concerned with access to goods like fresh produce and organic food, and as a result, projects and policies designed to achieve food justice have revolved around two goals: i) increasing access to healthy food among marginalized communities; and ii) the establishment of community control over food and agricultural systems (p. 413). Some scholars approach studying food justice from a spatial perspective to expose the relationships between space, place, societies, and power that are at play within food

justice issues (see Reynolds et al., 2020). Others utilize food justice to also focus on participatory justice in food systems; Loo (2014) argues that food justice should go beyond just distribution, and also be defined in participatory terms to take a more comprehensive approach to addressing inequalities within the food system. Such an approach would require that all relevant stakeholders be included in decision-making procedures on how just distribution should take place.

An example of both food sovereignty and food justice being applied to a study is Sivilay (2019), which applied Holt-Giménez and Shattuck's (2011) framework of food movements to Manitoba's local food movement. Sivilay (2019) concluded that though elements of food sovereignty were present, Manitoba's local food movement was more aligned with the progressive food justice movement rather than the more radical food sovereignty movement (as defined by the applied framework). This was concluded because the movement has been most focused on overcoming existing barriers for small scale food producers and on creating space for them within the existing agricultural system, often by engaging with government, rather than practicing more critical politics and aiming for food systems transformation. The study does identify aspects of food sovereignty present in the local food system, including discourse on systemic issues, as well as farmers reacting to unjust regulations via means outside of the state by, for example, ignoring unjust regulations and practicing new models of economic thinking (Sivilay, 2019). Sivilay (2019) discusses that the food movement may benefit from opting out of its relationship with a government unattuned to its needs, and instead focus its limited resources on functioning autonomously, which would make the movement more likely to embrace food sovereignty. They also recommend finding ways for the food

movement to link up and align objectives and actions to build more consistent communities of resistance, for organizations to purposefully ground their discourses in food sovereignty, and for the movement to interact with and integrate perspectives and demands of marginalized, Indigenous, and immigrant populations (Sivilay, 2019).

Both food sovereignty and food justice are terms used often in literature on food system change; however, they are not always well defined, and since many of their principles overlap, they are not always distinguished. Cadieux and Slocum (2015) clarify these terms by stating that while both food sovereignty and food justice advocate for greater control over food production and consumption by and for those who are marginalized by the conventional food system, food justice is more focused on the transformation of the food system to eliminate inequities, while food sovereignty advocates for the right of people for self-determination of food production and consumption. Though they are different, there are four areas where organizing for food justice and food sovereignty overlap (Cadieux and Slocum, 2015, p. 13):

i. Acknowledging and confronting historical, collective social trauma and persistent race, gender, and class inequalities;
ii. Designing exchange mechanisms that build communal reliance and control;
iii. Creating innovative ways to control, use, share, own, manage and conceive of land, and ecologies in general that place them outside the speculative market and the rationale of extraction; and
iv. Pursuing labour relationships that guarantee a minimum income and are neither alienating nor dependent on (unpaid) social reproduction by women.

Since local food is not inherently better or more socially just (Bloom and Hinrichs, 2011), applying food justice and food sovereignty frameworks to local food systems work can help ensure we are working towards more just food systems. Other strategies have also been suggested to work towards a more just food system – these are reviewed next.

2.4 Initiatives to Address Inequities in the Food System

Along with criticisms associated with the local food movement, scholars have suggested strategies to reduce inequities present in local food systems. Macias (2008) states that socially inclusive local agriculture that seeks to be just and sustainable should include "programs that promote food equity, foster social integration, and provide the conditions that allow for the generous creation of natural human capital" (p. 1098). Markow et al. (2014) synthesize strategies to improve access to community-based food systems, which include improving affordability through providing a variety of payment options for CSAs, improving affordability through providing government-subsidized vouchers to spend at farmers' markets, and improving access to local food by establishing farmers markets at convenient locations and offering home delivery.

Many farmers who participate in their local food systems seek out ways of farming that reflect their environmental and social values (e.g., Azima and Mundler, 2020). Scholars have found that many are motivated by environmental sustainability (Alkon, 2008; Beingessner and Fletcher, 2020), and some see themselves as nurturers of the land (O'Kane and Wijaya, 2015).[1] Social relationships between producers and

[1] This perspective is not necessarily exclusive to farmers who participate in the local food system – farmers who participate mainly in the global market and practice more conventional methods of farming may also see their role as farmers in this light.

customers are also an important part of farmers' activities in the local food system (Beingessner and Fletcher, 2020). In regard to the social dimensions of AFNs, it is common for farmers in these networks to aim to increase accessibility, diversity, inclusion and inclusiveness in these food networks through various initiatives and innovations (Fourat et al., 2020). For example, Mundler and Laughrea (2016) found that in all three Quebecois territories they studied, farmers and other stakeholders in the food system were making efforts to utilize agriculture to address food security and nutrition issues in their communities. One of the two farmers markets that Alkon (2008) studied was created specifically to provide locally grown organic food at a lower price to low-income communities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, small-scale producers in the UK responded to issues of food poverty with models that aimed to address inequalities (Sanderson Bellamy et al., 2021). It is clear that certain local food producers have an interest in doing what they can to address inequities present in the local food system. Some of these initiatives are also appearing in Manitoba.

In the last few years, social justice oriented initiatives to address inequities found in Manitoba's food system have been started by farmers and organizations alike. Heart Acres Farm, a friend-owned farm located south of Winnipeg in the Red River Valley that distributed their products through a CSA and markets, adopted a CSA pricing model based on customer income, which was adapted from Soul Fire Farm in New York state (Wichers, 2020). This resulted in some boxes being subsidized or distributed for free to lower income customers (Wichers, 2020). In 2019, a grassfed beef and lamb and raw pastured honey farm near Cartwright, Manitoba called Fresh Roots Farm started a fund by donation Food Accessibility Project which distributes meats to "families that may not

otherwise be in a position to access our food" (Fresh Roots Farm, n.d.). Similar initiatives are taking place at the organizational level. For example, Direct Farm Manitoba, a direct-marketing farmer and farmers market co-op, has started the Community Food Currency Program, where community currency is given to "individuals and families who would benefit from increased food security and decreased social isolation" and can be spent at participating farmers markets (Direct Farm Manitoba, 2020). Producer organizations like Manitoba Chicken Producers are also engaging in community initiatives. In 2020, they launched their Caring for Communities initiative, which is still in existence today. The Caring for Communities program provides Manitoba Harvest – Manitoba's largest food bank – with a donation of 1,000 chickens on a weekly basis in order to help address the protein shortage experienced by foodbanks (Manitoba Chicken Producers, n.d.a). Overall, these varied initiatives are providing new ways to distribute food that is produced by Manitoba farmers to Manitobans who may not otherwise have access to these products.

One of the criticisms in food justice scholarship is that supporters of sustainable agriculture have not done enough to bridge the barriers between low-income communities and the consumption of local and organic food (Alkon, 2017). Though these initiatives are generally small in scale and are mostly focused on financial barriers, they provide evidence that the inequities present in Manitoba's food system are not going unnoticed by the producers who participate in it, and that there is a desire from these participants to take action to address them. This presents a research opportunity to better understand the motivations behind these initiatives, and to work with these farmers to understand how these initiatives are contributing to a more just food system. Without continued critical reflection and the necessary supports, these initiatives could reproduce

the inequities they are trying to address. Using food justice and food sovereignty frameworks to look at how injustices are being addressed can help ensure these initiatives are truly contributing to a more just food system. This represents an important opportunity for researchers to work with farmers to help ensure the food system is indeed moving in this direction.

It's important to acknowledge that the work needed to create more just food systems is not only up to farmers. The recent pandemic has intensified injustices already present in the food system, and future crises such as climate change will likely continue to exacerbate such injustices (Sanderson Bellamy et al., 2021). With the climate crises looming, working towards a more just and resilient food system is necessary work. The re-localization of food production, distribution and consumption can create shifts in socio-economic, cultural, and environmental directions in agriculture, however it does not create enormous social change (Hinrichs, 2003). Greater shifts are needed at various scales including the federal and provincial governments. Local governments can also play a significant role in contributing to the change process at the policy level (Rose et al., 2022), where food policy councils can bring various stakeholders involved in local food issues together (Lapoutte and Alakpa, 2022). Though this research looks specifically at farmers' activities, this is only a piece of the bigger picture of what is needed to create a more just food system for all Manitobans.

2.5 Mapping out Manitoba's Agricultural Landscape

Since hermeneutic phenomenology requires a consideration of the historical, social, political, and cultural contexts and how these contexts and an individual's personal

background shapes the interpretation of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Wojnar and Swanson, 2007), this section provides an overview of Manitoba's agricultural landscape to assist in understanding farmers' experiences and truths within this particular geographic context.

2.5.1 Contextualizing Manitoba's Agricultural History

Manitoba's current agricultural landscape is most prominent in the southern portion of the province. This area is governed by the numbered Treaties 1 and 2, which were agreed upon in 1871, just a year after Manitoba's confederation in 1870. For the Crown, a significant motivation for the negotiations of these treaties was to acquire land for incoming settlers to use for agricultural purposes (Craft, 2013). Treaty One was an agreement to "share in the land, for the purposes of agriculture, in a spirit of 'peace and good will' with assurances of an 'allowance they are to count upon and receive year by year from Her Majesty's bounty and benevolence'" (Craft, 2013, p. 16-17). In relation to agriculture, these agreements ensured that settlers would be able to utilize suitable land for agricultural purposes.[2]

These events marked the beginning of the use of agricultural methods rooted in European food production, which largely dominate the physical landscape today. However, agriculture has been practiced on land in what is now known as Manitoba for much longer. Documented knowledge on agricultural practices by Indigenous groups in

[2] It's important to note that Treaty 1 aimed to allow agricultural practices on the land, without the interfering in the way of life of the Anishinabe, and that it provided the option for the Anishinabe to farm as well, and for them to be resourced by the Crown with the appropriate resources if they chose to do so (Craft, 2013). These promises were often inhibited due to various reasons, including discriminatory legislation such as *The Indian Act (1876).*

the Americas continues to evolve in the academic literature (Fedick, 1995; Mt.Pleasant, 2015), and more recently, evidence of pre-contact agricultural practices in Manitoba is being documented as well. Recent discoveries at two archeological sites in Manitoba – one in Lockport, alongside the Red River, and one just south of Melita alongside the Gainsborough Creek – showcase evidence of agricultural activity related to maize cultivation from AD 1250-1450 and the early 1500s onwards in Lockport and Melita, respectfully (Macynshon, 2016; Davison, 2021). These findings included agricultural tools, storage containers, and corn, and as a result, clear physical evidence of pre-contact agricultural practices by Indigenous communities (Malainey, 2021). Though these findings will result in new additions in the academic corpora, it is not necessarily new knowledge, particularly where oral-based knowledge systems are prioritized. Traditional knowledge on Indigenous agricultural practices continue to be shared through other means such as classes (e.g., Hobson, 2019), to be practiced by Indigenous farmers, and there is growing awareness on how Indigenous knowledge has contributed to current forms of sustainable agricultural practices such as regenerative agricultural practices (e.g., Heim, 2020).

European agricultural activity in Manitoba began in the 19th century, with the first major agricultural settlement, the Red River Settlement. This Colony was founded in 1812 by Lord Selkirk, on land which was granted by the Hudson Bay Company, and was created for the purpose of growing and exporting wheat, hemp, and wool (University of Manitoba Libraries, 1998). The beginning of pork production in Manitoba can also be traced back to this settlement, where 70 pigs were brought in 1819 (University of Manitoba Libraries, 1998). This settlement began the production of wheat in the prairies,

and as this production stabilized and improved, helped lead to the creation of export-related infrastructure in the province such as grain elevators (the first one was built in Niverville, MB in 1879) and the Winnipeg Grain Exchange built in 1887 (University of Manitoba Libraries, 1998). This wheat was exported to Britain and assisted in the development of Western Canada (McInnis, 1982). What became a wheat boom transitioned to more mixed farming by the end of the 19th century with cattle for beef and dairy, and pork farming began to grow at the very end of the century (McInnis, 1982). As agricultural practices continued to be adapted to the Canadian climate, agricultural products became a staple trading product for Canada, and led to the country being the major exporter of agricultural products it is today.

From a legal perspective, jurisdiction over agriculture in Manitoba is shared between both federal and provincial levels of government, as outlined in section 95 of the *Constitution Act (1867)*. The federal jurisdiction over "the regulation of trade and commerce" (Constitution Act, 1867, s. 91(2)) and its interaction with the provincial power over "property and civil rights in the province" (Constitution Act, 1867, s. 91(13)) has over time, and with the help of caselaw, led to the legal landscape that exists today (Bueckert, 2006). The history of agriculture in Canada is intertwined with immigration – this can be seen in section 95 of *The Constitution Act (1867),* where jurisdiction over both agriculture and immigration are addressed in the same section – and its associated policy was designed to help expand and secure control in the West as well as produce food for Canada and for its trading partners (Skogstad, 2006). As Canada's development progressed throughout the 20th century, and farmers experienced various challenges related to food production, the federal government enacted policies to protect agricultural

commodities by increasing the regulation of the marketing of agricultural products with actions such as the establishment of the Canadian Wheat Board, and with the creation of stabilization programs to help address low and unstable incomes (e.g., *The Farm Improvement Loans Ac, 1944* which made short-term loans available to farmers) (Skogstad, 2006). Additional major changes occurred after the 1950s with the creation of supply management for the dairy industry, as well as the creation of the Agricultural Stabilization Board (1958) which protected farmers from fluctuating incomes by guaranteeing a base price for certain commodities. Later in the 1970s, this expanded with the passing of the *Farm Products Marketing Agencies Act (1972)*, which saw supply management nationalized for the production of eggs, chicken, turkey, and broiler hatching eggs with the purpose of stabilizing farmers' incomes (Skogstad, 2006). At the national level, this meant new marketing agencies for each product were needed and led to the founding of the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency for the supply management of eggs and similar corresponding agencies for each previously mentioned supply managed agricultural product (these agencies and their role will be reviewed in more detail shortly) (Skogstad, 2006). During this time, stabilizing programs were also created for grain producers, such as the Western Grain Stabilizing Act (1976) which stabilized net profits from the sale of products such as oats, barley, and wheat (Skogstad, 2006).

Though stabilization programs remain such as the supply management for dairy, eggs, chicken, turkey, and broiler hatching eggs, the process of globalization throughout the 80s and 90s and associated trends of deregulation, as well as an increasing transfer of agricultural supports from the federal to provincial governments, altered the policy landscape. Some agricultural producers such as hog and cattle farmers have shifted away

from stabilizing programs with the intention of 'reducing barriers' to participating in the free market (Skogstad, 2006), and in a similar fashion, the passing of the *Marketing Freedom for Grain Farmers Act (2012)* led to farmers no longer being required to sell their grain to the Canadian Wheat Board to sell directly to buyers, which led to the Board's demise (Carter and Ferguson, 2019). There is extensive literature on the benefits and shortfalls of stabilizing and protection mechanisms like supply management chains in comparison to more open markets, however that is beyond the scope of this research. It is also worth noting that various government policies have assisted in shaping what type of agricultural products are grown in Canada and the way in which they are grown. An example of this is the *Farm Credit Act (1959),* which aimed to increase the productivity of agriculture by providing pathways for the mechanization and growth in size of farms (Skogstad, 2006).

Treaties 1 and 2, as well as key legislations and regulations have played an impactful role in the geographic distribution of agriculture as we see it today, the methods used to produce food, and what type of food is produced in Manitoba and the rest of the country. Canada's history of immigration intertwined with utilizing agriculture for the expansion of the nation has also had a large impact on who owns the means of production of agricultural products in Manitoba. The following section reviews the current landscape in Manitoba, with a particular focus on producer organizations and direct marketing.

2.5.2 The Current Landscape

Today, Manitoba is populated by approximately 1.3 million individuals, over half of which reside in the capital city of Winnipeg (Statistics Canada, 2017). About a fifth of

the population is composed of Indigenous peoples - the geographic area is home to several Métis and First Nation communities which are located throughout the province. While approximately two thirds of Manitobans are of European decent, the province's population is incredibly diverse in nationality and in language – a fifth of residents identified as being an immigrant at the time of the 2016 census. At this time, the provincial government is led by the Progressive Conservative political party, which has been in power since 2016.

As will be explained in the following paragraphs, Manitoba is still a significant producer of food in Canada. At the same time, a significant number of people who live in Manitoba (14%) experienced food insecurity in 2017-2018 (PROOF, n.d.) – this number has likely been exacerbated since the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation is experienced disproportionately by racialized peoples, with Indigenous and black people experiencing the highest rates across Canada, and in Manitoba in particular rates of food insecurity are high in the northern part of the province (PROOF, n.d.; Food Secure Canada, n.d.b). These resulting experiences are intertwined with Manitoba's history of access to food production – particularly the history of the Treaties and colonialism, and who has had access to the means to produce food. This should be considered when reviewing the following paragraph of the current state of agriculture in Manitoba, and the context this creates for the initiatives that are the subject of this research. I also want to disclose that this description focuses mostly on the dominant forms of agriculture in the province and the two main distribution systems involved in this work. It does not include all other forms of food production, particularly other forms of resistance to the dominant agricultural landscape, including Indigenous-led food sovereignty initiatives. As a result,

the following summary is not all-encompassing, and other narratives also exist alongside this one.

Agriculture in Manitoba encompasses various products that go beyond food produced for humans, such as floriculture and cannabis production. In order to remain in a scope related to this research, this section will focus specifically on food products grown in Manitoba, and the people who produce this food. Manitoba's current agricultural landscape is dominated by large fields of crops grown mainly for human consumption, for animal consumption, and for seed production. In 2021, farmers in Manitoba seeded over 9,980,700 acres of land with major crops including canola, wheat, tame hay (e.g., alfalfa), soybeans, oats, barley, corn, dry peas, dry beans, rye, fodder corn, flaxseed, and sunflower seed (listed in order of land space dedicated to each crop) (Manitoba Agriculture, 2021a). This yielded over 11,721,400 metric tonnes of product[3], with wheat having the highest yield in weight, followed by canola, as well as fodder corn and tame hay – both of which are generally used for livestock feed (Manitoba Agriculture, 2021a). Potato production is also present in Manitoba, with farmers producing over 19,700,000 metric tonnes of potatoes in 2019, most of which were exported to the United States (Manitoba Agriculture, 2019a). A large proportion of the crops grown in Manitoba are exported to other provinces and countries: about 13% of wheat produced goes out to other provinces, while two-thirds gets shipped internationally, 90% of soybeans produced in the province get exported internationally, as does the majority of canola (Manitoba Agriculture, 2020a; Manitoba Agriculture, 2020b; Manitoba Agriculture, 2019b). On the other hand, corn produced in Manitoba

[3] The 2021 growing season was difficult in Manitoba due to drought conditions, which contributed to smaller yield numbers than average.

remains largely in the province and is used for the production of alcohol, ethanol, and processed for human consumption and for livestock feed (Manitoba Agriculture, 2020c). Though this scope does not cover existing storage and processing infrastructure, Manitoba's agricultural landscape also includes various storage and processing capacities for several agricultural products.

Livestock production is another significant part of Manitoba's agricultural sector. In 2021, farmers reported 945,000 cattle and calves, 81,900 sheep and lambs, and 3,345,000 hogs and pigs (Manitoba Agriculture, 2022a). The hog industry is dominant in Manitoba – it makes up for approximately 23% of all hog and pigs in Canada (Manitoba Agriculture, 2022a). Chicken and turkey production is present as well, with 54,144 tonnes of chicken meat and 9,520 tonnes of turkey meat produced for consumption in 2021 (Manitoba Agriculture, 2022). As for livestock products, the dairy and egg industry also have a significant presence in the province. In 2021, 422,265 kl of milk (equivalent 105.6 million 4L jugs of milk) was produced, as were 66.4 million dozen eggs (Manitoba Agriculture, 2022b). These industries, particularly the beef and hog industry, contribute significantly to export products as well.

From an economic perspective, agricultural production accounted for just under 6% of Manitoba's GDP in 2020, with crop production making up over three quarters of that number. In terms of employment, there were 22,060 jobs in agricultural production in 2020, which consist of 3.4% of Manitoba's total job number that year (Manitoba Agriculture, 2022b). There is no additional detail available as to the types of jobs this entails such as whether they are part-time or full time, permanent, term or seasonal, which are factors important to consider when assessing job quality. In 2021, Manitoba

exported a total of $17,432,216,000 worth of both primary and processed agricultural products – this accounts for almost half (44.5%) of total exports from the province (Manitoba Agriculture, 2022b). The main product groups that brought in this revenue were oilseeds (21,9%), grains (20.5%), meat and meat products (18.5%), and animal and vegetable fats and oils (12.8%) (Manitoba Agriculture, 2021b). A majority of these products go to the United States (44.3%), while other main markets include Japan, China, and Mexico (Manitoba Agriculture, 2022b). The agricultural landscape both in terms of what is grown in the field and processing powers within the province continues to shift according to market demands. A recent example of this is the rise in dry pea production and processing in the province, which has occurred for reasons such as an increasing demand for plant-based proteins (Manitoba Agriculture, 2020d).

The overview presented to this point is very focused on the dominant agricultural landscape in the province, however it does not represent the whole picture. Between these large fields and barns also exists a mosaic of other landscapes, with less conventional products such as hemp, bison, and even quinoa. Though smaller in numbers, farmers in Manitoba grow crops for a variety of sectors outside of grain and livestock, including tree nuts, vegetables, melons, and fruits, as well as honey production (Manitoba Agriculture, 2016a; Manitoba Agriculture, n.d.). Food production also increasingly occurs on the northern end of the province, often through community partnerships and collaborations such as Meechim Farms in Garden Hill First Nation (NMFCCC, 2016). The agricultural landscape holds many narratives that are not necessarily represented in government statistical data, and though they may not be reviewed here, they are just as much part of the agricultural context as more dominant types of farming in the province.

Overall, approximately 17.6 million acres of land in Manitoba is considered farmland area (Manitoba Agriculture, 2022b). The number of farmers and farm owners that manage this land has gone down over time, while the size of the farm has increased through consolidation of farmland. For the statistics presented in this paragraph, farms are defined as "an agricultural operation that produced agricultural products intended for sale" (Manitoba Agriculture, 2016a, p.5). The average farm size increased from 291 acres in 1941, to 639 acres in 1981, and to 1192 acres in 2016, while farm numbers decreased from 58,024 in 1941, to 29,442 in 1981, and 14,791 in 2016 (Manitoba Agriculture, 2016b). During this time, the amount of owned or managed agricultural land has also gradually gone down from 13.8 million acres in 1951 to 11.6 million acres in 2016, while the use of rented farmland has gone up from 3.9 million acres in 1951 to 7 million acres in 2016 (Manitoba Agriculture, 2016c). When it comes to farmland ownership, though no demographic information is available as to who currently owns farmland in the province, it is clear that ownership of this land is becoming more concentrated. For example, in 2016, farms larger than 5,000 acres which accounted for 4% of all farms in Manitoba at the time, owned 24% of farmland (Qualman et al., 2020). These trends showcase that the land suitable for agriculture in Manitoba is increasingly owned and being utilized by a smaller number of individual operations.

Farm income is quite variable, where in 2016, 34.13% of all farms in the province made less than $50,000 in sales, while 43.05% made between $100,000 - $999,999 in sales (Manitoba Agriculture, 2016d). Farms in Manitoba also have a significant amount of debt, with a total of $10.7 billion reported in 2020 (Manitoba Agriculture, 2022b). However, farms generally have a high amount of capital, with three quarters of farms

reporting their capital at over $500,000 (Manitoba Agriculture, 2016a). For those who own farmland, its value has gone up significantly as well, with farmland and buildings growing by 64.5% in value between 2011 and 2016 (Manitoba Agriculture, 2016a). This ongoing trend of consolidated ownership and used, coupled with variable income, makes it difficult for new entrants into farming to acquire land. Since farmland is usually redistributed in open markets, this means it is easiest for those who already own a significant amount of land to purchase additional land (Qualman et al., 2020). Though larger farms can have higher efficiency and productivity, there is concern that these ongoing trends will change employment patterns, affect rural economies, and make the food system less democratic and resilient (Qualman et al., 2020). Farm ownership is regulated by legislation such as *The Farm Lands Ownership Act (1984)*, which regulates foreign ownership of farmland that is more than 40 acres of farmland in Manitoba. However, there is currently no other legislation that regulates farmland distribution in the province.

When it comes to farm operators – those who are responsible for the management decisions in operating a farm – in Manitoba, not many statistics are available outside of age and gender. Manitoba has one of the youngest populations of farm operators in Canada, with the average age being 53.8 in 2016 (Manitoba Agriculture, 2016a). This same census data showed an increasing number of women operators, at 23.8% of the total number. There are of course many others individuals who work on farms in the province who are not represented in these statistics. This includes temporary foreign workers who work in the agricultural sector through the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP), a Temporary Foreign Worker Program regulated at the federal level (Read et

al., 2013). These workers who are generally men from Mexico, cover approximately 3% of job positions in the sector, which are seasonal jobs that on average involve long workdays between 10-13 hours (Read et al., 2013). The agricultural sector is a major employer in rural Manitoba, however it has experienced labour shortages, with a projected 5,300 jobs going unfilled by 2029 (CAHRC, 2019). From the perspective of food producers, some of the barriers to recruiting and retaining people for these positions include declining populations in rural areas, a lack of qualified workers, the seasonality of the job and long work hours, and limited opportunities for advancement (CAHRC, 2019).

As we've seen, both the provincial and federal government play a significant role in the governance of agriculture in Manitoba. Another important part of the agricultural landscape are farmer-related organizations. Throughout agriculture's development in the province, different organizations, many of which provide a bridging role between farmers and government, have been created to fulfill various roles related to farming. These organizations can represent producers based on methods of production (e.g., Organic Producers Association of Manitoba for organic producers), based on distribution methods of agricultural products (e.g. Direct Farm Manitoba for direct marketing producers), and/or based on the type of food that the farmers grow (e.g., Manitoba Pulse and Soybean Growers). Each livestock and livestock product has its own organization (e.g. Manitoba Beef Producers Association), while other organizations represent several types of livestock producers based on common interests, such as the Manitoba Forage and Grassland Association. The governance bodies of these organizations are often composed of food producers, and the organizations generally aim to advocate for the producers they

represent, as well as play a role in research and education – both within and outside the industry. In addition, some organizations play roles related to market development and increasing profitability, while a few also play a crucial role in their agricultural products' supply management system. In Manitoba, these producer organizations are the Manitoba Egg Farmers, Manitoba Chicken Producers, Dairy Farmers of Manitoba and Manitoba Turkey Producers. The following section reviews these producer organizations in more detail.

2.5.3 Producer Organizations and Supply Management

Producer organizations involved in supply management were first introduced in Manitoba in 1968 with the passing of *The Natural Products Marketing Act* (now *The Farms Products Marketing Act*), which sought to create marketing boards similar to those already in existence in other provinces including Ontario and Quebec (Bueckert, 2006). The Manitoba Turkey Producer's and Manitoba Chicken Producer's marketing boards were created in 1968 under this Act (Manitoba Turkey Producers, n.d.; Manitoba Chicken Producers, n.d.b), while Dairy Farmers of Manitoba was established in 1974 (Dairy Farmers of Manitoba, n.d.). These organizations regulate the supply of the agricultural product they represent by distributing quotas – the right to produce a certain amount of a product – for how much each farmer can produce (Gibson, 2016). This in turn allows for the price at which these food products are sold to distributors to be controlled, less dependence on government supports, and more consistent and reliable income for farmers who are part of these systems (Young and Watkins, 2010).

In 1972, the federal government passed its first version of *The Farms Product Agencies Act*, which created national marketing agencies for eggs, chicken, turkey, and broiler hatching egg producers,[4] as reviewed earlier. These national agencies were created with objectives that include increasing producers' incomes, reducing the uncertainty and variability in prices, as well as providing more equal access to market opportunities for producers (Veeman, 1987). The provincial level producer organizations are members of these national level agencies alongside other participating provinces, and it is at this level that supply quotas for each province are set. For example, Manitoba Chicken Producers interacts with their national agency, Chicken Farmers of Canada, alongside other provincial-level counterparts (e.g., Chicken Farmers of Ontario, Chicken Farmers of Saskatchewan, etc.) to determine the supply that needs to be produced nationally for a certain time period. This established supply number is then divided throughout the provinces based on quotas set by Chicken Farmers of Canada, and the provincial-level organizations further divide this quota between their farmers. It is with this coordination that the sector is able to ensure that supply is steady and consistent with demand, which helps stabilize farmers' income and product prices (though this system does not determine retail pricing).

These programs are mandatory; provincial level organization are required to coordinate in accordance with their national counterpart, and farmers are generally required to be members of and distribute their product through the supply management system (Gibson, 2016). For example, if someone decides they would like to raise broiler chickens (chickens for meat), they have to acquire a quota from Manitoba Chicken

[4] There is no separate organization for hatching egg producers, they are managed by Manitoba Chicken Producers.

Producers and be prepared to produce enough to meet their minimum quota (Manitoba Chicken Producers, n.d.c). There are some exceptions to this; farmers who grow less than 1,000 chickens for meat do not have to operate under the quota system. For those who are interested in entering the industry, there are some programs that assist those who would like to join the industry such as new entrant draws which happen every few years through the producer organizations.

These organizations have a significant number of their farmers involved in their governance, with an elected board of directors made of farmers each representing a certain geographic area, with some boards (e.g., Manitoba Egg Farmers) also including members at large. They also have an operational body, with staff fulfilling the various roles needed within the organization. Alongside supply management, these organizations may also play roles in matters related to animal care, food safety, helping to increase the sustainability of operations, conducting research, and increasing public education and knowledge about the industry. Both Manitoba Chicken Producers and Manitoba Egg Farmers – the two producer organizations included in this research – are funded independently from the government, by fees paid from their farmers.

This structure of supply management emerged in part to provide a more stable livelihood for family farms in Manitoba and throughout Canada and has had several decades to evolve and develop into the structure that it is today. The following section reviews a more recent occurrence in Manitoba – that of direct marketing farmers.

2.5.4 Direct Marketing and the Local Food Movement

Not unlike the rest of North America and Europe, a movement for the re-localization of food production and distribution has also emerged in Manitoba. This has emerged

specifically in the form of new pathways for producers, processors, and consumers to interact with food. Previous research by Sivilay (2019) found the primary focus of the local food movement in Manitoba has been the creation of business and market structures for local producers. This is particularly evident in the evolving farmers market scene in the province, where markets like the St Norbert Farmers' Market, which began in 1988 with 8 vendors, now has 200 vendors, a permanent structure and runs year-round (St. Norbert Farmers' Market, n.d.). It is also present in the growing number of alternative forms of distribution of locally produced food including CSAs, on-farm pick-ups, house deliveries, meet-ups in central locations, and various networks created by farmers with institutions, restaurants, and individuals in the province to distribute their food products (Small Scale Food Manitoba Working Group, 2015). Distribution structures such as the Harvest Moon Local Food Initiative, which centralizes the distribution of various products from over a dozen family farmers in southern Manitoba through an online platform, have also been created (Direct Farm Manitoba, n.d.c).

The farmers who participate in these forms of food distribution are often considered small-scale producers, which are defined as producers that "tend to have a limited land base, raise multiple types of livestock and crops, practice integrated farming methods and market their products directly, either from the farm or through a farmers' market" (Small Scale Food Manitoba Working Group, 2015, p. 8). Since larger-scale agricultural production dominates much of the province's landscape, policy and organizational development for these generally smaller scale farmers has been limited, and this has at times resulted in regulatory confusion, and even conflicts (Small Scale Food Manitoba Working Group, 2015). As a result, the local food movement in Manitoba

has a recent history of small scale farmers and community allies organizing and campaigning to address regulatory limits created for "big ag" but imposed on small scale farmers, and advocating for alternatives to ensure their product can still be distributed and they can continue to make a living (see Sivilay, 2019 for a detailed overview of these various local food campaigns).

A more recent initiative to address the existing regulatory gap for small scale farmers has been the creation of the Small Scale Food Manitoba Working Group, which was created to help build and strengthen the small scale food production and processing sector, including direct farm marketing (Small Scale Food Manitoba Working Group, 2015). One of the observations made in this report was that there was no unifying organization for small scale producers and as a result, no one to represent these farmers' collective interests in a government setting and in the public in general. This report catalyzed the creation of Direct Farm Manitoba (previously the Farmers' Market Association of Manitoba), a cooperative of small-scale farmers and farmers market in Manitoba that currently represents 140 food producers and 41 farmers markets (Direct Farm Manitoba, n.d.a). This organization aims to "support our members to achieve fairness in our industry, and maximize opportunities for economic sustainability", is governed by a board of directors made up largely of farmer members, and currently has one full-time staff (Direct Farm Manitoba, n.d.b). Another more recent organizational initiative that also heavily involves small scale food producers is the Fireweed Food Co-op, a non-profit coop for both producers and supporters of sustainably grown, Manitoba-produced food which aims "to reduce barriers to, and increase participation in, the local food system for all people from producers to eaters" (Fireweed Food Co-op, n.d.a). This

organization also has a governance board made up of farmers, as well as researchers, civil servants, and community organizers, and currently has five employees (Fireweed Food Co-op, n.d.a). This co-op has added additional infrastructure for small-scale food producers through the creation of the Fireweed Food Hub, which aggregates food produced by small scale producers in Manitoba to make it easier for wholesale buyers to source locally produced food from small-scale farmers and as a result assisting farmers with the distribution of their product (Fireweed Food Hub, n.d.b).

Infrastructure for smaller scale, direct marketing producers is growing and changing; however, there remains several challenges experienced by farmers that are consistent with those experienced by other farmers in AFNs, including challenges making a living. Though Azima and Mundler's (2020) survey of direct marketing farmers across Canada does not showcase a representative sample of Manitoba specifically, it does show how direct marketing farmers in the province experience similar income challenges with 63 out of 101, or 62% of respondents, reporting their annual net revenue as below $20,000. Another challenge particular to Manitoba is that of distance, where farmers in Manitoba reported that 40% of their direct marketing sales were made with over a 50km distance from the farm itself (Azima and Mundler, 2020). Processing infrastructure is also quite limited for smaller scale farmers. Processing plants for supply-managed food products are generally limited to farmers who have a quota with their respective producer organization (Small Scale Manitoba Food Working Group, 2015), so even if, for example, a farmer can raise a smaller number of chickens without a quota, access to poultry processing plants is much more limited. Processing facilities for crops (e.g. grain and seed cleaning) also generally exclude smaller scale farmers, as they have minimum

crop requirement for processing. Small scale farmers in Manitoba are also often not able to access existing crop and livestock insurance programs (Small Scale Manitoba Food Working Group, 2015).

Since the agricultural landscape in Manitoba is not shaped specifically for smaller scale farming, these farmers and community allies continue to navigate various challenges. Nevertheless, they persist, as can be seen by the examples provided above. The local food movement has provided space for new farmers from various backgrounds – some with no background in farming at all – to enter small-scale, direct market farming (Sivilay, 2019). However, even though organizations like Direct Farm Manitoba have been created to support the small-scale food sector and advance the local food movement, sustaining these organizations has proved to be challenging. Often, funding for starting up new programs is often available, but funding to maintain or grow already established and proven programs is much more difficult to acquire, creating a start-and-stop pattern for these organizations (Sivilay, 2019). This makes building resources and organizational capacity to advance the local food movement challenging.

For both direct market farmers and farmers in supply managed systems, though their products are distributed in two different methods and their organizations do not necessarily intersect, both types of farmers produce food in geographic proximity to each other. Interactions between different types of farmers do happen informally at a community level, and indirectly through media discussions on the sustainability of different food production methods. Farmers from both these sectors also tend to be community minded, with many operating a farm that has been passed down for

generations. These differences and similarities, and where each has created challenges and benefits in working towards a more just food system, emerge in the results section. These results are presented following a review of the methods undertaken to complete this research.

Chapter 3: Methods

3.1 Positionality and Reflexivity

I approach this research from the perspective of a young, French-Canadian, white, queer woman of settler origin, from a middle-class background and working towards a Master's degree. I grew up in Manitoba on Treaty 1 land because my ancestors, who were originally from France, settled here in Southern Manitoba where they plowed, seeded, and harvested the land until a just few decades ago when my family moved closer to the city. I recognize the immense amounts of time and labour that my family put into generations of producing food to make a living. I also recognize that my socio-economic background today is deeply connected to the dispossession of Indigenous land that occurred through Treaty 1. I recognize that the food system here in Manitoba never began on an equitable footing, and as someone who has benefited from this inequitable footing while others have not, I feel a deep responsibility to work towards justice within the food system that my own family has participated in. This research is one of the ways in which I am honouring this responsibility.

I also feel a deep sense of respect towards farmers who are working today to improve the food system here in Manitoba from an ecological, social, historical, or economic perspective, and all of the overlapping intersections in between. While completing my undergraduate degree, I volunteered and worked at two different farms in Manitoba, which allowed me to experience firsthand some of the difficult work and commitment that is required to grow and distribute food. I have also been an avid supporter of Manitoba-grown food through purchasing various products at different

farmers markets and CSAs, which has provided me the opportunity to get familiar with the landscape of farmers here in Manitoba – particularly with farmers who participate in direct marketing, which is the landscape in which I volunteered, worked, and generally participated as a customer.

My personal attributes and experiences in relation to this research very much create opportunity for bias. As a qualitative researcher who sees knowledge as something that is constructed and sees truth as interpreted, I am the interpreter in this research; I am the one who transfers knowledge from these conversations with research participants into these words. As the research instrument, I cannot separate myself from my own biases; however, I can be aware of them and understand how they may shape my interpretations. For example, my deep respect for farmers who are currently working to improve the food system in Manitoba may compromise my willingness to view these initiatives from a critical lens, and contribute less effectively to the conversation on how to continue working towards social justice within the food system in this province. As someone who comes from a family that has benefited financially from industrial agriculture through the dispossession of Indigenous land, and as someone who has been able to access locally grown produce, I also risk being unaware of the inequities present in the food system I participate in. One of the ways in which I addressed this issue of bias awareness was through reflexivity by keeping a research journal throughout my research process (Watt, 2007). This time set aside for reflection provided for me an opportunity to observe how my biases may be appearing in my data collection and analysis processes, as well as my interpretation of the research results.

Another way in which my positionality plays into my research is my pre-existing social connection to certain farmers. To ensure I did not limit my perception of farmers who are participating in social justice related initiatives, I actively sought out farmers that exist outside of the social circles I am aware of. Throughout the process of this research, I also actively reflected on and learned about Manitoba's agricultural history to help minimize the possibility that the conclusions of my research do not perpetuate colonialism or inequities within Manitoba's local farming community. To conclude, I also invite others to respond to my interpretation of this work, as this work towards food systems transformation can only be done as justly as possible when various perspectives are heard.

3.2 Common Research Methods in Local Food Systems Research

The study of food systems is an interdisciplinary area of research, which means that a variety of theories and methods can be employed to better understand food systems. When it comes to gathering data from a farmers' perspective, most researchers seek to acquire a deep understanding that can only be acquired through qualitative data. An ethnographic approach to research through which data are gathered with interviews and observations is a common approach when doing research on local food systems (Alkon, 2008; O'Kane and Wijaya, 2015; Hedberg II and Zimmerer, 2020; Davenport and Mishtal, 2019; Alkon and Mares, 2012). Data gathered in this way can be analyzed using inductive thematic analysis (e.g., O'Kane and Wijaya, 2015), deductive thematic analysis, or a combination of both inductive and deductive methods. Participatory frameworks in the form of either community-based research, action research, or a

combination, is also frequent in research with food producers (e.g., Sivilay, 2019; Reynolds et al., 2020). Community-based participatory research approaches can include key elements such as partnerships with relevant organizations, the provision of opportunity for participants to review results and give feedback on these results, and the creation of additional outcomes such as building an action plan with participants (e.g., Beingessner and Fletcher, 2020).

Aligned with existing research that takes place with food producers, this research generated qualitative data via semi-structured interviews and a focus group with farmers in Manitoba who have initiated or participated in an initiative that seeks to create a more equitable food system. The following section reviews the methodology and methods that were applied throughout this research to engage with local food producers, and to understand their perceived roles in contributing towards a more just food system.

3.3 Ontological & Epistemological Approaches

This research takes a constructivist paradigm approach, which sees knowledge as something that is constructed. Each paradigm has its own ontology (view of reality) and epistemology (how you understand reality) (Patel, 2015). The ontology for constructivism is that reality is interpreted by individuals who exist in larger groups (Patel, 2015). Different people within these groups will interpret the same event in different ways based on their own experiences. As a result, constructivism does not believe there is one single discoverable truth, but rather that multiple realities can exist across different people (Patel, 2015). The epistemology of constructivism is that reality is something that needs to be interpreted in order to discover the underlying meanings of

events (Patel, 2015). With this paradigm, the role of the researcher is to attempt to understand the lived experiences of participants from their own point of view (Mertens, 2010). As the researcher, I worked to interpret the truths and experiences of participants involved in this research while using the following methodology, theoretical underpinnings, and guiding concepts.

3.4 Methodology

This research takes a phenomenological approach to research – more specifically, a hermeneutic phenomenology approach. Phenomenology is considered both a philosophical discipline and a research method that seeks to describe and understand phenomena (Wojnar and Swanson, 2007). Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses specifically on understanding, where it seeks to interpret "the structures of experience and… how things are understood by people who live through those experiences and by those who study them" (Wojnar and Swanson, 2007, p. 173). This particular perspective of phenomenology requires a consideration of the historical, social, political, and cultural contexts, and how these contexts and an individual's personal background shapes the interpretation of their experience(s) (Moustakas, 1994; Wojnar and Swanson, 2007). The informal networks of knowledge that farmers are a part of through community ties, family and personal relations, neighbourhood associations, peer groups, and traditions, play a large role in providing farmers the knowledge they utilize to make decisions while farming – this knowledge is usually generated in local contexts and reflect the complexities of the place in which these farms operate (Sumane et al., 2018). This phenomenological approach to research provides an opportunity to understand the local

context in which farmers are making decisions to try and address injustices in the local food system. Due to the specific context of this research, the results from this research – particularly those related to farmers' own experiences - are not generalizable, and are not necessarily transferable to other contexts. However, the results provide useful insights that would be useful in other similar historical, social, political and cultural contexts. Importantly, this methodology provides an opportunity to acquire deeper insight into the perspective of local farmers in Manitoba regarding their responsibilities in working towards a more just food system – this is particularly relevant to the first objective of this research. This methodology also creates opportunity to identify further areas of research needed in the context of Manitoba's local food system.

3.5 Theoretical Underpinnings & Guiding Concepts

3.5.1 Transformative Learning Theory

The constructivist theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997) was utilized to understand the processes that led to farmers either creating or participating in these initiatives – this is specific to the second research objective. Mezirow's transformative learning theory originated to describe fundamental changes in adult learners when they made meaning of their life experiences in order to guide their future actions (Anand et al., 2020). Central to this theory is one's *frame of reference*, which consists of "how we make meaning from our cumulative life experience and is coloured by our cultural background and beliefs that we might have assimilated without questioning, perhaps from authority figures in our life, or based on incomplete information" (Anand et al., 2020, p. 733). According to Mezirow (1997), one's frame of reference is composed of habits of mind,

which are “broad, abstract, orienting, habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting influenced by assumptions that constitute a set of codes” (p. 5-6), and points of view which are a “constellation of belief, value judgement, attitude, and feeling that shapes a particular interpretation” (p. 6). There are several forms of taken-for-granted frames of reference, including interpersonal relationships, political orientations, cultural bias, ideologies, and stereotyped attitudes and practices (Mezirow, 2003). Transformative learning occurs when one experiences something that does not fit their frame of reference, and instead of rejecting that experience as something that does not make sense, their frame of reference transforms itself in order to assimilate this new experience (Anand et al., 2020). As a result of this transformation, changes in one’s points of view – and less frequently, in one’s habits of mind – can occur. These changes in frame of reference are significant because they can be more grounded in the truths of the situation at hand (Mezirow, 2003).

When transformation does happen, it can be instantaneous, but it can also be an incremental process that happens over time. Mezirow outlines this process of transformation as one that has ten non-linear steps: i) Disorienting dilemma; ii) self-examination; iii) critical assessment of assumptions; iv) recognizing ‘shared’ nature of experience; v) exploring options for new ways of acting; vi) planning a course of action; vii) acquiring knowledge and skills; viii) provisional trying on of new roles; ix) building competence and self-confidence; and x) reintegration into society (Anand et al., 2020). Since this theory is constructivist and sees knowledge as something that is constructed through experience, the process of experience is a central component to the learning that takes place in transformative learning. The process of rational discourse is also important,

as it is a dialectical process with others where someone might arrive to a change in their frame of reference (Anand et al., 2020). The process of critical reflection is also a key process in transformative learning theory, where one's reflection on their experience, on how the experience came to be, and the framing of the experience itself are key for transformative learning to occur (Mezirow, 1994).

Two additional key concepts in this theory are that of instrumental and communicative learning. Instrumental learning occurs through manipulating the environment, when potential truths are attested and assessed to see if they can be supported (Mezirow, 2003). Learning occurs through the deduction of hypotheticals, which are ruled out or confirmed by doing. Communicative learning occurs when one is communicating with another and involves the process of becoming aware of and understanding the assumptions, intentions, and qualifications of the person that is communicating (Mezirow, 2003). Compared to instrumental learning, this process is more abstract and takes place through abductive reasoning, where concrete occurrences are used to create abstract conceptualizations (Mezirow, 2003). Both communicative and instrumental learning can play important roles in working towards social equity; communicative processes help people negotiate their own meanings, intentions and values during social interactions instead of simply adopting someone else's, while instrumental learning helps individuals become more effective at achieving the purposes they intend to achieve in their respective contexts (Zurba et al., 2021).These concepts are particularly relevant in the context of this research as the participants involved are often re-negotiating and understanding their potential roles in their broader context, and are seeking to achieve purposes related to equity through their measurable work as farmers.

Since its inception, Mezirow's theory of transformative learning continues to be reviewed and improved by scholars. Fleming (2018) has pointed out that the step of disorienting dilemma in the transformative learning process requires a connection between individual problems and broader social issues, requiring that the step of disorienting dilemma be understood within the personal and political perspectives being considered. The consideration of intersections like culture, gender, and other aspects of the social location of a person have also been noted as an important lens through which to understand the person's perspective (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Some now see Mezirow's theory as one approach in a metatheory of transformative learning currently in existence; Hoggan (2016) has conceptualized Mezirow's theory as one of four main approaches – the psychocritical approach – to transformative learning theory.

Mezirow's theory of transformative learning (also known as the psychocritical approach of transformative learning) was applied to this research to help understand the processes leading up to farmers taking action to create and/or participate in an initiative. The questions in the second section of the interview guides (see Appendix A) were informed by key aspects of the theory including the ten-step process that leads to transformative change, and the processes of experience, rational discourse, and critical reflection. The purpose of this was to create opportunity to generate understanding of any events, reflection, discussion, and decision-making that occurred before the action of creating or participating in an initiative. From a larger perspective, this theory fits with the objectives of this project because for social structures to change, profound learning at the individual level needs to occur alongside structural changes for meaningful social change to occur (Hoggan, 2016). Since many farmers in local food movements seek to

improve the food system in which they operate, understanding how learning that occurs at the individual level can result in action within the food system provides important insight into possible pathways for food systems change.

3.5.2 Food Justice and Food sovereignty

The concepts of food justice and food sovereignty are useful concepts that can be utilized to understand the dominant discourses in food movements. For the purpose of understanding the current state of the local food movement in Manitoba and where these recent farmer-led initiatives fit into the larger picture, I applied Holt-Giménez and Shattuck's (2011) food regimes and movements framework to better understand the nature of these initiatives, and where these initiatives fit within broader considerations related to food justice and food sovereignty. This was done to understand these initiatives in relation to Sivilay's (2019) analysis on the state of food sovereignty in Manitoba. This framework outlines the different institutions, models, and approaches to food concerns that take place under food justice and food sovereignty movements. These details assist in understanding what these initiatives indicate about food movements in the province. The full framework can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. A food regime/food movements framework (Source: Holt-Giménez and Shattuck, 2011, p. 117-118)

	Corporate food regime		Food movements	
POLITICS	NEOLIBERAL	REFORMIST	PROGRESSIVE	RADICAL
Discourse	***Food Enterprise***	***Food Security***	***Food Justice***	***Food Sovereignty***
Main Institutions	International Finance Corporation (World Bank); IMF; WTO; USDA; USAID; GAFSP; Green Revolution/CGIAR; Millennium Challenge; Global Harvest; Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; Cargill; Monsanto; ADM; Tyson; Carrefour; Tesco; Wal-Mart	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank); FAO; HLTF; CFA; CGIAR; IFAP; mainstream Fair Trade; Slow Food; some Food Policy Councils; Worldwatch; OXFAM-AMERICA; CARE; Feeding America and most food banks and food aid programs	CFS; Alternative Fair Trade & many Slow Foods chapters; many organizations in the Community Food Security Movement; CSAs; many Food Policy Councils & youth food and justice movements; Coalition of Immokalee Workers and other farmworker & labor organizations	Via Campesina and other agrarian-based farmers' movements (ROPPA, EAFF, ESAFF); International Planning Committee on Food Sovereignty; ATTAC; World March of Women; and many Food Justice and rights-based movements
Orientation	***Corporate/Global market***	***Development/Aid***	***Empowerment***	***Entitlement/Redistribution***
Model	Overproduction; corporate concentration; unregulated markets and monopolies; monocultures (including organic); GMOs; agrofuels; mass global consumption of industrial food; phasing out of peasant & family agriculture and local retail	Mainstreaming/certification of niche markets (e.g. organic, fair, local, sustainable); maintaining northern agricultural subsidies; 'sustainable' roundtables for agrofuels, soy, forest products, etc; market-led land reform; microcredit	Agroecologically-produced local food; investment in underserved communities; new business models and community benefit packages for production, processing & retail; better wages for ag. workers; solidarity economies; land access; regulated markets & supply	Dismantle corporate agri-foods monopoly power; parity; redistributive land reform; community rights to water & seed; regionally-based food systems; democratization of food system; sustainable livelihoods; protection from dumping/overproduction; revival of agroecologically-managed peasant agriculture to distribute wealth and cool the planet

(*continued*)

	Corporate food regime		Food movements	
POLITICS	NEOLIBERAL	REFORMIST	PROGRESSIVE	RADICAL
Approach to the food crisis	Increased industrial production; unregulated corporate monopolies; land grabs; expansion of GMOs; public-private partnerships; liberal markets; microenterprise; international sourced food aid; GAFSPF – The Global Agriculture and Food Security Program	Same as neoliberal but with increased middle peasant production & some locally-sourced food aid; microcredit; more agricultural aid, but tied to GMOs & 'bio-fortified/ climate-resistant' crops; *Comprehensive Framework for Action* (CFA)	Right to food; better safety nets; sustainably produced, locally sourced food; agroecologically-based agricultural development; Committee on World Food Security (CFS)	Human right to food; locally sourced, sustainably produced, culturally appropriate, democratically controlled; focus on UN/FAO negotiations
Key documents	World Bank 2008 Development Report	World Bank 2008 Development Report	IAASTD	Declaration of Nyelení; Peoples' comprehensive framework for action to eradicate hunger; ICAARD; UN Declaration of Peasant Rights; IAASTD

3.5.3 Participatory Action Research (PAR) & Community-Based Participatory Research

The limited scope and time allotted for this Masters' thesis did not allow for a fully PAR and community-based research project; however, PAR and community-based principles were considered in the design of this research. PAR is a "collaborative process of

research, education and action explicitly oriented towards social transformation" (Kindon et al., 2007, p. 9). It aims to uncover knowledge that is directly useful to a group of people and to empower them to use this uncovered knowledge (Lune and Berg, 2017). This particular orientation towards research seeks to go beyond just understanding the world by utilizing research to address real-life problems and change the world for the better (Kindon et al., 2007). PAR usually involves participants as partners in the research and involves them in all stages of the research, including research design. Due to the limited timeline of this Masters' thesis, involving participants from the beginning was not plausible. However, the actionable aspect of PAR has inspired the third objective of this research, where a knowledge product was chosen by the participants to be created by the researcher. Though this knowledge product is not an action that both researcher and participants are undertaking together, it will ideally facilitate and inform future actions undertaken by participants. In this way, the knowledge product may help empower participants and other stakeholders in the larger local farming community interested in this work.

Community-based participatory research aims to create partnerships with stakeholders and involve them in all stages of the research. Some of the principles overlap with a PAR approach, and include recognizing community as a unity of identity; building on strengths and resources within the community; facilitating collaborative partnerships in all phases of the research; integrating knowledge and action for the mutual benefit of all partners; promoting a co-learning and empowering process that attends to social inequalities; involving a cyclical and iterative process; and disseminating findings and knowledge gained to all partners (Israel et al., 1998, p. 178-180). Once

again, though not all of these principles could be honoured due to the limited scope of this research – particularly including partners in all phases of the research – this project was designed to integrate knowledge for the mutual benefit of both the researcher and the participants, to empower participants through providing a knowledge product that will help lead to action, and to disseminate findings to all involved.

3.6 Data Collection

To best answer the questions "What?", "Why?", and "How?" (Terrell, 2016), this research gathered qualitative data via two methods: semi-structured interviews and a focus group. Both methods were chosen for their ability to gather rich insight into farmers' experiences in trying to address inequities within the local food system of which they are a member. I received Research Ethics Board (REB) approval for both methods of data collection in June of 2021, and then focused on participant recruitment. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling strategy, where they were recruited based on their relevance to the research objectives (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). The participants that were sought out for both methods of data collection were farmers located in Manitoba who i) participate in the local food system by distributing at least a portion of their product(s) within the province and ii) participate in an initiative – either created by them or by other farmers – that seek to address inequities within Manitoba's food system. To find these participants, I reviewed websites with farmer directories (e.g., Direct Farm Manitoba) and verified each farm's website and social media accounts to find evidence of relevant initiatives. I also reviewed producer organization websites (e.g., Manitoba Egg Farmers) to find evidence of relevant initiatives at an organizational level.

Thirdly, I completed general Google searches to find additional evidence of such initiatives, including news articles featuring farmers involved in relevant initiatives. This was done while not logged into a personal Google account to reduce potential bias in the search results. In addition to my own research, I applied the snowball method to find participants by asking interviewees if they knew other farmers who should be interviewed for this research. Since not all farmers advertise their initiatives online, and since not all farmers have an online presence, this proved particularly useful to find additional participants who met the inclusion criteria. Finally, I also utilized my own emic knowledge from my previous interactions with farmers in the province (see positionality section) to find participants. Once potential participants were identified, I would reach out to them directly or the relevant organization by email to provide information about the research and ask if they were interested in participating. If they responded, I found a time that worked for them to conduct the interview. The following sections provide an overview of the data collection process that occurred.

3.6.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

The purpose of utilizing semi-structured interviews was to generate data for all objectives of the research. A total of 13 interviews were conducted with farmers who have created and/or participate in equity-focused initiatives – ten interviews were with direct-marketing farmers while three were with farmers who are members of producer organizations. These interviews lasted between 30 minutes – 1.5 hours. The interview guide for these interviews (Appendix A) consisted of five parts. First, participants were asked general questions about themselves and their farm. The second part of the

interview focused on the initiative they have created and/or participate in, its intended purpose, and how it came to be created, which is linked to objectives 2 and 3. The third part focused on the experiences of farmers while creating and/or participating in these initiatives, which is linked to objective 1. The fourth portion focused on the participants' perspectives on the role of farmers in working towards more equitable food systems, which is also linked to objective 1. To address the third objective, the concluding question asked participants for any ideas as to what sort of knowledge product I as a researcher could give back to farmers like themselves in reciprocity for their participation in my research.

Two additional interviews were also conducted with employees of organizations that run equity-focused initiatives that farmers can participate in. Organizations were only considered if they had farmers in leadership positions within the organization who played a significant role in the creation of these initiatives. The interviews were conducted with employees who work closely with farmers who helped create and/or participate in these initiatives; this provided additional useful information on the initiatives themselves. The interview guide for these interviews (Appendix B) was adapted from the interview guide in Appendix A to be targeted towards an organization rather than a single farm.

When reaching out to potential participants, alongside an invitation to participate I emailed them a description of the research as well as the REB-approved ethics form. Participants were asked to review and sign the ethics form before the interview or were given the opportunity to go through an oral consent process. Prior to starting each interview, I encouraged participants to ask any questions they may have about the research process. The interviews began in the fall of 2021 and continued throughout the

remainder of the year. These interviews took place over the video-call platform Zoom. Participants were also given the option to interview over the phone if video-call wasn't an option, however none chose that option. The interviews were audio-recorded using Zoom with the consent of the participants. These audio files were then transcribed using the transcription tool Otter.ai to be prepared for data analysis. These interviews were also utilized as an opportunity to invite participants to the next step of the data collection: the focus group.

3.6.2 Focus Group

Once the interview phase of this research was completed, all farmers who participated in the interviews were invited to participate in a focus group. The purpose of this focus group was to generate additional data to meet the first objective of this research, as well as to get feedback on the preliminary results related to this particular objective. A focus group was chosen for this objective because in this setting, participants are able to feed off of each other and stimulate the conversation more than would be possible with a one-on-one interview (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007). This produced additional useful data for the first objective of this research. To align with this purpose, the organization employees that were part of the interview process were not invited to attend the focus group. To find an appropriate date for the focus group, a survey was sent out to all interview participants on February 8th to determine interest in participating in the focus group and to receive feedback on the best date and time for the focus group. After providing a week to respond, the date was set and was communicated to participants two weeks ahead of the chosen date.

The focus group took place on February 28, 2022 at 1pm CST via Zoom and lasted for 1.5 hours. A total of six participants attended - two producer organizations and four direct marketing farmers. All participants were asked to sign the REB-approved consent form in the days before the event. At the beginning of the focus group, I reviewed key items in the consent form, particularly the commitment to each other regarding confidentiality that all participants were making by signing the consent form. I then re-iterated the purpose of the focus group. After reviewing some ground rules and the agenda, all participants took their turn to introduce themselves to the group. In two separate segments, I then presented the preliminary results related to the first objective of this research and used these results to build a conversation to acquire further information on the experiences and motivations of the farmers present behind initiating and/or participating in these initiatives and their perceived roles and responsibilities in working towards a more just food system. Pre-determined questions were used to spark discussion on the topic (Lune and Berg, 2017), while I left flexibility for additional prompts when appropriate. A complete focus group guide can be found in Appendix C. Participants were also given a reflection sheet (Appendix D) at the end of the focus group in case they had any additional feedback to provide. One of six participants returned this sheet. This focus group was recorded using Zoom with the consent of all participants involved. It was then transcribed with the use of the transcription tool Otter.ai to prepare for data analysis.

3.7 Data Analysis

The resulting data was analyzed with an inductive-dominant approach for the first objective, and reviewed a second time with a deductive-dominant approach to meet the second objective (Armat et al., 2018). For the first objective, the purpose of the inductive-dominant approach was to allow the experiences of the participants to come through and emerge from the raw data (Lune and Berg, 2017). Following a data analysis process for hermeneutic phenomenology (Cohen et al., 2000), the transcribed interviews and focus group underwent an inductive-dominant thematic analysis that consisted of the following steps:

1. First, data analysis began at the stage of the interviews/focus group, where I was thinking about what was being said and took note of possible labels for these meanings.
2. Once all recordings were transcribed, I read through each transcript to allow myself to be immersed in the data.
3. While reading through the transcripts another time, I reorganized and assembled pieces of texts that discuss the same topic.
4. Once similar topics were assembled and an overall understanding of the text was obtained, the data were read line-by-line, and important segments of the text were highlighted and coded using QSR's NVivo 12 with tentative theme names.
5. Each tentative theme and its associated text segments were reviewed together to ensure the theme name accurately described the text segments. Where possible, the theme names were composed of words utilized by participants themselves to ensure thick description of participants' experiences. These text segments also

serve as exemplary quotes in the following sections to illustrate the themes derived from the data.

6. As steps 4 and 5 were being completed and themes were finalized, I wrote memos for each of these themes to convey my understanding of participants' experiences and their associated themes.

Certain researchers list the importance of verifying these themes with the participants to clarify any misinterpretations (see Wojnar and Swanson, 2007). The verification of findings with participants can also be done to increase the validity of research findings (Lune and Berg, 2017). To ensure accuracy of interpretation and to increase validity, the preliminary results from the thematic analysis of the interviews were shared with participants at the focus group, where they were able to provide feedback. This feedback was utilized to add to and finalize the themes from the inductive coding. This was done to meet the first objective of this research.

The deductive-dominant approach was applied to the interview data and was based on transformative learning theory and the key concepts indicated earlier in this section, specifically concepts related to frames of reference, the ten-step process of transformative learning, instrumental and communicative learning, as well as the processes of key experiences, rational discourse, and of critical reflection. The purpose of this coding was to identify the role of transformative learning in the creation of these initiatives, and to meet the second objective of this research. The analysis process for both the interviews and the focus group was completed using QSR's NVivo 12.

To understand how these initiatives relate to larger food movements that are also concerned with equity and justice in food system, I synthesized information about the

different initiatives included in this research that was shared through the interviews and focus group and compared these initiatives to Holt-Giménez and Shattuck's (2011) food regime/food movements framework. This process contributed to Chapter 5 of this thesis which relates the initiatives back to Manitoba's local food movement.

3.8 Participant Follow-Up and Confidentiality

Throughout the consent process for both the interviews and the focus group, participants noted the level of confidentiality they were comfortable with regarding their participation in this research. A majority of participants noted they were comfortable being identified – these participants are identified by name and affiliated organization or farm in the results section. Some participants did not want their names shared but were comfortable with their affiliated organization being identified – these participants are referred to as a numbered participants (e.g., Participant 6) throughout the results section.

Before publishing this manuscript, participants were contacted with a list of their quotes and an explanation of the context in which these quotes were shared. This was done to i) confirm their approval of the contents of the quotes, and ii) confirm their comfortability with how their identity was disclosed at the end of the quotes. All participants involved responded, and all quotes included in this research were approved by the participant sharing them.

Chapter 4: The Motivations, Experiences, Perspectives, and Learning of Farmers Undertaking Equity-Focused Work

The following section provides an overview of farmers' motivations and experiences in relation to their creation of and participation in equity-focused initiatives, their perspectives as to the role of farmers in working towards a more just food system, and the learning process that occurs leading up to these actions taking place. This section is organized to provide a look into why things are the way they are now to prepare for Chapter 5 which discusses potential options for moving forward. As part of these results, I first provide an overview of the initiatives and farmers included in this research.

4.1 An Overview of the Initiatives and the Farmers

Of the fifteen interviews conducted for this research, ten of them were with farmers that participate in direct marketing, three were with farmers that are part of producer organizations, and two interviews were with non-farmer employees from organizations that run equity-focused initiatives that farmers can participate in. These participants represented a variety of initiatives that were run either by the participants themselves, in partnership with an organization, or in organization-to-organization partnerships. They were also aimed at addressing several equity-related issues, from various methods of increasing access to food through donations and/or addressing financial obstacles to food access, to creating spaces for those less commonly represented in the food system, to increasing access to food production through education and knowledge sharing. The following paragraphs give an overview of both the participants and the initiatives included in this research.

A total of fifteen farmers were interviewed, where two of the interviews were completed with couples. Together they represent thirteen different farms. These farms are located across southern Manitoba, with a cluster surrounding the Winnipeg area, another cluster in southwestern Manitoba, and two of the farms located a bit further north near the latitude of Gimli, Manitoba. These farms represent a variety of crop production, including (organic) market vegetables, livestock, honey, (organic) grains, and eggs, with almost all farms growing more than one type of food. Of the thirteen farms, the three producer-organization and four of the direct marketing farms were intergenerational in some way where their farm was a continuation of or utilized resources from their parent's or their partners' parents' farm. The remaining direct-marketing farms were established anew through acquiring resources from other means, though a few of them mentioned earlier generations in their families also participating in food production. The scale of production ranged from between a quarter acre to 1,000 acres. Participants from five of the farms mentioned that either they themselves or their partners had additional income from other employment.

When asked how they define themselves as farmers, participants gave a wide range of answers. Some identified well with the terms farmer or food producer, while many are currently reflecting on the meaning of those terms and if they accurately represent their work:

> "It's something actually I've kind of been struggling with recently, like, I don't know... When you suggest to somebody that you're a farmer, they expect that you have oodles of land, and that you don't have another job, or you don't work part time somewhere else, or all these other things. And that profit is what you're looking to extract from the landscape. I'm not saying that that's a fair extrapolation of what a farmer is, but it's something that I've been battling against with my own identity... When people ask you about whether you're a farmer or

> not, yeah, I guess I still, we still identify as farmers. But I think we're caretakers first." – Justin Girard, Hearts & Roots (Manitoba Community Food Currency Program)

In a similar manner, most participants added several words in addition to 'farmer' and 'food producer' to describe what they do. Some focused on the type of farm, describing their establishment as a family farm, a small farm, an urban educational farm, or a homestead. Some prioritized words that described the methods they use to produce food such as organic farmer, pasture raised, planned grazing, and regenerative producers. Others also focused on activities in relation to growing food that they also do, including caretaker, food processor, farm organizer and observer. A few farmers described themselves as direct marketers. Direct marketing farmers in particular used several additional words to describe themselves as food producers.

The participants included in this research represent several types of initiatives that have equity-focused purposes in relation to the food system such as increasing food access, creating more welcoming spaces for those less recognized in the food system, and increasing access to food production knowledge and education. These are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. A summary of initiatives working towards a more just food system

Name of Initiative	Farm / Organization Interviewed	Partner(s) / Collaborators	Description of Initiative
Food Donations			
Community Involvement – Partnership with Harvest Manitoba	Manitoba Egg Farmers	Harvest Manitoba	In 2021, Manitoba Egg Farmers began donating 20,000 eggs per month to Harvest Manitoba, which distributes them to food banks across Manitoba. In return, Harvest Manitoba purchases the same amount of eggs between donation periods to supply their food donations. This initiative has continued into the year 2022.
Caring for Communities	Manitoba Chicken Producers	Harvest Manitoba	Producers who are part of MCP can choose to donate birds to Harvest Manitoba each seven-week cycle, with the goal of 1,000 birds per cycle (though this number has generally been higher). These processed chickens are then distributed to food banks across Manitoba by Harvest Manitoba.
Waste Not Food Boxes	Fireweed Food Coop	Serve the People	Food donations are sourced from food producer members of the Fireweed Food Coop and distributed by Serve the People to the homes of people in Winnipeg who self-identify as in need of fresh food.
Food Price Subsidization			
CSA shares	Haven Farms		Haven farms provides CSA shares at a lower price in order to make them more accessible.
CSA shares	Heart Acres Farm	Mosaic Newcomer Family Resource Network	Heart Acres provided a tiered pricing model for their CSA shares, which also subsidized nine solidarity shares which were distributed to Mosaic Newcomer Family Resource Network.
Food Accessibility Project	Fresh Roots Farm		Fresh Roots Farm provides a select number of meat CSA programs subsidized at 50% of the regular price which are distributed to folks who applied and were randomly selected. In 2021, they supplied five subsidized shares. This is funded from a donation that was given to the farm by a local family after the passing of a family member and continues to be supported by customer donations.

Name of Initiative	Farm / Organization Interviewed	Partner(s) / Collaborators	Description of Initiative
Food Price Subsidization (continued)			
Good Food Club	Slow River Gardens	West Broadway Community Development Organization	This partnership began in the early 2000s when Chad's parents' ran the farm, and now continues with Slow River Gardens. This partnership provides fresh vegetables at a subsidized price to low-income residents in Winnipeg's inner city, and opportunities for residents to access the farm on a weekly basis (pandemic permitting). The subsidized price is provided by funding acquired by the organization, and the farm still gets paid regular price for the produce.
Grain CSA shares	Adagio Acres	Community organizations working with refugees (unspecified)	This annual grain CSA program utilizes additional dollars built into the pricing of regular grain shares, alongside the option for customers to donate, to provide grain CSA shares at no cost to partner organizations.
Veggie Van	Fireweed Food Coop	Various community partners (unspecified)	Beginning in 2021, the veggie van aims to make local produce available at a subsidized price in communities where food access is limited. In addition to the subsidized prices, there is also a pay-it-forward program through which those without money can obtain fresh foods. Farmers whose food is distributed through this method are compensated at a regular price, while funding goes to subsidizing the consumer prices.
Manitoba Community Food Currency Program	Direct Farm Manitoba	Various farmers markets and community organizations across MB	This program, which was piloted in 2020, distributes alternative currency in the form of vouchers to community partners, who then distributes it to members of the community. These members of the community can then spend these vouchers at participating farmers markets to purchase products from farmers that participate in the program. These vouchers are then cashed in by the farmers who have received them as currency.

Name of Initiative	Farm / Organization Interviewed	Partner(s) / Collaborators	Description of Initiative
Creating Spaces			
Queer Farm Events	Laura Tait (Heart Acres Farm)		Pre-pandemic, Laura hosted queer farm events at Heart Acres where queer farmers from anywhere in the province could gather and meet.
Connecting migrant workers to community	Jennifer (Big Oak Farm)	Previous work with Migrant Worker Solidarity Network	Jennifer from Big Oak Farm connects with migrant workers who work on nearby farms, to build friendships, and pre-pandemic, to hold events for and with them such as having meals together or organizing mass in Spanish.
Education and Knowledge Sharing			
Young Agrarians Apprenticeship Program	Young Agrarians	Farms across Manitoba	Young Agrarians provides an on-farm paid internship program by connecting farms with new and young farmers. It has existed in BC and AB for several years and is new to MB and SK as of 2021.
FortWhyte Farms' learning and employment programming for youth	FortWhyte Farms	Schools and community organizations in Winnipeg	FortWhyte Farms provides different stages of programming for youth in Winnipeg. The initial stages are for youth around the age of 14 with continued opportunities (both programming and paid opportunities) available until the ages of 18-19. Programming involves learning about growing food on the farm and other food-related skills like cooking. It aims to provide opportunities for youth to build life and employment skills, and prioritizes youth who work better in a learning environment like FortWhyte Farms.
Resource Sharing			
Seed Library	Haven Farms		Haven Farms has started a seed library which is accessible to anyone who is interested in growing food.
Grain CSA	Adagio Acres	Smaller scale grain farmers in Manitoba	The grain CSA itself has created a new distribution system for smaller scale produced grains and pulses in Manitoba, and increased capacity and provides a source of income for the farmers growing these crops. By providing processing infrastructure as well as this distribution model, it also ensures this food is distributed to people instead of being resorted to being used as animal feed.

Two of the producer organization farmers that I interviewed are both on the board of directors of Manitoba Egg Farmers and are egg farmers themselves. Sandra, previously a healthcare worker, got into farming when her husband's farm needed additional support, and is now a full time farmer. In addition to producing eggs, they grow alfalfa for seed, and also manage a leafcutter bee[5] business. The second farmer, Rick, runs a 7,000 bird barn on the same farm his grandfather started after returning from WWII, all the while working as a contractor. They also rent out 1,000 acres of land which is used for grain farming. In addition to discussing the partnership that Manitoba Egg Farmers has with Harvest Manitoba, where in 2021 they donated 20,000 eggs each month to the province-wide food bank network, both Sandra and Rick shared their experiences participating in various other community-focused initiatives run by the producer organization. This includes other types of food donations in partnership with organizations like DreamWorks Foundation, an Ambassador Fund where farmers can apply to be partially funded for an initiative in their community, and various education-focused events where consumers can learn more about the industry. The third producer organization farmer, from Manitoba Chicken Producers (Participant 10), also discussed with me the partnership they have with Harvest Manitoba, where through the collective donations of resources from farmers and processors, they are able to donate over 1,000 birds each seven weeks (the time needed to grow a bird):

> "As an initial launch, we needed to have the hatcheries on side because they needed to produce more chicks. We needed to have the processors on side because the way we had developed this proposal is the farmers would donate their effort, their supplies, and all of their inputs. And the processors would donate the processing and the delivery to the food bank... We had 75% of producers

[5] A type of bee utilized in agriculture for its pollination capabilities

> immediately engaged and we've now just got approval for the third year to start moving forward again. We're just notifying producers again to give us their number. And so, the coordination happens at the processing plant, and they do the delivery." – Participant 10, Manitoba Chicken Producers

Participants from both organizations expressed how the province-wide scale of Manitoba Harvest matched well with their own organizations which represent farmers from across the province. Both of these initiatives are re-evaluated on a yearly basis at the governance level, where they have to be re-approved to continue for another year. Both initiatives were approved again for 2022.

At the individual farm scale, Ken and Sam from Haven Farms describe themselves as homesteaders who provide a CSA program. With their quarter acre garden in addition to other products they produce, they currently provide a small number of CSA shares at an affordable price, which they are able to do because of other income. They are also in the process of creating a seed library for community members interested in growing their own food. In addition to this, they participate in the Loop program, where they pick up spoiled food from the local Coop grocery store with the purpose of reducing waste trough composting fruits and veggies, as well as distributing the meat to community members who use it for dog food. They expressed several ideas to expand these projects in the future, with the ultimate purpose of providing access to food production and food skill learning.

Fresh Roots Farm is run by Michelle and Troy, who raise grassfed beef and laying hens on a combination of owned and rented land, and manage a beekeeping operation that produces raw honey. They initiated their Food Accessibility Project when an unexpected opportunity occurred:

> "The reason we started it was sort of born out of tragedy. We were contacted in December of 2018 by the family of a man named Ian Berith Scott who had just passed away from cancer. We did not know him personally, and we didn't really know his family. He felt really passionately about eating local and organic foods. He had heard about our farm through a book called *An Army of Problem Solvers* by Sean Loney… We were contacted by the family who were wondering if they could use our farm as a memorial fund for people to give donations in his name. We were kind of taken aback, but we were honored that somebody thought of us in this way, and just accepted that offer. We decided to set up a special account, we received some funds and we, you know, attended the funeral of this person, met the family, and we did some visiting with them. We talked with them a little bit about what we could do with these funds because we didn't just want it to go into our general farm coffers, we wanted it to go towards something that would honor the memory of this person. So, we learned a little bit about him. We didn't previously feel like we were in a position to provide charity or give discounts on our product because we're just trying to scrape by ourselves and we needed to offer fair pricing, which unfortunately, makes our products inaccessible... It was kind of like, here's an opportunity for us to do something that has never sat right with Troy and I, that there's a whole demographic that isn't able to really access our food that we would like to be serving." – Michelle Schram, Fresh Roots Farm (Food Accessibility Project)

This program has changed over time, though it has always remained focused on increasing financial access through subsidization. Its most recent iteration, as described in Table 2, was advertised intentionally to prioritize reaching equity-deserving groups. They also continue to explore different ways to structure this program through partnerships with community organizations.

Heart Acres farm began as a partnership between friends in 2018 that focused on market gardening. When the pandemic began in 2020, Laura, one of the co-owners of the business, decided to try a sliding scale pricing model for their farm's CSA program, where customers were suggested to pay a certain price based on their level of income. The concept for this model was adapted from founding co-director of Soul Fire Farm Leah Penniman's book *Farming While Black* (Penniman, 2018). This tiered model

allowed for more accessible prices for lower income folks, and also provided nine solidarity shares which were donated to the Mosaic Newcomer Resource Family Network – an organization Laura had created a partnership with to distribute these additional shares. Laura also created queer farmer events on the farm, where queer farmers in Manitoba could come meet and connect, as described in Table 2. Though Heart Acres dissolved in 2021, Chad Wiens, who was also part of Heart Acres, continues to grow vegetables on that same land – land that is owned by his parent, who also farmed there – as Slow River Gardens. Is it as Slow River Gardens that Chad continues a partnership with the Good Food Club:

> "It was in the early 2000s that my dad began a relationship with people in the West Broadway neighbourhood of Winnipeg. And so, it's forged with a community organization out of West Broadway called the West Broadway Community Development Organization. The Good Food Club is a like a subgroup out of there. And the general gist of my relationship with the Good Food Club is, number one, providing fresh vegetables to low-income residents in the inner-city. And then number two, providing a place outside of the city where they can visit. So up until COVID happened, they would be making weekly trips to the farm… as of now it's just been occasional zoom visits or video connections, which allows people to sort of see what's going on in the farm. But through that, it's very clear that people miss that connection. So, the way that the Good Food Club structures their participation with the farm is that within that organization, they have what's called sweat equity points for any member of the Good Food Club. They are invited to put in volunteer hours, either doing things within the neighbourhood, setting up the weekly markets, maybe volunteering to put together food bags, or when they're doing their weekly visits to the farm, that counts as volunteer points. And then members of the Good Food Club can use those points as sweat equity to then purchase vegetables at the weekly farmers market. So, it's a pretty cool system that I didn't put energy into developing it, but I'm very excited to carry on this connection. In a normal week, pre-COVID, we would have maybe a dozen to 25 people coming out once a week onto the farm to do random jobs. Generally, my goal when people come out is to ensure that they're just having a really nice time. And it's very clear that people love getting outside. Every once in a while, there's people that come out and say like wow I haven't been out of the city in years, or I haven't heard the sound of birds or haven't not heard the sound of cars

> for so long, so, it's nice to be able to try that experience. And we're definitely not like truly putting them to work in the fields. But there's tasks, there's good things that people can do like sorting through onions or garlic or pulling weeds here and there. So, people come out and put in work as they can. And then we supply them with vegetables within the same week. And then people can both see the work that they've done on the farm, and then use that work as a way to compensate themselves for the vegetables that they get at the market. It seems to work out pretty good… Nearly 20 years later, and it's still going." – Chad Wiens, Slow River Gardens (Good Food Club)

Another participant in this research, Jennifer, mentioned having participated in this program when she lived in the city and did not own a car, as a way to escape the city and also to get involved in growing food again as she learned to do when she was younger with her own family.

Jennifer now owns Big Oak Farm with her husband, where, on a small scale, they raise Icelandic sheep, laying hens, grow vegetables and produce honey form a few beehives. Jennifer was suggested to me as someone to reach out to because of her work with migrant workers, which has been a significant interest of hers since high school. After joining different groups and making connections with migrant workers in her area, she shifted her approach to this work:

> "And then over time, it really transitioned from 'I'm here to support you' to 'you guys are just my friends.' And I just want to be friends with you.' And the best way to support you, what I've concluded the best way to keep migrant workers safe and non exploited in their communities is for them to have friends in the community. Because then their bosses know that they know other people." – Jennifer deGroot, Big Oak Farm

Though the Covid-19 pandemic has made it difficult to do so, at a community level, Jennifer has participated in organizing various events such as masses and celebrations for Mexican Independence Day and to create those community connections and continues to seek out different networks to connect with on this work.

Another farm included in this research is Amy from Adagio Acres, where they grow approximately 100 acres[6] of certified organic naked oats each year and also run a small-scale grain mill. Though the decision to grow naked oats was intentional, but the decision to run a mill emerged from a gap in infrastructure, which they discovered after growing their first crop of oats:

> "We didn't have all the equipment to process it from the farm. We didn't have all the machines to sort out grasshoppers and weeds and straw and chaff, and so we went to other seed cleaners around the province to find someone who would clean the oats for us just as they were cleaning seeds to prepare for planting. We made maybe 20 phone calls and everyone we talked to said '20,000 pounds, no, it's not enough. It's such a small amount that it would just get lost in our augers before we had a chance to calibrate everything.' And every batch of oats is a little bit different, and hull-less oats are quite different. So, it takes a bit of time to change the screens in your equipment, change the parameters and the different settings on each machine. Everyone just said no, for 20,000 pounds, it isn't worth even setting up my equipment to do your batch of oats. Right from the beginning, it was really obvious that there's this crazy discrepancy between the scale that we eat at and the scale that we farm at. They don't match. It's 20,000 pounds, how would I possibly sell that many oats? And then you talk to someone who's actually involved in the industrial side of food and like, nah that's too small, they don't even touch it… So we've been buying equipment that's really small scale that fits that scale, and when we're milling our oats now, we can usually process about 200 pounds in a day… We've been able to find equipment that works for us, but often it's from the farm auction a couple miles down the road. And they're selling this old piece of equipment for 75 bucks, and the only other guy raising their hand is the scrap metal dealer, so we're buying things for scrap metal pricing, then it takes a month to fix it up and get it working again." – Amy Nikkel, Adagio Acres (Grain CSA)

Amy soon encountered other farmers who were experiencing similar problems with smaller scale crops of grains and pulses, and this became an opportunity for not only new milling infrastructure but also for a new distribution system, the grain CSA:

[6] Adagio grows approximately half of these on their farm, while two other farmers will grow the rest in rotation, in a different area. This increases the likelihood of a viable crop each year.

> "Hearing from other farmers facing the same problem that we had faced when we were starting, we started rounding up some of the other crops that other farmers had a hard time finding processors for. And that was the first year we did the grain CSA, in 2018. It was kind of a combination of direct marketing, wanting to go more into that to keep the prices more accessible, and other farmers looking to find someone who would be able to do some cleaning and processing for them. Right from the start, we had priced things as attainable as possible, knowing that it was still organic grain... We figured if we were just to sell direct marketing, you know, small bits here and there, then we wouldn't be able to get to that price efficiency unless we bundle things together to do a larger quantity to be more efficient at. We also had some farmers contacting us with odder things like hemp hearts saying 'I don't think if we put this on the website, anyone would ever buy it because they're not used to it, it's something strange.' But if we want to be able to support the farmers who are growing that product, and we bundle it all together, it will get people to be creative and to try new things. We aimed to do a combination of making things price conscious for people, and to help out every farmer – not just farmers growing the three most popular food items that everyone wants, but the range and the variety of food. The more variety of food that's being grown, the more robust our farming systems will be, the better equipped farmers will be to find different crops that fit the different requirements of each year and each soil rotation. Wanting to be able to increase that diversity as much as possible is why we decided to bundle things together into grain shares." – Amy Nikkel, Adagio Acres (Grain CSA)

In addition to being a creative solution that addresses several challenges at once, the annual distribution of these grain shares became a community event where consumers could also connect with the farmers that grow the products. As indicated in Table 2, the pricing structure of the initiative also subsidizes free shares that are distributed to community organizations.

To better understand Direct Farm Manitoba's Community Food Currency Program, I was able to interview Justin from Hearts & Roots, a certified organic farm currently shifting away from market gardening and towards different crops with the purpose of improving the land. Justin played a significant role in the creation of the initiative, first by bringing up the idea at the Direct Farm Manitoba townhall in 2018:

> "It was an opportunity for Britt and I to put forward the idea of developing a program, the community food currency program, based on the program that already existed in BC. There are programs all over the world that have similar structures. But BC was the closest and kind of the easiest model. And since Direct Farm Manitoba also represents farmers markets, it was in the interest of both member groups, farms and farmers markets, to run it off of the BC model first and see where you could take it from there. And that's where we saw it already happening, so we brought it to the attention of Direct Farm Manitoba." – Justin Girard, Hearts & Roots (Manitoba Community Food Currency Program)

To better understand the ins and outs of the initiative, Kristie from Direct Farm Manitoba also agreed to participate, and provided a great description of the currency program:

> "The program works with community partners, so we work with organizations like women's centers, and hopefully we're going to be working with some senior centers and seniors' programs next year as well. We had a school that worked with us with some of their students. And basically, we gather all the funds needed for the program and we give this alternative currency to these community partners who then choose people to be part of the program - they're usually people they're working with already. We don't put parameters around that, we let our community partners figure out who would be a good fit for the program. But we do request that they have communication lines open with the people who are part of the program, because we want to make sure that it's done in a way that is as barrier free as possible, and really works for participants. That communication piece is really important. Our program runs in a similar way to the BC program in that the currency can only be spent on farm products, so products at farm booths. We have signage that gets hung up every week at all the booths in the farmers' market that are farm booths, and that's where people know they can spend their currency… To be part of the program, any farmers that are from a participating farmers market can accept the currency at their booth." – Kristie Beynon, Direct Farm Manitoba (Manitoba Community Food Currency Program)

Several direct marketing participants brought up this initiative in their interviews as an example of an initiative that is increasing access to locally grown food across Manitoba.

Included in this research was also the Fireweed Food Coop, which works with smaller to medium scale farmers across Manitoba who prioritize growing food sustainably. They run two recently created initiatives that farmers can participate in

through donating food: The Waste-Not Food Box and the Veggie Van. Throughout other interviews, some of the direct-marketing farmers mentioned previously participating in the Waste-Not Food Box program by making food donations.

The two remaining participants are both farmers and also work for an organization related to the initiative, both of which are related to education and knowledge sharing. First, FortWhyte Farms, which is part of the larger organization FortWhyte Alive, is a non-profit urban educational farm that provides programming and employment opportunities for youth in Winnipeg through teaching food-related skills, as described in Table 2. There is also Young Agrarians, which is an education resource network that exists across Canada, and has recently established an apprenticeship program in Manitoba:

> "There was a bit of a gap in on-farm training programs, specifically with regenerative, ecological-type farms on the prairies. There are quite a few opportunities that we've found in BC, but not so much on the prairies and that, of course, leads to barriers for people to have access to learning opportunities or access to land… In BC there is a business mentorship program, there are land matching programs. And we do some online learning programs too. And then on the prairies, we run this apprenticeship program in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and we seek out farms that are willing to mentor and provide employment. And then we kind of do our marketing magic and hope to recruit people that are interested and also form a cohort of learners and do farm tours and other farm learning events. The hope is to support the next generation of farmers." – Sara Yagelniski, Garlic Farmer and Young Agrarians Manitoba Apprenticeship Coordinator

Sara, who is the coordinator for the apprenticeship program in Manitoba, is also a food producer. Other farmers included in this research have also participated in this program as mentors.

There were farmers who were interviewed in this research that did not run a specific initiative, but integrated social justice orientated practices in their farming and participated in other social justice initiatives. This includes first generation farmers Katie and Colin from Dogs Run Farm, who raise sheep, pigs, poultry, chickens, turkeys, and laying hens on a combination of owned and rented land. They aim to contribute to equity and justice where they can, through actions such as partnering with organizations to give educational tours of the farm, building relationships with the nearby First Nation community, and donating to the Fireweed Food Coop's Waste Not Food Boxes initiative.

Throughout the interviews, farmers mentioned other small ways not captured in the table above that they seek to increase equity in the food system, through donations, through providing informal educational opportunities, and through the way in which they approach creating their initiatives. Some of these emerge in the remainder of this text, but even if they are not present here, I want to affirm that they are worthy of recognition.

4.2. Motivations, Experiences of and Perspectives on the Role of Farmers

The first objective of this research was to understand the experiences and motivations behind the social justice driven, farmer-led initiatives that are included in this research, as well as farmers' perspectives about what their own roles and responsibilities as food producers should be in working towards a more just food system. The following section reviews the motivations and experiences that farmers shared during both the interviews and the focus group, as well their perspectives about what their roles and responsibilities should be and why.

4.2.1 Motivations

The participants in this study mentioned various reasons and motivations behind why they choose to create and/or participate in these initiatives. These motivations include personal values, a desire to increase access and inclusion to the food they produce and food production, and the desire to create a more resilient food system in general. Some participants also mentioned how they were inspired by other food producers, both within their community and beyond, to begin such initiatives.

First, *Personal values* were mentioned by several participants as a motivator behind creating or participating in equity-focused initiatives. They mentioned being guided by values that were part of their upbringing and are now ingrained into who they are as people. These include the importance of giving back and of looking out for other people. Some participants related these values to their faith, and how this has played a role in how they interact with members of their communities:

> "I grew up in a Christian home. Our Christian response has always been to ensure that you're giving back what was given to you… It is in giving that we receive. It's easy to live in our own bubbles, but to acknowledge our privilege and give back betters our community and the lives of others. Giving back also opens ourselves up for personal growth and relationship building too…It's hard to articulate why it's so important to give back." – Sandra Dyck, Manitoba Egg Farmers

Another motivation mentioned related to personal values was the desire to demonstrate these values to their own children and grandchildren by providing examples for how to give back:

> "Being able to talk to our kids and our grandkids about the reason we do what we do, being able to look beyond our own walls and look at the needs of others as well… It's been a positive thing. It gives us a teaching opportunity to say, how can we be generous beyond just our own our own family?" – Participant 10, Manitoba Chicken Producers

In certain cases, these initiatives are an expression and extension of their personal values that have been embedded in them as individuals while growing up, and for some, they now want to pass them onto younger members of their families. These values expressed are integral to how they view themselves and their roles and responsibilities as individuals and members of their communities, and in some case, how they view themselves as farmers specifically.

Some farmers expressed how the personal values that motivated them to choose farming in the first place were also the same values that pushed them to create and participate in initiatives that aimed to increase access to food:

> "It's kind of connected to similar reasons why I'm interested in growing food in general, and having the realization that I'm interested in carrying on growing food and making that my livelihood, and realizing that there is an increasing interest and demand within Winnipeg for that. And then also realizing that there's a lot of people who just aren't able to get access. So, for me, I mean quite honestly, specifically my role with the Good Food Club is something that, it's a relationship that I'm maintaining and carrying on now. And I've been really happy to be able to participate in it because it somewhat checks off what I'm wanting to work towards." – Chad Wiens, Slow River Gardens (Good Food Club)

In this case as well it is evident that the initiative can act as an expression of farmers' personal values, where the initiatives are a way to integrate these values into farming activities.

Another main motivator that was expressed by farmers – and is also intertwined with personal values – is the *desire to increase access and inclusion to the food that they produce, as well as to food production in general*. The most common way to increase access that was mentioned was through addressing financial barriers that exist to accessing food. Farmers also mentioned they were motivated by sharing the privilege that

they have access to as farmers, by the desire to help people (re-)connect to food production, and to make farming spaces more inclusive and accessible.

Farmers were cognisant of the fact that not everyone is able to access the food they produce due to financial barriers – this was particularly the case for direct marketing farmers, who noted that they have to charge a certain price to ensure they can make a living:

> "Our food is inaccessible to a lot of people and we cannot make it accessible. We need to charge the prices we're charging, or we're not making any money. Again, like, I think it's the other food that is cheap, based off of cheap fossil fuels. So, we can't necessarily offer big discounts or give away all of our food. We're not a charity, we're trying to make a living and like, we're not getting rich. We're not poor, but we're not – this isn't going to make us rich. But we have maybe some other ways that we can give back." – Colin McInnes, Dogs Run Farm

As a result, they've had to find more creative ways to reduce price barriers. This tension between making a living and providing ways to access food has influenced the structure of many of the initiatives included in this study. This is quite different for farmers who are part of producer organizations, as the scale of the production structure allows them to offer a variety of products, which, accordingly, are sold at varying price points in retail:

> "As a commodity group, we provide options for our consumers. We provide an affordable egg for all consumers to afford raised in an enriched barn, and then provide options regarding housing from enriched, free run, free range. We provide white, brown, organic, omega 3, veggie diet, the list goes on. As egg farmers, we have acknowledged that people have different food budgets, different preferences and we want to provide those options for all our consumers whether you buy a three dollar dozen or a 8 dollar specialty dozen. If the retailers say they want a certain type of egg, we'll help them out, but we don't bend right away, because we want to ensure that we have an affordable protein that's available for all people, and all their preferences and their socioeconomic statuses." – Sandra Dyck, Manitoba Egg Farmers

Though this variety provides additional pricing options to consumers compared to products sold through direct marketing, there was also recognition that this still does not guarantee access to everyone, resulting in the community focused initiatives in discussion.

While financial privileges are limited, participants recognize the other privileges they hold as farmers, and mentioned *their motivation to find ways to share those privileges*. These privileges include resources such as access to land, time, and educations:

> "Honestly, it's acknowledging your privilege. We can all say, 'Oh, I can't afford that' but we always see what we can't buy. But we need to step back and acknowledge what we have, we are so fortunate here in Canada, and as farmers, to be able to give back." – Sandra Dyck, Manitoba Egg Farmers

Some farmers noted how the more established they become, the more they are able to find capacity and opportunities to share in their privilege. Regarding the privilege of education, the skills and knowledge required to grow food is not always easy to access for those who want to learn to farm. Some participants were motivated specifically by the desire to share their knowledge by providing learning opportunities for those who are interested in farming, and to share food production knowledge generally. Some of the initiatives, such as FortWhyte farms, were created specifically for this purpose:

> "Just seeing the need with urban kids not getting any non-urban time in their lives, like not knowing how to garden or not even necessarily that but I mean, a lot of the youth that we work with are newcomer youth, and they actually had gardens at home, but now they don't have them here. Or they farmed back home. And youth from up North, they hunt and they trap, and then they move to the city for school, and they don't have those things. And so, being able to reconnect back to those things in nature I mean, FortWhyte as a whole it's sort of their mandate, right? Connecting with nature, but connecting youth to the food they eat as well." – Participant 6, FortWhyte Farms

The educational and work positions provided by FortWhyte Farms and Young Agrarians create opportunities for the resource of knowledge of food production to be shared with others interested in producing food and as a result, increase access to food production opportunities.

The last sub-theme related to increasing access to food and food production in general was the goal of making farming spaces more inclusive and accessible. For several participants, there was a general recognition that while Manitoba has a huge diversity of residents, farming – and particularly those who own the means of production of farming and who make decisions in organizational spaces – is overrepresented by white, cis-gendered, and heterosexual folks. Some participants were motivated by ensuring that farming and representation of farming in Manitoba is more inclusive:

> "Part of the impetus of having queer farm events, or women and trans and queer folks in farming tours, was let's get people excited about farming who aren't white dudes or white couples. Nothing wrong with being a white farmer, or a white cis farming couple, but it's the primary representation we see." – Laura Tait, previously Heart Acres Farm

In terms of who farms in Manitoba but isn't necessarily represented in these spaces, the population of migrant workers was also mentioned as a group who often isn't represented in these spaces, even though they also produce food in the province. In addition to making farming spaces more inclusive, some participants were focused on wanting to make the majority white rural community in which they live more welcoming and inclusive of diverse identities.

During the focus group discussion, it became evident that there are differences in how inclusivity is defined and what type of inclusivity is prioritized. While the farmers in this research who were part of direct marketing focused more on inclusion in terms of

race, gender, sexuality, additional diversities in identities, and farm ownership, farmers from producer organizations were focused on inclusivity in terms of who can produce the commodity that their producer organization represents:

> "We've been looking at inclusiveness in our organization. Because we're a discipline supply, there's restrictions. Not anybody can just, you know, build a large Chicken Barn, that's there to protect everyone. But at the same time, we've got different things in place so that people can still grow their own food. As far as growing your own food, anyone at all who's got enough land base can grow up to 999 chickens. And we are not involved with that… We are saying hey, if you want to grow some food, whoever you are, here are some opportunities to do it." Participant 10, Manitoba Chicken Producers

In this case, their work on inclusivity was focused on ensuring access to the production of food for individuals who have the means to do so, without needing to be part of the supply management system.

The third major theme for motivations for creating these initiatives was to *work towards a more resilient food system*. For working towards this improved food system, participants recognized that strong community is needed for a more resilient food system, and that these initiatives were also working towards increasing financial and organizational capacity in the local food community.

Farmers from producer organizations in particular expressed recognition that their own success as farmers relies on the need for strong communities that are able to support them in return as they produced food. Both Sandra and Rick emphasized the volunteer roles they fulfill in their community in addition to the producer organization initiative, and how this also plays into the bigger picture of a resilient community:

> "It kind of all comes back full circle. If we can keep our community strong, the economy is strong, and that being a contractor, then there's more building and more work that way for myself as well. So it all comes full circle. – Rick Lee, Manitoba Egg Farmers

They emphasized the need to work with community, as if they are a part of the same team, to ensure that both farmers and the community in general can be supported. Community was also mentioned by farmers in direct marketing and was considered in the design of initiatives such as the Manitoba Community Food Currency Program. This initiative was designed to not only benefit farmers but also the communities that the farmers are aiming to feed.

On the direct marketing side, and for the Manitoba Community Food Currency Program in particular, the design of this initiative was also motivated by its possibility to increase resources for the small scale farming community as well build its organizational capacity, two things that do not exist in abundance for direct marketing farmers in Manitoba:

> "Programs like this are really efficient to run so you actually don't need a lot of administration. But they also get you a little more administrative money, which helps us then pursue more policy work to push for a regional food strategy, to push for more local food access, to push for things that our farms need, to push up against certain quota ramifications, to push for insurance, to push for things like that. So, it kind of does all of those things at once. It manages to invest in the sector in a way that's community focused and not just self-serving. And it also manages to invest in the organization so that the organization can continue to do that sort of work." – Justin Girard, Hearts & Roots (Manitoba Community Food Currency Program)

Building financial and organizational capacity in the local food system was seen by several farmers as necessary to move towards the development of future projects that would also help build towards a more resilient local food system, such as a regional food strategy. In this sense such initiatives can also be a steppingstone to help work towards future projects that can continue to improve equity in the food system.

A final theme that was mentioned by participants for their creation of and participation in these initiatives was *being influenced and inspired by others* also working towards creating change. This included organizations and individuals in other provinces and outside of Canada, who provided examples for actions and initiatives that participants could take on here in Manitoba:

> "Yeah Rob Greenfield is like a little bit of a hero, and a lot of his stuff has either lined up with what we've wanted to do or given me ideas… He's a cool guy. If he ever comes here, he's welcome on our farm. He's a good motivator, just seeing that it's possible… It's just, it's given me a lot of hope." – Samantha Audet, Haven Farms

In some instances, these existing initiatives provided pre-existing structures that helped with the development of the initiative – an example of this is the Manitoba Community Food Currency Program, which was created based off of an existing program in British Columbia. Participants also mentioned being inspired by other farmers locally in the way that they created and designed their initiatives, as was shared here during the focus group:

> "I think that the very tiny, itty bitty baby initiative we are trying to do, which I have to say – I just got to give props to Laura here, because some of the things that you did inspired some of the way we developed the initiative. And I know that you got some of your ideas from a farming organization in the United States[7]. Hopefully there can be more education shared between farmers." – Michelle Schram, Fresh Roots Farm (Food Accessibility Project)

The access to information about other existing initiatives and the people who run them not only created motivation and inspiration for the creation of these initiative, but also facilitated their creation by providing useful information on how to design the initiatives.

Farmers who participated in this research expressed how their personal values play a significant role in their decisions to create and/or participate in equity-focused

[7] Referring to Soul Fire Farm

initiatives. Since these values are integral to their identities as farmers and as members of their communities, these initiatives appear to be an extension of these values, and for some, a way that they can express those values through their farming activities. For direct marketing farmers in particular, values related to inclusiveness motivate them to create opportunities specifically to increase opportunities for access – this value is also embedded in decisions made about the designs of the initiatives themselves. Embedded in these decisions on initiatives is also the desire to create more resilient communities of both consumers and farmers, with the goal of some being to create a more resilient food system overall. And the inspiration that is acquired from others not only has an impact on what types of initiatives are created, but also has an impact on the experiences of farmers as they create and participate in these initiatives, which is explored in the next section.

4.2.2 Experiences

Farmers framed their experiences while creating and/or participating in these equity-focused initiatives as nuanced, with many having positive experiences, all the while dealing with challenges and feelings of exhaustion and burnout, as well as isolation – particularly for those who have started these initiatives from scratch. Building social connections through interacting with others emerged as a clear benefit experienced by farmers as they undertook these initiatives.

When asked what their experiences have been like related to these initiatives, some participants immediately turned to the positive experiences they've had throughout their participation:

> "It's amazing. There hasn't been a day in three years that I have woken up and been like, Oh, my God, I don't want to go to work. I love everything about this job." – Participant 6, FortWhyte Farms

Farmers mentioned the rewarding feelings they received from watching people learn and grow in more educational-focused initiatives, while another participant iterated the incredible feeling they received from being able to give back to their community. One farmer mentioned how they were happy to participate as it allows them to fulfill the values they have as a food producer who also wants to increase access to food. It's important to note here that many of these clear expressions of positivity came from farmers who are participating in an initiative that is run by or created in partnership with an organization, such as Manitoba Chicken Producers:

> "We've been pretty excited to be a part of that. It doesn't – it doesn't affect me in that I don't need to go in the barn to pick out the birds that we've donated. They all get shipped at the same time to the processing plant. There is a specific number that each producer has given Manitoba Chicken Producers so that they know what to deduct from our quota. That's been the process. So yeah, it's been amazing. It's been working, the farmers are happy." – Participant 10, Manitoba Chicken Producers

In initiatives taken on by an organizational body such as Manitoba Chicken Producers, the organization takes on at least a portion of the coordinating and administrative work that is required to run these initiatives. This creates less additional work for the farmers themselves to keep these initiatives running.

While all farmers voiced benefits related to their experiences in creating and/or participating in initiatives, some were also candid about the additional work these initiatives required, and how this proved challenging when capacity is often already limited from fulfilling regular farming and everyday life responsibilities:

> "I know for myself, when things are really, really, really busy, or money's tight, or time is tight, energy is tight, it can feel like there's just, there's nothing else left for giving and giving and giving. And so, sometimes it feels exhausting to even think

> about... You're just trying to keep a business going and you're not, we're not yet saving the world. That I find challenging that I have to sometimes remind myself, okay, come back to why we're here, why we're doing this, what our values are and what we believe in and try not to get too wrapped up in the day to day, in the chores and money and time and energy stuff." – Katie McInnes, Dogs Run Farm

Several participants, particularly those who had created their own initiatives, expressed struggling with feelings of overwhelm and exhaustion, which in certain cases led to burnout. This burnout also had a gendered dimension, where individuals socialized as women tend to take on the finance and administrative roles on farms, which is also an essential aspect of running these initiatives:

> "In Manitoba so far, my experience was that - and I think this is completely connected with inheriting land and who has access to land - so many of the farmers were couples and men who own farms. And couples where men were mainly the operations managers and women are mostly the finance and admin operators, which is sort of what my relationship at Heart Acres ended up turning into a bit... A lot more of my time was dedicated to traveling and deliveries and communicating with people over email, customer relations and stuff like that." – Laura Tait, previously Heart Acres Farm

Though this work is part of running a farm and is also necessary for running these initiatives, this sequestration into administrative work may have contributed to the burnout they experienced while running a farm.

Another point that was made related to burnout was the presence of isolation in the experiences of some of the participants who ran these initiatives. Since Manitoba's rural landscape is widespread and sparsely populated, it can be difficult to find other like-minded people, particularly farmers, close by who are also interested in doing this similar social justice oriented work. Several direct-marketing farmers mentioned feeling like some of the only people in their communities interested in doing this sort of work. This

was particularly the case for farmers who are further away from Winnipeg, who felt their ideologies did not necessarily align with those of their community:

> "I mean, farmers are very independent. But they're also very, often very isolated. Right? So we don't know any farmers around us who are, you know, concerned about climate change. There are people around Clearwater, obviously, who are interested, and there are others in Manitoba. But yeah, it's absolutely essential for us to join in groups like that and have a common voice. Just because so many of us feel so isolated, isolated and sidelined in our own communities and amongst our own neighbours" – Jennifer DeGroot, Big Oak Farm

In this case, Jennifer mentioned how online platforms and organizations such as the National Farmers Union can help address some of these feelings of isolation and facilitate the meeting of other like-minded farmers.

During the focus group session, farmers mentioned the importance of discussing the experiences of exhaustion and burnout mentioned by farmers who are running these initiatives:

> "I think the fulfilling part of these kinds of initiatives is pretty predictable. But the exhaustion and burnout side of it is, I think, really important to acknowledge as well. Especially when as farmers, often these initiatives are above and beyond all of the things that we're doing just to get through each day. I think in most cases it would take extra energy, extra time, extra resources, or money or whatever we're trying to contribute to make these things happen. So yeah, I just think that's an important part, to see that included in there." – Michelle Schram, Fresh Roots Farm (Food Accessibility Project)

It's important to note that the burnout discussed here is not caused uniquely from the additional tasks required from initiatives, but is also expressed by direct marketing farmers in this research because of the large amount of work required to run a small scale farm. While the responsibilities of running the initiatives does add additional work, it is not the sole reason for the burnout experienced by some of these farmers. For one participant, this burnout contributed to them choosing to leave their position as a farm

owner, which resulted in the end of the initiative they had created. This has important implications for the long-term viability of farmer-run initiatives, as they cannot be sustained over a long period of time if the individuals running these initiatives have to choose to let them go in order to preserve their own well being.

A major theme that came out of participants sharing their experiences while running these initiatives was the social connections that they built through these initiatives, and the impact that these social connections had on them. Some participants mentioned how through these initiatives they've received support from their community that wasn't there before, and how they have also created new connections with members of their own community:

> "I've had to reach out to a number of different people, mostly through social media, some neighbours as well to say, 'Hey, I know you got dogs, do you guys want dog food?' Because none of it's for human consumption at that point. It's all expired food and so it's good dog food. It's been neat because I now have a reason to talk to my neighbours more often. And they're all excited and saying, 'Man, I'm saving 40-50 bucks every two weeks by not having to buy food for my animals.' So that part's been really cool." – Ken Chubaty, Haven Farms

Participants described these new social connections as fulfilling and rewarding. This building of social connections has acted as an antidote to the feelings of isolations experienced by farmers. Participants also mentioned that the new social connections provided them momentum and motivation to keep doing this work, particularly because the connections reminded them that they are not alone in working on these issues:

> "The connections with people that we've made, many of them have been lasting, that's the best part for sure. And getting to be involved with people who are also doing good work and trying to make a difference, and are trying to work in that same direction... It's really cool, I think, to have this realization that it's not all up to just one of us or just our business or whatever, right? It sounds so cheesy, but getting together, working on stuff. It's great. It's really rewarding. And then often

> making wonderful friends in the process. That's been the positive part." – Katie McInnes, Dogs Run Farm

The motivation created by these new social connections as well as the motivation that is created when these participants are inspired by others in this community who also do this work, as mentioned in the previous section, speaks to the importance of having support from like-minded folks who are working towards similar goals for these initiatives to be sustained. Some of these already formed social connections were evident during the focus group, where some of the participants were previously aware of each other's work in creating initiatives.

When preliminary results on the experiences of farmers were presented at the focus group, the participants present resonated with them, particularly the nuances involving the less positive experiences that farmers can go through while running these initiatives – even if their purpose is to create good. In relation to this, there was recognition of each other's experiences as farmers and how difficult this work can be:

> "Yeah, I just want to say that farming is really freaking hard. And you all are amazing. And you're all doing enough. And if you want to do more later, that's great too. But also, you're all doing so much. I think for me, in and of itself, just doing that and committing to that, you're already doing social justice. And I think it's great." – Laura Tait, previously Heart Acres Farm

Some of the discussion also moved towards recognition of the common motivations and experiences that farmers across production methods had in working towards a more just food system:

> "I just find it affirming that a lot of us have the same values. There's so many similarities in the findings, because I think the group here represents a pretty diverse group of farmers. We all have the same goals at the end of the day. And I think that the research kind of affirms that, and I appreciate working with all sorts of farmers and attaining those goals." – Sandra Dyck, Manitoba Egg Farmers"

This recognition of common goals and experiences across the farmers present at the focus group not only provided an important sense of normalization of these more difficult experiences, but may also point to potential opportunities to work across food production methods towards these common goals.

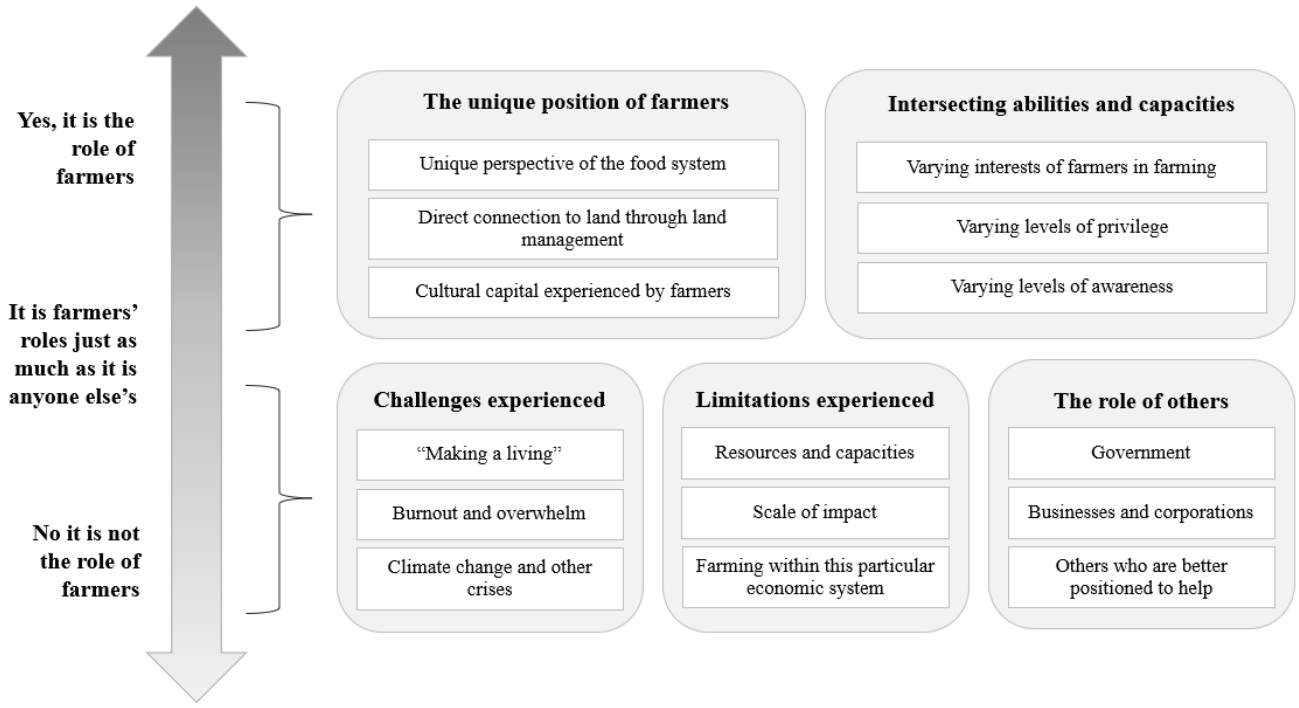
Though farmers have had a variety of positive experiences from creating and/or participating in these initiatives – particularly regarding the creation of new social connections – it's important to note the weight of experiences like exhaustion, isolation, and burnout mentioned by those who have taken on the responsibility of creating these initiatives. It's important to note that the human experience is nuanced – that the "positive" and rewarding experiences from participating in these initiatives are not necessarily separate from the heavier experiences of exhaustion and isolation, that many participants described feeling a multitude of these experiences. As a result, the good cannot necessarily be separated from the bad, nor should it. On an interpersonal scale, acknowledging and sharing less pleasant experiences of farmers can be important to normalize the difficulties involved in the work of farming in a way that aims to create a more just food system, and help individual farmers know that they are not alone in that experience. On a larger scale, it is also important to acknowledge the potential consequences that consistent experiences of burnout can have on an individual and, when experienced by several farmers, the impact this can have on work being done to create a more just food system in Manitoba.

4.2.3 The Perspectives on the Roles and Responsibilities of Farmers

Participants provided a spectrum of answers as to what they believe the roles of farmers should be in working towards a more just food system. Though many agree that they do

have a role to play, participants also acknowledge the challenges and limitations already faced by food producers and suggest that additional support is required and that others in society also have a role to play in working towards a more just food system.

Figure 1: Farmers' perspectives on their roles and responsibilities in working towards a more just food system



When asked whether farmers have a role to play in working towards a more just food system, some participants answered that yes, they absolutely do have a role. They provided specific reasons for their answers such as the fact that farmers have a unique perspective of the food system from where they stand, and that voicing their views and experiences can contribute to improving the food system. One unique position of farmers is the direct contact and impact they have with the land through the decisions they make for how they produce their food:

> "I think there are also people who are taking a lot of responsibility and putting a lot of effort and time and resources into taking as best care as they can of the land… We as farmers are arguably the most connected to the technicalities and the techniques that are used to take care of the land, and the research in action. So, I think that voice is really important." – Sara Yagelniski, Garlic Farmer and Young Agrarians Manitoba Apprenticeship Coordinator

This role in land management was often mentioned in relation to climate change, which is a concern mentioned by many of the participants involved. This is an important consideration in conversations on justice as climate change is likely to exacerbate existing injustices in the food system. They shared their awareness of how their farming practices could help reduce carbon emissions and hopefully contribute to mitigating climate change. Related to land management was also the mention of the history of colonization in Manitoba, and how their farming activities take place on traditional Indigenous lands (this is discussed in more detail in section 5.4).

One participant also pointed to the cultural capital that is currently being experienced by farmers, particularly those who take part in direct marketing:

> "It seems to me that farmers, specifically small farms or local food farms, are enjoying a certain amount of cultural capital and a certain amount of attention that perhaps they hadn't had recently. And I'm not sure why, but I think, it's just kind of like chefs, chefs, just suddenly there was this big thing and the local food scene grew, suddenly chefs got this almost celebrity culture and they acquired a lot of cultural capital. And I'm not sure that that's right. In fact, I don't think it is. But nevertheless, in that situation, I think that does make you uniquely positioned to leverage that. It's just more privilege that you should hopefully put into the service of something greater than yourself." – Justin Girard, Hearts & Roots (Manitoba Community Food Currency Program)

As mentioned by Justin, this cultural capital experienced by direct marketing farmers is an additional unique privilege possessed by farmers that could be utilized to work towards a more just food system.

Related to the higher end of the spectrum in Figure 1, participants acknowledged that though farmers have roles and responsibilities in working towards a more just food system, what those are is something that is different for everyone:

> "We do have a role in it. That role is probably different for every farmer. For myself, it's to not lose sight of why I'm here. It's to make ends meet, yes, but ultimately, I farm and I love what I do, I enjoy going to work every day. I'm producing food for a consumer, and so I need to produce what they need, when they need it, and adjust to that as best as I can, right?" – Sandra Dyck, Manitoba Egg Farmers

Participants noted how what these roles and responsibilities should be is dependent on intersecting capacities and abilities, with consideration of factors such as differing interests, privileges, and levels of awareness of the farmers themselves. For interests, participants noted the various ways in which farmers can work towards a more just food system, and that what they take on, whether that is better management of the land, improving access to land, improving access to food, etc., depends on what they are personally interested in working towards. Self-interest was also mentioned by some farmers as a factor:

> "I think that there's a giant spectrum of food producers who are self-interested and... Everybody has really different relationships with the land and with what they're growing and what they're willing or not willing to do. And I think that there's also people that are taking a lot of responsibility and putting a lot of effort and time and resources into taking as best care as they can of the land, and also speaking out about the injustices of the food system and access to land and to food. So, yeah, there's a huge spectrum, and we all have lots to learn." – Sara Yagelniski, Garlic Farmer and Young Agrarians Manitoba Apprenticeship Coordinator

This variation in priorities while farming was seen as having an impact on the willingness of farmers to play a role, if any, in working towards a more just food system.

Varying levels of privilege was also mentioned as an important factor to consider when defining the roles of farmers in working towards a more just food system. Some participants acknowledged the fact that they were only able to start their initiative because of a certain access to privilege:

> "I think for myself, personally, it's something that I acknowledge that there's privilege, a kind of unjust privilege, associated with what we're able to do." – Amy Nikkel, Adagio Acres (Grain CSA)

Some of the privileges mentioned by participants that facilitated their ability to do this work included access to land and machinery due to family members who also previously farmed. There was also the mention of financial privilege in the form of a spouse having a consistent income for the family from a non-farming job, which provided more flexibility for creativity and alleviated the need to make decisions purely for the purpose of "making a living". Identifying privileges that are available in surplus to share and finding a way to do so without leading to the point of burnout can be a difficult task, as outlined in Chad's answer to whether farmers have a role to play in working towards a more just food system:

> "The answer is, it's complicated. Because one I want to say yes, absolutely. And then two I also want to say, be careful, don't burn yourself out. And then three, I want to say, but be aware of the privilege that we're all holding to be able to do the work. Right? So those three realities I'm contending with… It's hard enough to do this work if you're solely trying to get a profit. And then if you're wanting to broaden that into other avenues, it gets harder. But from my own experience, I know that I've used that as an excuse to not work towards other goals." – Chad Wiens, Slow River Gardens (Good Food Club)

Privilege is not the only deciding factor as to whether or not farmers choose to play a role in working towards a more just food system. Participants expressed their view that farmers in Manitoba have varying levels of awareness in terms of what improvements can be made in the food system, and that this influences their view on what role they can

play as food producers and the decisions they make as a result of this.

On the lower end of the spectrum in Figure 1, participants outlined various reasons why farmers are not best positioned to do work towards a more just food system, and how other individuals or bodies may be better positioned to do that work. They re-iterated the various challenges that farmers already face, with the most commonly mentioned one being to ensure they get enough income to support themselves and, for some, their families as well as employees. This requires making decisions that prioritize this necessity – something that has been strained even more recently with the rising costs of inputs like animal feed:

> "Yeah, it's, I don't know. I don't know what the answer is there. Everything, even on my construction side, everything is just increasing, and there doesn't seem to be any window to tighten any gaps, everything from lumber to eggs to feed is increasing inputs, for grain farming is increasing. So, it's tough to find a way to slow down or bring things back to the way it was… I think quite often of what we can do better to reduce costs without affecting the final result. And really, there isn't, what we're doing, we just have to carry on, and if feed prices go up, we just have to deal with it." – Rick Lee, Manitoba Egg Farmers

The rising costs of inputs can of course lead to higher food prices, which in turn can make food prices less accessible than they were previously if consumers' incomes remain the same. Though making a living is a challenge, some participants emphasized the importance of not letting it get in the way of looking beyond that goal to see what else can be done:

> "I think one of the constraints that a lot of people feel obviously is the financial one. And it one, makes them uptight about doing things outside of their own personal realm. And then it makes them less inclined to connect with other people as well. So maybe working towards shifting your understanding that it can be possible to make a living, and also like help other people make a living, and also help other people just get fed, and work towards that at really small scales." – Chad Wiens, Slow River Gardens (Good Food Club)

In relation to this, another challenge mentioned was that of farmers already over-extending themselves and the energy they have into their farm work, leading them to deal with exhaustion and burnout.

> "Yeah, I think that farmers or at least with small farmers... There needs to be some other outside support so that it's not all on the people who are doing the physical work. That's how we burn out and that's how we don't see sustainable change." – Laura Tait, previously Heart Acres Farm

As a result, putting additional responsibilities related to improving the food system on the farmers themselves was seen by some as too much responsibility to put onto those who already perform the difficult work of producing food, and trying to do so in a way that allows them to support themselves financially.

A third important challenge mentioned by participants were the climate-related challenges they are already facing with their work and the resulting impacts this has on their ability to produce food and make a reliable living:

> "We had a drought this year, we've had a string of dry years before that, but having a real drought this year, there were some very real conversations in our household this summer. You know, the financial effects, the hard decisions that are being made, the environmental stressors which play into the financial… I don't think that responsibility should be completely on farmers." – Michelle Schram, Fresh Roots Farm (Food Accessibility Project)

Other crises such as the recent COVID pandemic was also mentioned. These crises can also create opportunity for farmers – for example, some direct-marketing participants mentioned experiencing an increased interests from customers in their produce at the beginning of the pandemic; however, even with the occasional benefits, these large crises can increase the instability and unpredictability of farming work, increasing stress experienced by farmers, contributing to challenges such as burnout.

Participants also listed various limitations that they experience as farmers which limits their ability to work towards creating a more just food system all the while continuing in their roles as farmers. A limitation that is interrelated with many of the discussion points that have been brought up is that of limited capacities and resources. In addition to having a finite amount of labour to expend on such initiatives in addition to their food production labour requirements, participants also mentioned limitations in terms of access to land – particularly to owning land, which provides some long-term financial stability for farmers – and how, for some, this results in a limited capacity to grow as much food as they would like to be able to produce. Some farmers saw this as limiting the positive impacts of their farming decisions and their initiatives could have. Related to this is the limited scale of impact resulting from many of these farmer-led initiatives, where many participants discussed the tension between the importance of making individual impacts and the need for larger-scale change:

> "It's political and like anything else, individual actions are nice, but it's really about systems change. And we can keep doing charity work or nice things, but they just kind of seem like band aid solutions to larger issues and larger injustices and inequities. But, you know, actions of individuals also make a difference." – Colin McInnes, Dogs Run Farm

Other participants such as Samantha from Haven Farms also mentioned how their participation in the Loop program also feels like a band-aid solution to a much larger scale issue. Some farmers discussed how Direct Farm Manitoba's Community Food Accessibility Project has the potential of having a larger-scale impact in terms of increasing access to food.

In relation to systems change, several participants – particularly those in direct-marketing – mentioned the limitations created by the economic system (capitalism) and

how this limits their ability to focus on their other values when they also have to ensure they make enough profit to continue their work:

> "From my experience, I would say a lot of small farms are value-based they otherwise wouldn't have entered farming in the first place. And it is a lack of time and resources that makes it difficult for small farmers to fully align themselves with the values that they went into farming with. Because capitalism doesn't allow anyone to live according to their values. And we're all trying to just stay alive." – Participant 5, Fireweed Food Coop (Waste-Not Food Box, The Veggie Van)

Certain participants were also aware of how, in the same way that the economic system limits their ability to produce and distribute food exactly in the way that that would honour their own values, it also limits their ability to create a more just food system, because affordability and access to their own produce are intertwined with large-scale social challenges in the dominant economic system:

> "Food insecurity is based in all of these other injustices and inequities, right? It's the fact that we don't have proper living wages. We have all these other issues around poverty and the conditions that are causing these things, right? You can't just hone in on food and say, we'll just donate a whole bunch more food to a food bank and make sure that people get more free food, and that'll be great. Which is why I have a certain degree of skepticism about our own program, too, right? It's only going to do so much until we address those basic issues. Those are just overwhelming, but I think that's where it has to really come down to for bigger structural change to happen." – Michelle Schram, Fresh Roots Farm (Food Accessibility Project)

Though the initiatives discussed in this paper do create important impacts for individuals in the community, these considerations highlight the limited capacity currently available to farmers to create systemic changes that may be needed to create a more just food system, particularly as isolated local initiatives. As a result, participants emphasized the need for others to play a role.

As to who else has a responsibility and a role to play in working towards a more just food system, participants listed government, businesses and corporations as having a role to play in working towards a more just food system. This was mentioned specifically in relation to larger systemic issues and shortfalls in the food system. Participants also mentioned that there may be other individuals who are better positioned to contribute to a more just food system in terms of capacity, knowledge and connections. Generally, participants agreed that farmers had some role to play, but that this is an issue that extends beyond food producers:

> "I wouldn't want to place that entire burden on farmers. However, I think a farmer, like anybody else, has a responsibility to their community that goes beyond the success of their business… So yes, long story short, it is the responsibility of farmers, as much as anybody else." – Justin Girard, Hearts & Roots (Manitoba Community Food Currency Program)

As a result, working towards a more just food system should be seen as a greater community responsibility, rather than one that is put uniquely on food producers.

4.2.4 Motivations, Experiences, and Perspectives in Relation to Alternative Food Networks

The farmers interviewed in this research are largely seeking to address food system issues with the purpose of working towards a sustainable food system that helps ensure community well-being and social justice, just like other AFN farmers (Weber et al., 2020). The expression of farmer's non-monetary values and goals are exemplified by the initiatives that they create and participate which aim to address issues such as adequate access to food, access to education for food production, access to spaces in farming for

those less represented in the dominant narrative of agriculture in Manitoba, and resource sharing.

Farmers in this work appear to be generally aware of the potentially exclusionary nature of locally grown and directly marketed foods and their distribution systems (e.g. farmers markets), which is well documented by scholars (Macias, 2008; Farmer et al., 2014). Several of the initiatives in this research appear to be contending with this exclusionary nature by providing pathways for folks of different income and geographic proximity to participate in the purchasing and consumption of locally produced food. Several of the initiatives included in this research are also aligned with Markow et al.'s (2014) suggestions for strategies to improve access in community-based food systems through providing more payment options for CSAs (sliding scale pricing model), providing government-subsidized vouchers to spend at farmers' markets/working to establish farmers markets at convenient locations (Manitoba Community Food Currency Program) and offering home delivery (Waste Not Food Boxes).

Though some experiences related to these initiatives are positive, farmer's experiences of burnout should be taken seriously. The concept self-exploitation (Galt, 2013) can be useful in understanding the experiences of insufficient income and burnout that are experienced by farmers in the local food system, including participants in this research. As noted in the literature review, self-exploitation occurs when farmers make decisions based on non-economic values, but since they have to continue finding ways to exist in a capitalist system where profit-making is required for their farms to survive, they turn to self-exploitation which often takes the shape of unpaid labour. The initiatives that provide increased financial access to food without compromising farmers' incomes

provide a way for farmers to honour their values related to making their food accessible without affecting their income. However, when these initiatives are farmer-run and require a significant amount of additional labour, farmers may not be compromising their monetary income but may be self-exploiting by performing the additional labour required to run these initiatives, leading to exhaustion and burnout. Burnout has serious psychological and physiological consequences on farmers (Salvagioni et al, 2017), and can lead to farmers having to leave farming, which is something one participant in this research had to do. As a result, creating and supporting initiatives that don't put additional labour on farmers nor require them to compromise their incomes, but provide a pathway for farmers to participate and express their justice-related values can help mediate the experiences of burnout. If structured correctly, these initiatives could facilitate positive outcomes that help keep burnout at bay by providing opportunity for social interaction and building social connections (Jones-Bitton et al., 2019).

Farmers in this research who participate in direct marketing also discussed experiencing high labour and time demands leading to managerial challenges and longer workdays, as is mentioned in other literature (Argüelles et al., 2018; Jarosz, 2008). This is mentioned even without the additional burden brought on by creating these initiatives. This points to potential additional ways that direct marketing farmers be could better supported by others in the community, not just in relation to their work on bettering the food system, but also in their regular farming activities. This support could look like mechanisms that directly address the challenges and limitations that farmers experience, such as having a stable and reliable income, preparing for and recovering from extreme weather events, and support to decrease experiences of burnout and overwhelm, and

increase wellbeing. Strategies to increase resources and capacities and to create more space for farmers to prioritize their values instead of having to compromise them to make a living would also be useful. As seen in the Manitoban context, the provincial and federal government have historically been involved in helping address challenges faced by farmers. As a result, government provides an important resource to look to in order to help mitigate some of these challenges. However, garnering support from government – particularly for smaller scale farmers – has challenges as well, and looking at other potential resources in communities that could help support food producers in addressing these challenges and limitations may be a useful strategy.

The nuanced responses given by farmers as to whether they have a role in working towards a more just food system showcases the varying capacity that each farmer involved in this research has experienced throughout their farming careers and were experiencing at the time of their interviews. Though it does not appear that farmers who participate in these initiatives are only farmers who have higher levels of capacity, it is evident that those with higher capacity – or with access to the capacity of an organization – are able to participate in these initiatives with more consistency, and with more capacity to offer the unique experiences they have as farmers to improve the food system. Ensuring that supports are offered to help balance out the challenges and limitations that farmers experience is essential to helping farmers who are interested in improving the food system, contribute to doing so from their unique position.

4.3 The Role of Learning

The second objective of this research was to apply transformative learning theory to understand the learning which may lead to plans and actions undertaken by farmers to create social justice driven initiatives in their food system. Since the processes leading up to the creation of these initiatives have already occurred, the interviews did not provide deep insight into the entirety of the processes – many of which appear to have taken place over several years. However, transformative learning theory was useful for understanding the learning that occurred leading up to farmers taking action to create and/or participate in these initiatives, and how, based on their continued learning, they continue to re-evaluate the roles they should play in relation to bettering the food system considering their own capacities and limitations.

It is evident that the frames of references currently held by the farmers who participated in this research have been in the making for a long time and are deeply intertwined with their decision to farm in the first place. Participants did not reveal any big specific events that led to a disorienting dilemma; rather, the learning that led them to wanting to address injustices in the food system is a process that happened incrementally. Some participants mentioned first becoming aware of and interested in social justice issues while in high school and/or university:

> "I was first interested in poverty and social justice when I was just leaving high school and through university and just getting to know the world more, I realized that growing food would have a significant impact. And so, I just kind of tested the waters a little bit through WOOFING in South America and in Canada, and then I eventually sought out employment in the sector on all sorts of different farms. That led me to having my own business and co-managing a business." – Sara Yagelniski, Garlic Farmer and Young Agrarians Manitoba Apprenticeship Coordinator

Several of the direct marketing farmers mentioned their high school and university experiences as being part of their growing awareness of social justice issues. Some participants also mentioned previous work positions they held before they started farming which also intersected with social justice issues, such as community development and women's issues. This came up specifically in my interviews with direct marketing farmers – both first generation and generational farmers – who expressed very deliberate reflection behind choosing to farm as a career, and who often chose farming as a way to address specific injustices.

At times, their specific social justice interests, which were part of their reasons for farming, were directly related to the initiatives they've decided to take on:

> "Already when I was in high school, I just started to be really concerned about the products or the things that I used or interacted with in my day to day life, and how that connected me with people around the world. I was very interested in sweatshops, but then I was also really interested in migrant workers and how they needed to leave their families and come here. The workers that I connect with are mostly with the seasonal agricultural workers program, the SAWP, which is part of the temporary foreign worker program with the federal government." – Jennifer deGroot, Big Oak Farm

Later in the interview, Jennifer related this interest directly to her reasons for choosing to farm in this specific way:

> "My husband and I, with our university education, we're choosing to go do the work that these guys [*referring to migrant workers*] do, because we think that's the best response to the world that we live in. And we think it's a good way to respond to climate change. And we think that, you know, doing manual labor makes us better people than we would be if we sat in offices looking at computers. Whether that's true and that's happening can be debated. But yeah, it's just a really big, it's a really big issue." – Jennifer deGroot, Big Oak Farm

This connection between the learning about specific issues and farming as a form of response to this particular issue showcases the overlap that can exist between the choice

to enter farming as a career in the first place and the creation of these initiatives themselves.

During this incremental learning process, several transformative learning steps such as self-examination, exploring options for new ways of acting, planning a course of action, and acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills to take on the action often occurred in overlapping sequences over time. This is well illustrated in this quote from Colin describing the steps that led to the establishment of Dogs Run Farm:

> "Growing up I was really drawn to the outdoors and food and cooking, and in high school I started becoming more aware of environmental issues. I think I'd dream of living in a log cabin in the woods, turned into more of a like a homesteading dream, and then kind of wanting – cause going forward and learning more things and becoming more active in the community, that evolved into creating, or helping to contribute to a more just food system. And so I took jobs that I thought would develop skills which would be useful. Some of them were farm jobs, I did carpentry, some other outdoor work that helped me learn machinery and building skills and problem solving, all kind of working towards this goal. And I guess it took about 15 years to finally get our own thing going." – Colin McInnes, Dogs Run Farm

This quote also illustrates how, for many direct-marketing farmers, the act of farming itself is an exploration of potential actions that could lead to the greater goal of having a more just food system.

This learning does not appear to stop at the point of integrating these initiatives into society. If anything, direct marketing farmers appear to be re-visiting various steps of the transformative learning process in a cyclical pattern. This occurs through instrumental learning, where through the actions of farming and playing out these initiatives they learn about their own capacity, and as a result, continuously seek to find a way to address the inequities alongside also achieving self-sufficiency:

> "My decisions are guided by moving in the direction of access to food for more people, and also having a decent income for myself… And also just paying attention to my passions and securing myself and my household with food and my really tight, small community. So, yeah, it's kind of complicated. And it's not – I never feel like I'm hitting all the spots. I think there's always room to grow. But yeah, my decisions are guided by inner sufficiency, as well as a passion to support all people having access to it." – Sara Yagelniski, Garlic Farmer and Young Agrarians Manitoba Apprenticeship Coordinator

The actions that occur as a result of this learning appear to be incremental. This continuous learning also occurs through communicative means as they learn more about these inequities and reflect on whether or not they address what they are meant to address:

> "The thing I'm most thankful for is having the opportunity to engage one on one with the community organization workers and really having to negotiate what access looks like. This program isn't perfect, right? Because not everybody has access to a good farmers market. Not everybody wants to, or even feels comfortable in certain public spaces. There are certain farmers markets in areas of the city that, you know, were considered a little too... That some of the organizations thought were maybe a little too affluent and a little uncomfortable for some of the members, or when it comes to public transportation. So, negotiating all of that, I think, was really important and eye opening. We have no illusions that this program is a fix or is THE program. I think it's just an excellent program to add to what you would hope would be a slew of great programs that are community focused. But I think understanding the difficulty of access – not only that, but should you give somebody money to purchase food? Do they have access to a good kitchen? Do they have the time, do they have all of these things? And so, negotiating which demographics and who can identify which demographics that could benefit the most from the program, there was a lot to learn. On top of that, I think the other thing we really learned is that it's a really fine line between promoting the program as a healthy food initiative and not telling people what to eat. That's really something I wasn't thinking clearly on beforehand… The program in BC manages to sell itself to the government through this idea of we're going to get people eating this type of food. Negotiating whether the currency can be used for cookies and bread... it gets tricky… Trying to find an honest compromise between all of them in the language is quite difficult, but also really, really worth it. You do a lot of soul searching and

> understanding while you're trying to negotiate those different perspectives." – Justin Girard, Hearts & Roots (Manitoba Community Food Currency Program)

Though this particular example does not address personal capacities since it is an organizational-level initiative, it does showcase the communicative learning that occurs to inform the structure of the initiatives, and as a result, to ensure that the initiative (the action resulting from the learning) accomplishes what it is supposed to. Several other direct-marketing farmers shared similar communicative thought processes as they learned more about the impacts of their initiatives.

Overall, it appears that through these actions, farmers become increasingly aware of their capacities and of the nuances involved in addressing food system injustices, and as a result, continuously re-evaluate where they are best suited to play additional roles related to addressing inequities in the food system. This process, which can be seen in the quotes above, involves a lot of reflection on their own experiences and how they came to be, which is central to transformative learning (Mezirow, 1994). These processes, at times, lead to actions such as the initiatives included in this research, which based on the descriptions provided by participants, also appear to be incremental. However, they do not all lead to actual action, and even when they do, not all actions are successful long-term. That lack of long-term success is also an important part of the learning process and of the re-negotiation that occurs to understand where they are best suited to play a role in working towards a more just food system. This is shared by Laura, who is currently regrouping to figure out how to approach farming differently in the future:

> "I got to tangibly see that if you create spaces for people, they will come. But then from my tiny little position as a business owner who didn't make enough money to keep running the business for myself, I can't actually make sustainable or systemic change." – Laura Tait, previously Heart Acres Farm

These learning experiences can, in addition to helping farmers re-negotiate the roles they choose to play in the food system, indicate areas where gaps exist that cannot be fulfilled through renegotiation, where it is not reasonable to expect for these issues to be resolved by individuals, and that external supports are needed to help lead to structural change.

The interviews with the producer organization farmers did not reveal as much of an overlap between the origin of farming and the creation of the initiatives themselves. This could be due to the fact that all three producer organization farmers that I interviewed explained that they got into farming through their own family's or their partner's family's intergenerational farm, and that the way in which they farm is largely regulated. This likely means that the process for choosing to farm was different for them compared to direct marketing farmers. It may also be because the initiatives run by Manitoba Egg Farmers and Manitoba Chicken Producers are organization-to-organization partnerships between the producer organization and Harvest Manitoba, and that Harvest Manitoba played a significant role in the initiation of the initiatives themselves. That being said, learning did occur during communications with Harvest Manitoba during the creation of and reporting on the initiative:

> "Until we started with Harvest Manitoba, I wouldn't have believed that there were that many families that are, are food deprived kind of thing. So that was a big eye opener for me and made it all the more worthwhile. We have breakfast coupons that are going out to the schools as well for families that just, there's some kids that don't have breakfast in the morning. So things like that are a real eye opener, if I wasn't involved in something like this, you probably wouldn't know any different." – Rick Lee, Manitoba Egg Farmers

There was very clear involvement and will from the producer organizations in key steps in the process leading up its creation. For example, in terms of planning out the action

itself, the Manitoba Chicken Producer's initiative took just under 3 years to plan before it was launched:

> "We have to be careful that we're not doing an end run on an overall supply question and saying, 'Are we just finding another way to dump chicken on the market that's going to negatively affect somewhere else?' We have to understand the end result of this thing, so we did a little bit of that work. We also had to make sure that our chick supply is adequate. I mean, 1,000 birds a week doesn't sound like a lot, but our Manitoba Chicken Producers oversees the Manitoba Hatching Egg Producers as well. So, these people put laying hens in their barns a year and a half before we see them, before we see the hatched egg in our broiler chicken barns. It's a long process to make sure that we've got the right number of chicks coming out of the hatcheries heading for the broiler barns." – Participant 10, Manitoba Chicken Producers

Later on in the interview, Participant 10 explained how farmers in this organization, most of which are family farms, tend to be very community-minded, which is reflected in the actions that they take in their farming activities, and in the producer organization overall:

> "Local farmers, they take care of their environment. They don't like to spread manure in places that shouldn't have manure spread. Local farmers will spend their money in their local communities. They will send their children and grandchildren into the local communities for, whether it's sporting events or whatever. You're connecting with the community in a number of different ways. It's been positive all around because it's just a whole community type of engagement." – Participant 10, Manitoba Chicken Producers

This is also evident in Manitoba Egg Farmers, where farmers established the Ambassador Fund mentioned earlier to give farmers another way to give back to their own communities. The interviews did not provide access into the learning of these farmers in the larger organization in relation to their community mindedness; however, it is likely that this community mindedness overlaps with their identities as farmers, and that their own experiences of learning that led to them to view their work in this way also contribute to the initiatives they create in their organizations.

For direct marketing farmers, the learning that occurs that leads to the creation of these initiatives is deeply intertwined with the learning that leads to their choice to farm in the first place. The initiatives appear to be an extension of their decision to farm in order to address inequities, and as they learn of specific inequities within the food system while they farm and see themselves playing a role in recreating some of those particular inequities to ensure they can also make a living, they seek to address those initiatives as well. For producer organizations, since integration into farming is different and more pre-determined, there doesn't appear to be that same overlap between the decision to farm and the decision to address injustices. However, there is a community mindedness that is emphasized and protected by the supply management system, which overlaps with farming, and this appears to play a role in the creation of the initiatives. Since only a few farmers from these organizations were interviewed, there is definitely more there to understand and it's difficult to draw specific conclusions about the learning that occurs there.

It appears that many of the initiatives that are presented in this research are the action that results from incremental learning of injustices in the food system that cannot just be addressed through the physical act of farming itself – at least, in the case of increasing access to food, not without compromising their own ability to make a living. In fact, it could be said that direct marketing farming itself is a disorienting dilemma – since there is so much room for creativity and a continuous experience of limited infrastructure and resources compared to a more regulated and resourced system like supply management, the experience of direct marketing farming itself appears to be quite transformative and require constant reflecting and exploring to reach a more consistent

state. As a result, the learning does not stop at the creation of the initiatives and their integration into society but is rather continuous as farmers try on different provisional roles to try and negotiate an appropriate space where they can both live out their values through farming all the while taking care of themselves and respecting their own capacities.

Though transformative learning can lead to actions that make significant impact, it's important to note how learning itself is not enough to lead to systemic change. As is illustrated by Laura's quote earlier, even though the actions themselves can be successful in achieving what they were meant to, if those who are responsible for creating those actions are not supported, those actions will not be able to continue long-term. This is where the need for additional structural support in order to work towards a more just food system becomes evident.

Chapter 5: Moving Towards a More Just Food System

Throughout the interviews and the focus group, participants identified what a more just food system could look like in Manitoba, and though it is a responsibility that should be held by many in the larger community, discussed the different ways in which farmers can (and in some cases, already do) play in working towards a more just food system. Based on my discussions with them, I've compiled a list (Figure 2) of the different actions that farmers in Manitoba may be able to take on to work towards a more just food system, as well as potential strategies to help facilitate this work. At the end of this section, I also identify where these initiatives fit into food justice and food sovereignty discourses, and discuss the implications of this for the local food system in Manitoba.

5.1 Defining a More Just Food System

Before diving into the roles and responsibilities that farmers can take on to work towards this more just food system, I want to take some time to review what this more just food system looks like for the participants in this research. When discussing the role of farmers in working towards a more just food system, it became evident that this differs across participants. This became particularly evident in the focus group, where different farmers brought up different priorities. That being said, there was also overlap between farmers' views of what more justness and equity looks like, and as a result, room for farmers from different farming spheres to work together towards certain aspects of a more just food system. Nevertheless, in future discussions on farmer's roles in working towards a more just food system in Manitoba, it would be of use to create a vision of what this looks like, to provide a clearer vision of what these initiatives are ultimately

working towards.

This particular research project cannot clearly answer the question "what does a just food system look like in Manitoba?", as it is not set up for this purpose. However, throughout the interviews, participants provided some indications of what they would like to see in Manitoba's food system. Based on the participants included in this interview, a more just food system may include some or all of the following:

- Everyone having access to the food they need in a way that prioritizes dignity and empowerment.
- Having farmers markets and other distribution systems in all neighbourhoods in Winnipeg with the appropriate resources and programs to ensure members of those communities no longer face barriers to food access.
- Equity for farm owners and their employees, including migrant workers
- Protection for farmers from the at times tumultuous free market and climate
- Preserving "family" farms that are rooted in community over multinational companies that are better financially positioned to purchase farmland.
- New farmers having more accessible ways to acquire farmland, where they have programs through which they more realistically access the capital needed to invest in farm equipment.
- Farmers utilizing farming methods with the lowest environmental impacts to help mitigate climate change.
- The food system being supported by the public sector, where government provides financial support for and invests in the local food economy.
- Farming spaces where all farmers are represented and the people who farm in

Manitoba represent more of the diversity in identities that this province contains.

- More infrastructure for processing both crops and animals raised for meat at a smaller scale, and the government support to create this lacking infrastructure.
- Having more centralized distribution systems for smaller scale farmers to reduce their need for focus on distribution and to help them reach larger markets.
- Having less of the food and the resources it took to produce that food go to waste and finding a way to better distribute it to feed people.
- Farmers actively working to address the colonial history of farming in Manitoba.
- Less misinformation, where consumers are well educated about how their food is produced.

A more just food system may also be one where there is less divisiveness between farmers across various food production scales and methods, where instead they are working together to contribute towards this more just food system:

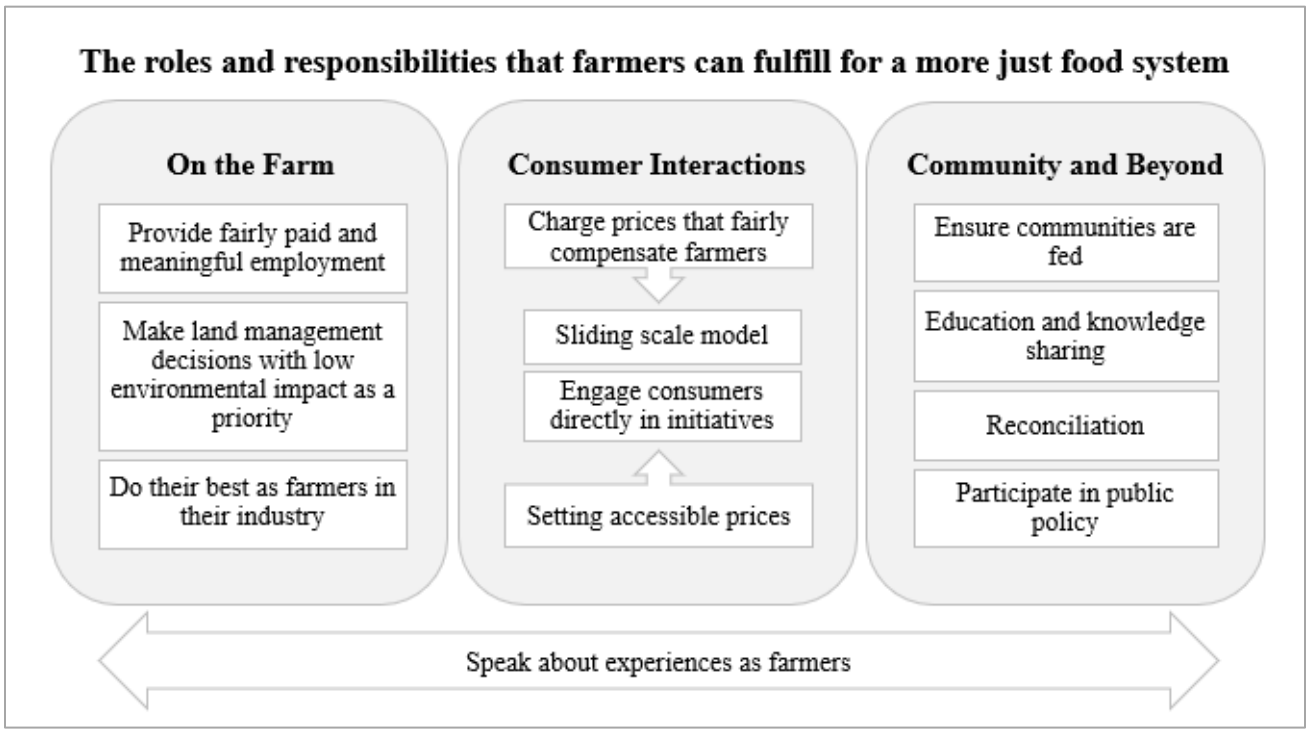
> "My hope would be that one day we can have more of a unified approach to it, that we can all work together. Because I find, if I can speak frankly, often organic farming is against conventional farming and vice versa. And I really feel like there's a place for ALL types of agriculture. They're servicing different people, and they're just different markets. I think if we all work together as opposed to bashing each other along the way… We have different markets and different goals, but yet the same goal, and I think as long as we work together on it, this is possible, it is definitely possible." – Sandra Dyck, Manitoba Egg Farmers

Though there are differences in priorities for what a just food system could look like and methods for how to get there across the types of farmers involved in this study, there are also clear overlapping, community-focused goals, such as ensuring that everyone has access to the food they need. Such overlapping goals could provide a meeting ground for a more unified approach for working towards a more just food system.

5.2 The Potential Roles and Responsibilities of Farmers

The roles that farmers can play to work towards a more just food system are divided into three different levels: at the level of everyday farming responsibilities, at the consumer level, and at the larger community level. What is viable for each farmer will vary of course based on many intersections already discussed in this manuscript, this is simply a list of suggestions based on the data from this research.

Figure 2: The potential roles and responsibilities of farmers in working towards a more just food system



At the level of *everyday farming responsibilities*, farmers are able to contribute to working towards a more just food system starting with the people they employ to work on their farm:

> "I think that large producers have a role in making jobs equitable and just to begin with… Thinking specifically of migrant workers and people of color and the work that they do, and the money that they get paid for that work, for the food that we all benefit from, and they don't necessarily benefit from." – Participant 6, FortWhyte Farms

Though there are certain things farmers don't have direct control over such as the migrant workers program itself, they do have decision-making power over the roles of the employees on the farm and the wage they are paid. Chad outlined how he believes it is farm owners' responsibility to ensure their staff are paid adequately for their labour:

> "I think there's a lot of things that are, in my understanding, sort of complex and nuanced, but the one around pricing and paying staff has always seemed pretty clear cut, where if you want to pay your staff higher, just charge more. And maybe I'm missing something. But I see a direct correlation there. And then if you're having issues charging more, then you have to do a better job with communication. And I do firmly believe that that's the farm owner's responsibility." – Chad Wiens, Slow River Gardens (Good Food Club)

Some participants indicated that aiming to pay staff a liveable wage, which in Manitoba is currently approximately $16/hour (CBC, 2022), is one way to ensure that staff are paid adequately. Improving justness in the food system through employment can also look like creating meaningful employment opportunities and creating clear responsibilities for employees. Laura outlined how they created employee manuals and formal systems for conflict resolution for employees – something that is quite rare on smaller scale farms, but provides employees with tools to ensure they know their responsibilities and with processes to help guide them when conflicts and uncertainty occur. There are existing resources that may be of use for this such as the Not Our Farm zine which may be of use to both food producers and farm workers (Taylor et al., 2021). Providing more well-paid and meaningful employment in this sector could help address oncoming predicted labour shortages in the agricultural sector in Manitoba, with a predicted 5,300 jobs going

unfilled by 2029 (CAHRC, 2019). Providing meaningful employment could look like creating opportunities for advancement, creating learning opportunities, and finding ways to address obstacles that come with the seasonality of the job positions that are often involved in farming. Such employment improvement could also occur for workers who are hired on farms through migrant worker programs like SAWP.

Where farmers don't have complete control over employment programs such as SAWP, farmers can get engaged and advocate for their employees:

> "You can say whatever you want about migrant workers. But if you're not willing to pick your own vegetables, weed your own organic vegetables, who's going to do the work, right? This is part of a whole food system here, this isn't about one farmer treating their workers badly. Workers are incredibly vulnerable, incredibly vulnerable in this program, because they're tied to one employer, and the moment they open their mouth, they're out of here. And there's been all kinds of abuses in Manitoba… I mean the employer just has all the power. The employer can do whatever, and they don't speak English, and they won't advocate for themselves. And all they want is an invitation to come back next year, right? So the program is highly problematic that way, but I just think the big picture around food security is not generally talked about. There are some employers, farmers who have migrant workers that are also part of advocating for migrant workers, who recognize all of the flaws in the program, and who also recognize that they can't have their farms without these guys because they can't find workers." – Jennifer deGroot, Big Oak Farm

Though this requires an additional level of engagement that goes beyond daily activities, it is also an avenue through which farmers can share their experiences and advocate for a more just program.

Farmers are also able to work towards a more just food system through the way in which they choose to manage the land by employing farming techniques that have a lower environmental impact – something that both producer organization farmers and

direct marketing farmers mentioned they are working towards and continuously seek to improve.

Farmers can also work towards a more just food system simply by doing the best that they can as farmers within their industry. Though there were many suggestions as to what farmers can do in addition to their daily responsibilities, some participants also emphasized the fact that sometimes just farming in itself can be enough:

> "Something that I also keep in mind when you look at why some farms are doing things that are kind of unconventional and reaching outside the box… A lot of people are farming just to pay the bills for the next day, and to appreciate what they're doing as well, which is just managing their farm, managing their land responsibly and sustainably, to sustain their own family, there's value in that too. There's a whole lot of value to doing something that's positive, or that's not destructive to the world, and doing it to support yourself." – Amy Nikkel, Adagio Acres (Grain CSA)

This sentiment was also emphasized during the focus group, where participants emphasized the difficulty of the work they are each doing and celebrated their work as farmers.

At the level of their *interactions with consumers*, farmers have options as to different pricing schemes they can apply to how their produce and programs that can help contribute to equity. These options are particularly relevant for direct-marketing farmers, who generally have direct control over how much they charge for their products. The first is to charge a price that is fair to the labour and resources that went into the product itself, which in turn that allows farmers to pay themselves and their employees a liveable income. The second is to charge an accessible price – this often contradicts the first suggestion of charging a price to be able to pay a fair wage, which may make the price inaccessible for some consumers. The tension that exists between setting prices that are

enough for farmers to make a living but also finding ways to ensure the food they produce is accessible is an example of farmers trying to balance the social and economic dimensions of their work (De Bernardi and Tirabeni, 2018; Fourat et al., 2020). In this case, these initiatives provide a solution to "getting the prices right" (Hinrichs, 2000) in a way that still allows them to make a living while providing accessible and affordable foods. The two next suggestions act as a way to mitigate the contradiction between these at times contradicting dimensions.

A sliding scale model provides different pricing options for consumers based on their income levels, with the ideal that the higher price that is paid by those with a higher income subsidizes the lower price reserved for those with a lower income – in this sense, pricing is accessible for consumers with various incomes, while the farmers can still earn a liveable wage. This is the model that was applied to Heart Acres' CSA program, which proved to be successful in terms of redistributing food across various incomes:

> "I introduced a tiered income CSA model* so that we're redistributing that wealth, which I feel like is the model that should be incorporated in the world, let alone just this small model. We tried it and it was really great. We were able to redistribute enough money for nine no-cost "solidarity" CSA shares, which is a lot because we went from a 50 person to 100 person CSA and nine of those were for newcomer families, and that was really cool." – Laura Tait, previously Heart Acres Farm

As a result, people from various incomes were able to access this program, while the farmers did not have to reduce their income to make this possible.

Another option available that also addresses the tension between making prices accessible and ensuring farmers get a liveable income is by providing ways in which other consumers can get involved and contribute to distributing food as well. Several of the initiatives, such as the Food Accessibility Project and the Grain CSA are taking this

approach via donations by providing the option for consumers to add a donation to their purchases which goes to contribute to the fund for their subsidized and donated shares, respectively. FortWhyte Farms was also able to engage their customers in a similar way that allowed them to provide some CSA shares for free to members of their community:

> "So we approached our CSA members and told them that we wanted to donate weekly CSA shares to this community group that is in Manitoba housing that's quite close to us for the families that live there, and would they be willing to donate money towards this? And our CSA members were like absolutely, we would love to do that. So, we were able to donate five CSA shares every week, which they then split up into 10 CSA shares to share with 10 families." – Participant 6, FortWhyte Farms

These programs are not just providing nutrition to those who get access to this food, they are also providing something greater in value. While discussing these same CSA shares, Participant 6 shared some feedback that he received from one of the recipients of this program:

> "All the feedback we got about that was fantastic… I have a friend who actually was one of the families that got the food and she was just like, it was the best thing about the whole summer. Every week, my kids and I would go down, they were so excited to see it, I didn't just feed my family, I fed all my kids' friends. Clearly, it's a good thing." – Participant 6, FortWhyte Farms

The impacts of these initiatives – both nutritionally but also of experiences as expressed in the quote about – provide important grounds for future research.

By engaging consumers in these initiatives via pre-determined pricing structures like sliding scale or by asking for donations not only takes some of the responsibility away from the farmers for having to be the ones who provide already limited resources to make the food they grow more accessible, but it also provides a pathway for others in the community to choose to help increase access to Manitoba-grown food if they feel they are in a position to do so. The moral economies of AFNs and the social embeddedness in

the form of trust and social and environmental values that is present in these exchanges (Hinrichs, 2000), provide opportunity for this sort of consumer engagement to occur. Consumers are likely willing to pay more in the form of donations or by paying a higher price based on their income because they are also getting values out of it that is greater than the food they are receiving. These exchanges could be seen as an extension of community economic rents (Galt, 2013), where consumers pay more for local products than they would in another setting because of the additional values embedded in these exchanges.

It's important to note that this sort of consumer involvement can take some additional capacity for farmers – for example, communicating new and unfamiliar pricing structures to customers can be time consuming. However, since direct marketing farmers are already at the intersection of food production and distribution, creating these initiatives at the point of purchasing and distribution is a possibility. For farmers who are part of supply management, applying similar consumer engagement opportunities would likely prove difficult, as their products get distributed through retail and they themselves are not directly connected to the consumers at the time that they purchase their products. As a result of that, as well as the economies of scale, it is understandable as to why a focus on providing an affordable product all the while making a living is more common.

Farmers also have roles and responsibilities available to them that they can fulfill at *the level of their communities and beyond* for helping to work towards a more just food system, the first of which is to ensure their communities are fed. This responsibility may seem evident to state about food producers, but as Sandra reminds us, it is a central goal in producing food:

> “We have a role for sure in ensuring that our world is fed and that our communities are fed. We are ultimately responsible for that and I don't think we should lose sight of that.” – Sandra Dyck, Manitoba Egg Farmers

As the farmers who participated in this research have shown, this responsibility goes beyond simply producing food for conventional distribution. It can also take place in less formal ways than the initiatives included in this research:

> “I think there are ways in which farmers are feeding their communities, but it's outside of formal programming. It's just really grassroots and authentic. Farmers are dropping leftover food at community groups. They're giving free food when someone stops at their market stand but can't afford their food. These things are happening; they are just not as out in the open and thus don't necessarily get recognized..” – Participant 5, Fireweed Food Coop (Waste-Not Food Box, The Veggie Van)."

As the people who produce something that is essential for everyone’s well being, farmers are in a unique position where they hold resources that can help ensure their communities are fed. Since not everyone is capable of being fed through the conventional distribution system, this responsibility, which can be performed in various ways depending on privilege and capacity, extends beyond mainstream distribution system and requires alternatives such as the initiatives showcased here.

A second role that farmers can play at the community level is that of education and knowledge sharing. As was mentioned earlier, some farmers mentioned being motivated specifically by the desire to share knowledge. Education was brought up by several participants as a resource that farmers have in more abundance and as a result is more plausible to share when other resources are limited. This is related to working towards a more just food system especially when it comes to sharing knowledge on food production with those who may not have access to it otherwise:

> "We're trying to make opportunities for other people who are interested in farming. And that's just kind of starting for us, but we're hoping that it continues to be a pretty important part of – since we both had that opportunity before becoming farmers, and we know how important it is to learn directly from being on a farm, we're hoping to make that more and more accessible." – Katie McInnes, Dogs Run Farm

This knowledge sharing can take the form of on-farm mentorships, but it can also take place through accessible resources and workshops, such as the workshops hosted by FortWhyte Farms about growing food in a passive solar greenhouse like the one they have on the farm. Knowledge sharing and education also plays a significant role in ensuring transparency with consumers as to how the food they eat is produced. This transparency allows customers to be aware of where their food comes from, and gives them the opportunity to choose which types of food productions they want to support. This form of education is useful for sharing less commonly known methods of production, but it is also useful for addressing misinformation; producer organization farmers explained how they spend a lot of time focusing on education and addressing misinformation about their own production methods:

> "I find that whether there's producers sharing information with producers, or there's producers sharing information with consumers, I think both are probably important. The role of education is pretty important as there are so many people who don't really know where their food comes from… Before COVID, the Government of Manitoba was hosting an Open Farm Day across the province. Because we're close to Winnipeg, we had the opportunity to open the windows to the barn – a commercial farm like ours usually isn't open. And so, we were able to put in some big glass windows and look inside, answer questions. We had lots of folks out from Winnipeg, from all over the province, but in particular from Winnipeg, people who wanted to know more about food that's produced. Messages out there are plentiful, negativity is plentiful, and people don't often know what's true and what's not. We had a really positive experience here in terms of answering questions, the floor was open to anything. All the issues that are often being communicated out there about different things, about the food that is being sold in grocery stores, we were able to address it, at least from the perspective of what we're growing. It turned out to be a very positive thing. Some

> of the challenges for producers is that we do have our hands full with all that, but it seems that what has changed is that what we've been doing for many years in terms of taking care of the land or the climate, recycling stuff that can get thrown out – anything from the waste from the animals to whatever, we're making use of it, and we're doing it well. And so sometimes we've forgotten to tell that story.... But those are challenges because you're now trying to prove that you're doing those things." – Participant 10, Manitoba Chicken Producers

At times this misinformation is also present between food producers in different industries, such as between producer organization farmers and direct marketing farmers who largely operate in different farming spheres. Ensuring accurate information is shared helps work towards a more just food system because it allows those who participate in it to make informed decisions that are best for them.

Certain participants noted the responsibility they believe they have as farmers in working towards reconciliation. Since food production in Manitoba largely takes place on Treaty lands, land that is most commonly managed by farmers through food production activities, there was an acknowledgement that farmers do have a role in working towards reconciliation:

> "I do think, as far as reconciliation, as farmers, as landowners, we do have maybe more of a responsibility than somebody that isn't living on a big tract of land and isn't managing land that we have only because of colonization. So that's a responsibility that we definitely feel is very serious to us." – Michelle Schram, Fresh Roots Farm (Food Accessibility Project).

A few participants mentioned there were ongoing efforts towards building relationships with First Nation communities nearby with the intention of learning (with the community's priorities in lead) how they as farmers can share their privilege and contribute to reconciliation in a meaningful way. As we saw in the literature review, addressing issues of injustice that are interwoven with the agricultural system itself, such as colonialism, is an important part of working towards a more just food system (Matties,

2016). These interactions are still quite new, and will have to occur on a greater scale with the participation of more farmers to truly ensure that goals of equity and justice are achievable.

Farmers' participation in public policy can also help move towards a more just food system, as their experiences as food producers can help inform and shape policy at various government levels:

> "I think absolutely, farmers shouldn't just be growing food, they should also be involved in public policy. There is a group called Farmers for Climate Solutions – that's pretty awesome that that's happening – and they're suggesting some very bold policy, which the Liberal government is adopting, which is amazing." – Jennifer deGroot, Big Oak Farm

Though this sort of activity may take place beyond the level of the local community, policy changes have the potential to impact individuals at the community level. For example, Direct Farm Manitoba has been working with the Canadian Farmers Market Coalition as well as other provincial level market organizations to obtain federal support and funding for voucher programs like the Manitoba Community Food Currency Program across provinces. If this is successful, consistent funding for this program would create an important impact for recipients of the vouchers as well as provide more income for direct marketing farmers in the program.

Throughout all three of these levels of everyday farming activities, consumer interactions, and community, it's important for farmers to talk about their experiences as food producers in the system that they currently operate within:

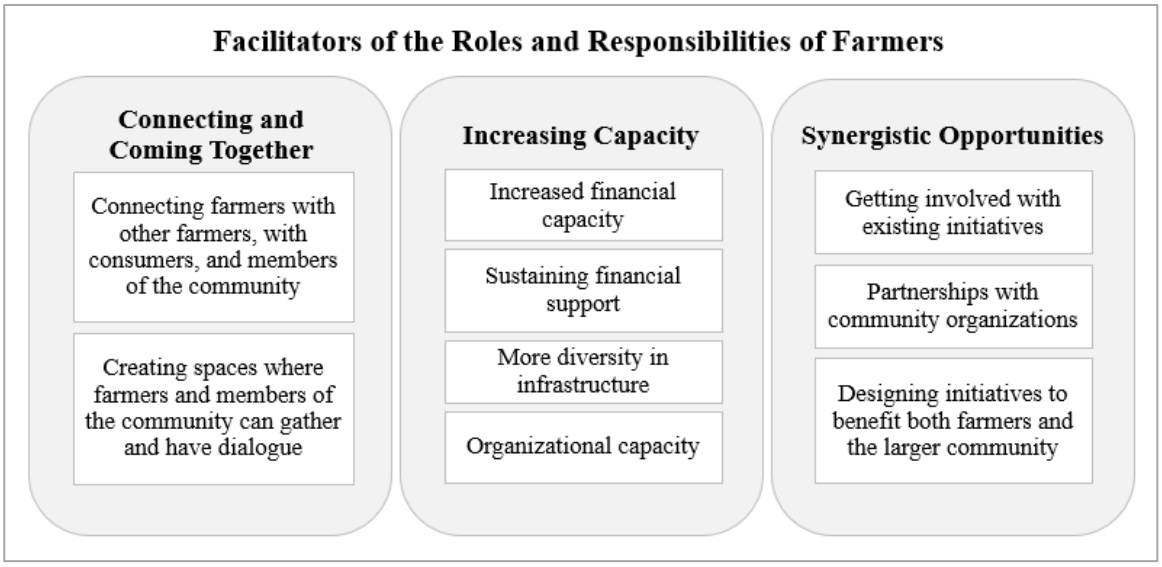
> "I think that we have to have conversations. What are the barriers to consumers? What are the barriers to producers? In the end, the only way to make any sort of change is to talk, to be willing to talk about it and willing to speak to our own experiences and be vulnerable." – Sara Yagelniski, Garlic Farmer and Young Agrarians Manitoba Apprenticeship Coordinator

Since farmers hold a unique position of the food system from where they stand as those who grow the food that feeds the rest of us – a perspective that many in their communities have likely never experienced – their perspectives can provide important insight on what needs to be improved in the food system. Afterall, a true equitable food system also includes the food producers themselves by ensuring they have access to a liveable income and to the ability to produce and distribute food in a way that is reflective of the more just food system we are working towards.

5.3 Ways to Facilitate these Roles and Responsibilities

Based on my discussion with participants, there were certain aspects of the initiatives and farmers' experiences in these initiatives that facilitated their ability to fulfill some of the roles outlined above. These are separated into three main themes (Figure 3): Connecting and coming together, increasing capacity, and synergistic opportunities.

Figure 3: Facilitators of the potential roles and responsibilities of farmers in working towards a more just food system



The first theme, *connecting and coming together*, reflects the importance of interactions with community members and the building of relationships have played in the creation and continuation of these initiatives, as well as the experience of farmers in building social connections while running and participating in these initiatives. Having spaces where farmers and other members of the community have been able to gather and have dialogue has contributed to the creation of the initiatives themselves, as well as influenced how the participants structured the initiatives. Farmers markets offer one gathering place where this can take place but having spaces to gather outside of market exchange activities is beneficial as well. In these initiatives, connections with other farmers, with consumers, and with community organizations has helped lead to better understanding of the barriers that currently exist, as well as potential opportunities to address them. Overall, since these initiatives aim to help members of the community, connecting with members of the community can facilitate creating awareness of issues that can be addressed, and identify community resources to do so.

A second facilitator of farmers' ability to fulfill their roles in working towards a more just food system is that of *capacity*, and specifically financial capacity. As we've seen, the farmers who have financial stability have more space to be more creative when it comes to creating and running initiatives, as well as to make decisions that don't have to prioritize profit-making but rather reflect the values behind why they farm in the first place, which in the case of these farmers are generally not profit-driven. This financial stability could be acquired through ensuring farmers are fairly compensated for their products, but it could also be ensured more broadly at a structural level:

> "There are so many programs and services that the government could be providing to help free up the time of producers so that they can participate more

> meaningfully in justice-oriented work. But it's not just about freeing up time, it's about making sure that they have guaranteed income and stability so they can weather the climate crisis etc. As I mentioned, I think that the majority of people who are entering small-scale, sustainable farming are doing so because of their values because the truth is, they're not going to make good money doing it. And so if you support people who are already values-driven, I think you will see them want to contribute more to increasing equity and justice in the food system." – Participant 5, Fireweed Food Coop (Waste-Not Food Box, The Veggie Van).

As mentioned by Participant 5, increased financial stability can also lead to farmers having more time available to them, which could free up their capacity to participate in more gatherings as mentioned previously. Increased financial stability could also be assisted with loan programs that are more accessible for smaller-scale farmers who do not have access to generational production resources and/or do not yet have the financial resources or collateral for the loan programs that are currently available to farmers and business owners. Such financial capacity would help farmers deal with the often precarious nature of their work, and, in addition to helping facilitate equity focused initiatives, would also help with experiences such as exhaustion and burnout.

Organizations who run initiatives in which farmers can participate would also greatly benefit from increased and sustaining financial capacity, as it facilitates their ability to not only continue to host these initiatives to increase access to locally produced food, but also to plan strategically to expand and grow these initiatives:

> "Now, not all of our farmers markets are participating yet because we have budgetary constraints, because at the present moment, we're just applying for funding from lots of different sources… But what we're really hoping is for sustaining funding like they have in BC and Nova Scotia where it's basically annual funding that's guaranteed to a certain level by the government, that tends to expand year after year. We're seeing that as the real way to make this a sustainable program at markets to help farmers, to help people in the community." – Kristie Beynon, Direct Farm Manitoba (Manitoba Community Food Currency Program)

Providing consistent financial support for an initiative like the Manitoba Community Food Currency Program would not only allow them to expand their program to other existing farmers markets in the province, but also to strategically distribute vouchers to communities where increased access to food is needed but farmers markets have had a hard time remaining viable over time – this program creates more income for farmers at these markets all the while increasing food access to members of those communities, making the establishment of farmers markets in those areas more viable than they would be otherwise. It provides access to food to those who need it, without compromising the income of farmers. Already in the spring of 2022, these organizational initiatives such as the Manitoba Community Food Currency Program and Fireweed's Veggie Van program had not yet secured funding to continue running the programs this year (e.g. Wichers, 2022). These financial obstacles keep initiatives like these in a precarious position – this is particularly problematic for small scale farming organizations where employees are often already limited in resources, and where funding is often given last minute, which makes preparation and strategic planning much more challenging and can compromise the potential impacts of these initiatives. Overall, increased and stable financial capacity would allow organizations like Direct Farm Manitoba to realize the full potential of their initiatives, and create stability not only for the organization but also for participants who take place in the program and rely on them to access food for themselves and their loved ones. It reduces precariousness across the board, and results in important benefits at the community level.

Increased capacity in the form of more infrastructure for local food also acts as a facilitator for this work. Increased infrastructure in the form of organizations such as

Young Agrarians and other organization mentioned in this research has already facilitated some of this work, but the addition of processing infrastructure would also contribute to this. We've seen here how Adagio Acres was able to fill a grain processing gap for smaller scale grain farmers. Processing infrastructure for smaller scales of farming is still quite precarious in Manitoba, particularly in the meat industry, as Michelle discusses here in relation to the way the recent COVID-19 pandemic impacted the food system:

> "One of the things I feel really strongly about is, it's kind of scary that we have a lack of processing capability in Manitoba. We are lucky to have a great one that we can use to legally sell our meat only 20 minutes away in Killarney, so our animals don't need to be transported that long. We talk to a lot of farmers that are transporting their animals an hour or more just to take them to the facilities, to an abattoir. And then a butcher – sometimes it's one in the same. And we do that, we bring animals in every month. We were sort of crossing our fingers that this small family owned butcher, nothing would happen with them, that they would stay healthy and wouldn't have to shut down. Because even just not being able to take two of our beef animals in one month, with our subscription and the fact that we're relying on that so much, we don't really have a lot of options to go to the next... We're just really limited in the capacity. And I find that really scary. A whole bunch of smaller places shut down after BSE[8], right? … We are booking in almost a year in advance with our butchers. So for somebody that's like, hey, I want to direct market, they might not even find a place to be able to get their animals locally done. The local butcher here, right in our community isn't provincially inspected – he can do it for your own consumption, but if you actually want to make a sale and you want it to be legal, there's only so many... And from what we know from our butchers, that process of getting approved, all the red tape involved with actually getting set up and crossing all the T's, that is a total nightmare right now… You don't see people wanting to start up an abattoir or a butchering plant because it's virtually impossible. It's a huge investment. And then you're working really hard and your margins are very tight in that business as well." – Michelle Schram, Fresh Roots Farm (Food Accessibility Project)

With farmers participating in these initiatives depending on such small numbers of facilities, with little to no back-up plans available, this puts both the farming on which

[8] Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, also known as Mad Cow Disease

they depend for their livelihood, as well as their initiatives, in a constantly precarious situation, unpredictably endangering their capacity to continue this work should something happen. This points to an ongoing need for increased processing infrastructure for small scale farming, as indicated in the Small Scale Manitoba Food Working Group report (2015).

I've marked organizational capacity as a facilitator of these initiatives because both direct marketing farmers and producer organization farmers have initiatives at the organizational level that they can participate in which, as we've seen, lessens some of the burden on farmers to create and maintain these initiatives as individuals. However, the established supply management system for both Manitoba Egg Farmers and Manitoba Chicken Producers appears to be able to provide sustainability for the long-term potential of their initiatives:

> "I would like to think that it will be a long term commitment for us with Manitoba Harvest and things like that. It is reviewed yearly, at a board meeting, but a lot of that stuff, once it seems to get started it, we're able to carry on." – Rick Lee, Manitoba Egg Farmers

Even though the initiative goes through a yearly review for the board to decide whether or not it continues, the capacity built within the supply management system appears to provide more reliability for the continuation of this initiative, as it is not dependent on external financial resources to continue to function but rather on the farmers on the board of directors to choose whether or not they continue with the initiative. This is in contrast to organizations like Direct Farm Manitoba and Fireweed Food Coop where external funding is required to keep these initiatives going. This is not to say that supply management is necessarily the answer for small scale farmers as well – when it comes to these initiatives, the supply management system is restrictive in other ways. For example,

the structure of initiatives occurring with direct marketing farmers appear to have more room for creativity in their structure, which has resulted in more community-specific ways to distribute food. It is, however, important to note the differences in capacity present across the organizations that run these initiatives and how this impacts their long-term potential.

The final facilitator of initiatives is that of *synergistic opportunities* for the creation of and participation in initiatives that work towards a more just food system. As we have seen, farmers create these initiatives on their own, it can add quite a bit of additional work to their already busy regular farming responsibilities. As a result, identifying opportunities where farmers can plug into work that is already being done to work forwards a more just food system may be a good way to facilitate their roles and responsibilities all the while contributing less to exhaustion and burnout. These strategies are already being applied in several of the initiatives featured in this research.

An evident opportunity for farmers to get involved without having to create an initiative from scratch is to get involved in already existing, organizational-level initiatives that are working towards a more just food system. Initiatives like the Manitoba Community Food Currency Program, Fireweed's two initiatives, and the two producer organization initiatives featured in this research do just that by providing farmers the opportunity to participate in the programs of their own willingness, in a way that doesn't require much additional work from the farmers themselves. These organizational-level initiatives provide meaningful opportunities for farmers to be involved in doing work that is reflective of their values without requiring a lot of additional capacity – this provides

an important solution between still working towards a more just food system but without putting all of that responsibility on the farmers themselves.

Another approach that several of these initiatives have employed is that of partnering with community organizations that are already doing work related to food access to create these initiatives. This happens on an organization-to-organization level with, for example, the producer organization initiatives where they have partnered with Manitoba Harvest. It also happens at the farmer to organization level, such as the Good Food Club where Slow River Gardens is partnered with the West Broadway Community Development Organization. Not only does this allow the farmers to have the support from the organization's own capacity, these organizations are also often much better informed on issues related to access to food, and have established relationships with members of the communities that they serve who can benefit from initiatives related to access to food. As a result, farmers are once again in a position where the responsibility is not all on them, and the initiatives themselves are also more likely to be well informed and directly address the food needs of their community. These partnerships with organizations are also not limited to increasing access to food, but can involve other important intersecting issues such as decolonization and reconciliation. For example, organizations can be better positioned than individual farmers in their relationships and their knowledge to facilitate consistent work towards reconciliation in the agricultural realm. In fact, throughout the interviews, some farmers explained how an organization had facilitated their own learning through hosting events with a local elder, while in another instant, an organization facilitated the beginnings of a relationship between farmers and a First Nation community in the province. In these instances, organizations' capacities and

bodies of knowledge can provide more informed pathways for farmers to participate in this work. This could be particularly useful when discussing land-redistribution, land governance, and colonization in relation to agriculture. For example, partnerships with organizations that are involved in the Land Back movement could provide guidance and opportunity for farmers to participate in and understand how they can contribute to decolonization. Overall, the acquired knowledge and capacities of organizations connected with food producers trying to improve their food system can help inform and improve this work in impactful ways.

A third synergistic opportunity that is present is finding ways to design initiatives so that they benefit not just recipients of the initiative, but farmers and the food system at large as well. This possibility is seen in the design of organizational initiatives like the Manitoba Community Food Currency Program, where the vouchers that make the food more financially accessible also increase farmers' income and can create necessary reliable income for new farmers markets that are still establishing a customer base. This synergistic opportunity also works towards the goal of increasing capacity, all the while increasing access to food.

Collaborations and partnerships in general, between individuals, with organizations, in various forms, can create synergistic opportunities for farmers to fulfill their roles in working towards a more just food system, without putting this necessary but at times heavy work on individual farmers. The importance of collaborations and partnerships speaks even more to the importance of creating spaces where different members of the community who may not interact otherwise can come together and

connect – these spaces have proven to be important catalysts to the creation of these initiatives.

One space I believe remains unexplored in terms of potential for synergistic opportunities are connections between different types of farmers. In the case of this research, the gathering of both direct marketing farmers and producer organization farmers in a common space during the focus group created opportunity for dialogue that does not often get the chance to occur, as they rarely occupy the same organizational and market spaces. Since both group of farmers are community-minded, there is overlap between some of the community-focused goals that these farmers have of working towards a more just food system. Both types of distribution systems have their advantages in relation to creating initiatives – direct marketing has a lot more space for creativity, while supply management holds more consistent capacity. This may be a space that has not yet been explored but may be important in terms of working towards a more just food system.

Since the role of working towards a more just and equitable food system is seen as one that, while includes farmers, also includes other members of the community, the facilitators mentioned here provide ways in which individuals and organizations in the community can contribute to already ongoing work to create a more just food system. The possibilities are quite expansive, particularly with the untapped potential of partnerships across different community-focused food producers in Manitoba. That being said, this is only possible if better and more sustained capacity can be reached, not only to reduce consequences such as burnout, but to ensure long-term and scalable impacts of these initiatives. This is where larger supports are needed, whether they're from

government or other forms of community resources, to assist in creating this capacity. This is particularly crucial at this time, with rising food prices which are having serious consequences on food access.

This concern, as well as the large-scale issues of land access and distribution of which farmers themselves have very little control over, point to the need for larger scale bodies to take on additional responsibility. This is where provincial and federal government have a larger role to play, if not by taking on the issue themselves, then by providing resources to bodies that have the knowledge and tools required to take on this role. Local government may also play a role here by contributing to change at the policy level (Rose et al., 2022). Overall, several existing equity and justice-related issues in Manitoba's local food system cannot be addressed singularly at the level of farmers and consumers.

5.4.1 Potential Facilitators: Disseminating Knowledge Products to the Community

Inspired by the principles of PAR and community-based participatory research, I chose to ask each participant at the end of their interview if there was a knowledge product useful for them and/or their community that I could create for them in reciprocity for their participation in the research. Though this work towards a more just food system cannot be addressed singularly at the level of farmers and consumers, these knowledge products could potentially act as facilitators to the work already being done, as well as create opportunities for future planning. These suggested ideas, which are reviewed below, provide an additional insight into the resources needed to help facilitate farmers' work.

Participants provided a variety of ideas, however two particular ones received the most support. The first was a list and description of initiatives similar to those included in this study that exist across Canada, and beyond:

> "As you've heard me talk, I've learned so much from what other people are doing in other places. Learning from other people around Canada would be wonderful as well." - Amy Nikkel, Adagio Acres (Grain CSA)

The second was a list of potential funding sources that can be accessed for those who are interested in starting similar initiatives:

> "I think something that I would be curious to learn more about and something that's always lost on me is the possibility for getting funding, or finding ways to access funding, specifically for things that we've been talking about, about making food more accessible to people. My hunch is that there's probably more funding out there than I'm ever aware of. And my hunch is that also, as most farmers are, we're always quite busy doing other things. And that's always felt like a bit of a limiting thing for myself... So I think that's something I'd be curious to learn more about, what are different organizations that can be tapped into, what are different government programs or initiatives that might already be in place that I don't know about." – Chad Wiens, Slow River Gardens (Good Food Club)

These knowledge products will be created over the summer of 2022. Once these knowledge products have been created, they will be distributed to participants as well as relevant farmer organizations that may find this information useful.

Other knowledge product ideas that were given included a list of potential funding sources for farming general farming activities, a review of what a food strategy is and a description of first steps towards creating one, a synthesis of information that would help organizations be more pro-active with policy ideas as issues arise, and a how-to guide for farmers who want to begin their own food justice related initiative. Though these knowledge products were not created for this manuscript in particular, one of the articles I plan on writing for knowledge-dissemination will be focused on the structure of these initiatives, and as a result, will provide an opportunity to help fulfill the idea for a how-to

guide for those who are interested in starting an initiative. This one seemed particularly important, as some participants expressed how logistics for how to create these initiatives can make it quite difficult to know where to begin. This is exemplified in this quote where Laura was able to share the logistics of a tiered pricing CSA model with another farmer:

> "I have a friend in BC who also runs a farm and who used that same model and now does that in their CSA because we were talking about it and the logistics of how to do it… Yeah, logistics are a big barrier for anyone doing small business work, but farming in particular. When I was able to say 'this is what you do', they were able to just do that, and then it wasn't adding another thing onto their plate." – Laura Tait, previously Heart Acres Farm

Another participant, who also mentioned this idea, iterated how this guide could also provide best practices for creating such initiatives such as a list of considerations, which could not only guide new initiatives but also help to improve existing ones.

There was also a clear desire for the results from this research to be shared with participants, as well as the larger community, which includes other farmers, consumers, and organizations that interact with farmers:

> "I would love to read whatever comes of this myself. I think that making something that isn't accessible, like I can read the thesis and be fine with that. But obviously not everybody is going to be fine with that. And so I think that it would be fantastic if there was some sort of accessible reading of it… It is helpful to know what other places are doing and what their plans are, or how they're moving forward, because sometimes we don't think of the same thing. So, I think for myself, anyway, that will be very helpful." – Participant 6, FortWhyte Farms

Emphasis was put on the need for these dissemination products to be synthesized and accessible, with one participant suggesting formatting the results into social media posts to make it easy for organizations to share on their social media platforms. In addition to sharing this published thesis with the participants in this research, I will be sharing a

plain-language summary report of the results which will be distributed via email to the participants themselves. After getting any feedback from the participants, this plain-language report will be distributed to key stakeholders in food systems work in Manitoba, including relevant government officials, policymakers, NGOs, and any other stakeholders identified by participants, with the purpose of this research being utilized to inform future actions within Manitoba's food system. In addition to the published thesis and the summary report, I will be submitting two articles for publishing based on this research, which, once published, will also be distributed in the same manner. I will also be seeking other potential opportunities to create additional dissemination pieces as this information gets distributed and opportunities for dissemination within the community emerge; for example, Direct Farm Manitoba now has a Patreon supported publication where farmers have been sharing articles, and one participant suggested that this platform could also be utilized to disseminate results in the form of a short article.

Participant's prioritization of knowledge products focused on learning about other successful initiatives, accessing funds for initiatives, and best practices for such initiatives really showcase farmer's interests in continuing to create and improve initiatives, despite the challenges that occur with doing so. That being said, the research needed to create these knowledge products is often not something farmers have the time to do themselves, which points to the importance of external resources in this movement towards a more just food system. Identifying where external resources are best suited to play a role can be facilitated by understanding how these initiatives relate to the changes needed in order to have a more just food system.

5.4 Bringing it back to the local food movement in Manitoba

As noted in the literature review, the local food movement in Manitoba has been focused on overcoming existing barriers for small scale food producers and on creating space for them within the existing agricultural system by engaging with government to do so (Sivilay, 2019). Many of the initiatives that were reviewed for this research emerged from the farmers and the organizations that are associated with this local food movement. As we've seen, some of those initiatives were designed in a way that they would help with the continued creation of space for small scale producers. However, there are also additional objectives present in the creation of these initiatives that go beyond simply creating infrastructure and aim to address existing problems within the food system and work towards increasing justice within it. This final results section provides an overview of the initiatives as they relate to Holt-Giménez and Shattuck's (2011) food regimes and food movements framework to understand how these initiatives relate to the potential for transformative food systems change.

Of the four categories of food regimes/food movements in Holt-Giménez and Shattuck's (2011) framework, different aspects of the initiatives considered in this work fall in various places throughout three of them: The reformist food security, progressive food justice, and radical food sovereignty. In simple terms, the reformist food security regime utilizes state-led assistance and philanthropy not to challenge market forces but to regulate and to re-distribute surpluses created by industry to eliminate hunger (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck, 2011). None of the initiatives included in the research belong exclusively in this category, however certain elements – particularly the re-distribution of surpluses and the dependence on philanthropy – can fall into this category. For example,

one of the instigators of the Manitoba Egg Farmers partnership with Harvest Manitoba was the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, where a surplus of eggs was starting to collect due to key buyers like hotels requiring less eggs. Surplus is also re-distributed through Fireweed's Waste Not initiative, which often gets food donations from vendors at the end of the weekly farmer's market they host during the summer. In terms of philanthropy, organizations such as FortWhyte Alive are funded by donations from businesses and individuals. However, none of the organizations listed above are advocating for increased trade liberalization, which is a key approach of the reformist regime (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck, 2011), and the organizations themselves hold characteristics from the progressive and radical food movements, such as ensuring that farmers are making a stable wage. The key consideration with initiatives that fall into this food regime when discussing food systems transformation is that they are focused on mitigating an ongoing problem (in this case, hunger), but do so in a way that is dependent on surpluses (in both food and money) created from the current system. The initiatives themselves do not address the cause of the hunger and as a result do not create structural change.

The progressive food justice movement generally focuses on empowering lower-income, oppressed, and underserved communities through the local production and processing of food, the creation of new business models, and overall community organizing and mobilizing to solve local problems (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck, 2011). This food justice trend is based primarily in the middle and working class, includes organic and agroecological food production methods on a local scale, embraces traditional knowledge, and is particularly popular with urban and university youth (Holt-

Giménez and Shattuck, 2011). Several of the initiatives involved in this research overlap with this food movement category, particularly those that seek to provide increased access to food to lower income folks in creative ways, such as the Good Food Club and the Food Accessibility Project. The motivation of farmers to create these initiatives to increase access to food as well as create more resilient food systems are aligned with the two food justice goals of increasing access to healthy food and establishing community control over food and agricultural systems (Alkon, 2017). A key takeaway of looking at these initiatives through this lens is that though they are beneficial and an important part of working towards food systems transformation, these initiatives are a "'patchwork' of successes and failures" (as cited in Holt-Giménez and Shattuck, 2011, p.125) – they are localized initiatives that are spread out throughout the province and largely disconnected from each other. Though their motivations and goals aim to address hunger by creating community-based structures that do so, the disconnection between the initiatives leads to a lack of potential for challenging the dominant food regime structure, and as a result, does not lead to transformative systems change.

The radical food sovereignty movement has several overlaps with the progressive food justice movement, but advocates for a radical transformation of society through the redistribution of wealth and power (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck, 2011). This is done through approaches such as the redistribution of land, government regulation of international markets, the strengthening of local and reginal food systems, and ensuring community rights to (healthy) food, water, and seed, all the while ensuring economic, ecological, and social justice (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck, 2011). These approaches, which focus on addressing structural causes of issues such as hunger, evidently require a

collaborative effort across a larger scale of individuals and groups. Some of the initiatives included in this research embody some of these approaches, such as sliding-scale pricing structures which do result in a re-distribution of wealth at a smaller scale. Participants also mentioned throughout their interviews the obstacles to land access and to the means of food production that exist, which also relate to food sovereignty approaches. Similar to Sivilay's (2019) conclusion that Manitoba's local food movement is aligned with the more progressive food justice movement, most of the initiatives in this research can be characterized by a progressive food justice approach. However; addressing the disconnect between the initiatives and creating a more unified front may provide more momentum for food systems change in the province, and more possibilities for tackling larger-scale issues – such as land-redistribution, which should include honouring Treaty 1 – that are not realistically attainable problems for individual food producers to tackle on their own.

There is also evidence of continued emergence of elements of food sovereignty in the local food movement that is found in other food sovereignty literature. One of the guiding principles for food sovereignty is the building of knowledge and skills (as cited in Matties, 2016, p. 7); initiatives such as Young Agrarians and FortWhyte Farms contribute to this goal. Throughout my interviews with farmers, there was evidence of emerging discourse in the direct marketing farming community about ongoing systemic issues in the food system and beyond, particularly in relation to racism and colonialism. There is also evidence of potential integration of perspectives and demands of marginalized, Indigenous, and immigrant populations, as was recommended by Sivilay (2019). This can be seen in steps taken to design some of the initiatives, such as the creation of a steering committee to help inform the design of the Manitoba Community

Food Currency Program. It may also be occurring in the creation of spaces for folks who participate in the food system but aren't as represented in decision-making spaces, as well as through developing relationships between farmers and First Nation communities. There appears to be an increased desire from farmers in the direct marketing community to create space for more inclusivity overall, which may lead to increased integration of perspectives and demands of marginalized, Indigenous, and immigrant populations in decision-making. If the goal is to create initiatives that lead to true distributive and participatory justice, the integration of such perspectives is crucial.

One of Sivilay's (2019) observations of the local food movement in Manitoba was that opting out of its relationship with a government unattuned to its needs and instead focusing its limited resources on functioning autonomously could be beneficial for embracing food sovereignty. As we've seen with the producer organizations involved in this research, their financial independence and regulatory influence provides them with a significant amount of capacity that gives these organizations the autonomy to make the decision to put into motion the community focused initiatives they provide. This is in contrast to organization-run initiatives in the direct marketing sector, which are generally dependent on external funding for these initiatives. This dependence on external funding can create uncertainty. Though external seed funding is often available, continuous funding has proven difficult to acquire – this is showcased in the Manitoba Community Food Currency Program's recent announcement that they did not get provincial government funding for the program to run their third year of programing this year. As a result, they've had to turn to the public to seek funding through donations. This approach to funding, though not necessarily as reliable as the capacity built by producer

organizations and their supply management system, may prove to be more reliable than certain forms of government funding – particularly if the government in power is not showing support for the local food system and the initiatives created within this system. I also believe it is important to note that though producer organizations do have more capacity to provide consistent initiatives, this capacity is created through working with the current economic system through regulation. As a result, it would be important to be critical of the source of this capacity and to consider whether this creates unintended obstacles for working towards transformative food systems change.

No matter where these initiatives fall across this framework, I want to acknowledge that this is not a reflection of the impacts these initiatives are having in helping people in Manitoba meet their daily food needs. This study does not measure their impacts, and working to meet people's food needs is important, particularly in a time where a series of events (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic and the increasing cost of living) has made access to adequate food through conventional market exchanges increasingly challenging for many. However, working towards a more just food system also requires a look at long-term goals for ensuring the food system is more equitable. When considering the larger local food movement in Manitoba, an appropriate question to ask may be: How do these initiatives fit into a bigger picture of the food system that we want to work towards? For an answer to this question, a common vision of what a transformed, more just food system in Manitoba could and should look like would be useful. The creation of such a vision should include the participation of food-insecure groups as well as groups who don't currently have access to means of food production. It could determine the role of government in ensuring a more equitable food system. The

creation of a common vision or common goals could create a pathway through which farmers and organizations can turn the current patchwork of initiatives into a more complete picture to understand how these initiatives are feeding broader food system goals for social equity throughout the food system. This would be especially useful to ensuring that limited resources are being well spent, which is particularly important for a movement that exists in an agricultural context dominated by large-scale, export-focused agriculture in a neoliberal corporate food regime.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to better understand the reasons behind farmer's decisions to create and/or participate in initiatives that aim to address inequities present in the food system in which they operate. I aimed to do so by using a phenomenological approach to understand the experiences and motivations of farmers for creating and/or participating in these initiatives, and to understand their perspectives about their roles and responsibilities as food producers in working towards a more just food system. I utilized transformative learning theory to understand the learning that occurs leading up to the plans and actions undertaken to create these social justice driven initiatives. I also applied Holt-Giménez and Shattuck's (2011) food regimes and food movements framework to understand how these initiatives fit into Manitoba's local food movement and their potential role in helping work towards food systems transformation.

Due to the phenomenological approach of this study, the results of this research regarding the experiences and motivations of farmers and their views on their roles and responsibilities as food producers in actively working towards a more just food system are best understood in the context of Manitoba and is not generalizable to all farming contexts. That being said, this research may provide a useful starting point for research on farmers in other similar socio-historical and economic contexts. The results of this study related to the potential roles and responsibilities that farmers can play, and the facilitators of those roles, may also provide a useful guide in other similar contexts. Overall, the results of this research are best used in the context of agriculture in Manitoba.

This research provides important insight into the reasons why farmers in Manitoba are deciding to create and participate in initiatives that aim to address social

justice issues in Manitoba's local food system. The farmers in this research are involved in initiatives that are focused on a range of purposes including increasing access to the food they produce through donations and food subsidization, creating spaces for folks less represented in the dominant food narrative, providing education and knowledge sharing opportunities, and other forms of resource sharing. They are motivated to do so based on their personal values, a desire to increase access and inclusion in the food system they work within, and a desire to create a more resilient food system within their communities and beyond. For many, their choice to begin these initiatives is integrally related to the reasons why they chose to farm in the first place. This research also provides important insight into the experiences of farmers while creating and participating in these initiatives. Though many have had beneficial experiences, particularly related to the experience of giving and building social connections, some farmers also experience feelings of isolation, exhaustion, and burnout. These less desirable experiences, which can lead to serious negative health impacts, were felt more often by farmers who create initiatives on their own in comparison to farmers who had access to an organization's capacity. Such experiences point to the need for the creation of and support for initiatives that allow farmers to participate in this work, without putting additional burden (financial, labour demands, or other) on farmers. It's important to note that the sharing of these less desirable experiences during the focus group was helpful in letting farmers know that they are not alone in that experience.

This research also provides important insight as to the potential roles and responsibilities farmers can provide in working towards a more just food system. Farmers provided a spectrum of answers as to what they believe their roles and responsibilities

should be. They noted how their positionality provides them with a unique perspective of the food system and direct access to land and the decisions they make to manage it. They also noted the cultural capital that smaller scale farmers are currently experiencing as a resource that can be harnessed for this work. However, they also noted that their ability to play a role in working towards a more just food system depends on the varying levels of privilege, awareness, and interests of farmers. Others noted the various challenges and limitations farmers already face as reasons why they may not be best suited to play a significant role. This includes challenges like making a living, experiences of burnout and overwhelm, and dealing with climate change and other crises, as well as limits in resources and capacities, in the scale of impacts, and the limits created by the economic system within which they have to operate. Since farmers do hold a unique place that can be beneficial in working towards a more equitable food system, an important course of action is to ensure they are able to fulfill those roles by creating mechanisms that address the various challenges and limitations they face. These mechanisms should aim to provide financial stability, increase infrastructural capacity, and increase equitable labour capacities. Such mechanisms of support could come from government and policy, as it often has in Manitoba's agricultural history; however, other community resources should also be explored as gaining government support can take time and postpone food needs being met at a community level. The structure of producer organizations that participate in supply management provides an interesting self-supported structure that creates capacity for farmers who participate in it, as well as initiatives that are run by those organizations.

The learning aspect of this research showcases how the initiatives discussed in this research don't occur uniquely from farmers participating in the food system – that the learning that led to the creation of these initiatives started before the farming itself, and is often intertwined with personal values that have been developed throughout their lives. Several participants shared how their interest and involvement in justice related issues began in high school and university, or is rooted in pre-existing personal values. These experiences and identities appear to create a foundation from which incremental learning continues to occur, leading to the creation of initiatives. As a result, participating in the food system itself may not be enough for farmers to become aware of its inequities, and additional education or experiences are likely required for farmers to become increasingly aware of justice issues in the food system within which they operate. This is important to be aware of, particularly if the goal is to get other farmers in Manitoba to become involved in addressing inequities in the food system as well. Starting with farmers who are already community-minded may be the more promising starting point when discussing transformative food system change.

To move towards a more just food system, it's necessary to first define what this just food system should look like, as farmers across production methods have varying perspectives of what this means. Farmers did provide specific roles and responsibilities that farmers can and, in some cases, already are playing for a more just food system. These included initiatives that farmers can take on at the level of their farm (e.g., providing fairly paid and meaningful employment), initiatives that can occur in the space of consumer interactions (e.g., providing a sliding scale pricing model), and actions that can be taken at the level of the community (e.g., education and knowledge sharing). The

data also revealed that these roles and responsibilities can be facilitated through the creation of spaces where farmers and others in the community can come together, through an increase in capacity – particularly financial - and through synergistic opportunities such as through partnerships with organizations. These facilitators provide an important reference point not only for farmers, but for other bodies in society to understand where they can contribute to already ongoing work to create a more just food system. In the end, it is crucial to understand that several justice-related issues in Manitoba's food system cannot be addressed solely at the level of food producers and consumers in the food system. It is also important to understand that if additional capacity is provided to community-minded farmers like those involved in this research, the possibilities for additional work for a more just food system is quite expansive. The untapped potential for partnerships across different types of food producers in Manitoba with similar community-focused goals – like the ones included in this research – is just one example of future work that has the potential to occur to improve the province's food system. If bodies such as provincial or federal government are looking to support existing initiatives, I believe the best route would be to support initiatives that are community-informed, that benefit farmers by increasing capacity in some form (e.g., a more stable income; more labour resources), all the while addressing an equity barrier on the side of the recipient as well, whether that be access to food or access to education.

This study provides important insight into how this patchwork of initiatives plays into the larger local food movement in Manitoba, and what this means for food systems change. While some initiatives have hints of food sovereignty, a majority of these initiatives fall into the progressive food justice because they aim to increase access to

healthy food and establish community control over food and agricultural systems. These goals are aligned with working towards a more just food system, but because they are occurring separately, there is no strategy to understand how these initiatives can help work towards food systems change, nor what this transformed food system could look like. This provides promising grounds from which to work from, and showcases that a more coordinated effort between initiatives is needed to create meaningful, large-scale change. This finding is crucial to consider, particularly due to the fact that resources in the local food system are quite limited. Creating a coordinated approach across initiatives provides an opportunity to ensure that limited resources are spent strategically to work towards larger food-systems goals related to equity.

This research shows that farmers in Manitoba that are creating and/or participating in social justice initiatives have the desire to increase the justice and equity present in the food system in which they operate. There is room for farmers to play a role in this work, particularly in relation to their unique positioning in the food system. Participants involved in this research also have the desire to do this work – this is evidenced by their desire for knowledge products that would help inform current and future initiatives in the province. However, it is also very clear that it cannot all be up to them, that additional capacities are required to sustain the work that is currently occurring, and that this responsibility extends beyond that of food producers in Manitoba. Though this conclusion is clear, the question of "who's responsibility is it" if not just farmers', remains to be answered.

From my own positionality, as someone who has previously worked within the local food system and has now taken part in this research, I believe there are different

levels of responsibility to consider when discussing who holds this responsibility. At the individual scale, I do believe that each person in our communities with the capacity to contribute should be playing a role in working towards a more just food system. This particularly includes people with significant financial and social capacity, such as middle class folks who consume much of the locally grown food. As we have seen in this research, this population is already marginally engaged in these initiatives largely through financial contributions. Contributing financial capital to improving the food system is an important option; however, there are likely additional ways in which these folks can contribute (or may already be contributing) by sharing other forms of capital such as their social networks. The role of this general public can be guided by organization-run initiatives like the ones included in this research.

At a macro level, I continue to return to the fact that food is a necessity for all of us, and that there is a responsibility present in that in itself to ensure that this required substance is accessible to everyone. This begins with ensuring that those who produce our food are adequately supported and taken care of. Throughout this work, there is a very evident theme of limited capacity, with many small scale farmers being low income themselves and experiencing burnout – signifying that they are going beyond their own capacities to do this work. Organizational capacity plays an important role here as well in helping to alleviate the workload of farmers and to provide justice-focused initiatives that farmers can contribute to. However, this only works of the organizations themselves also have adequate capacity to fulfill such a role, which isn't always the case in Manitoba's local food system. This general theme of lack of capacity points to a very serious gap in appropriate uptake of responsibility by those who have the capacity to do this important

work, or that a redistribution of resources is needed to ensure that those who can and want to contribute to this work have adequate resources to do so.

As much as opting out of government is a potential option to be considered in certain cases, I do believe that, as the primary body in our society that seeks to serve the public, government has an important role to play in working towards a more just food system. In the context of agriculture, this would mean that both the provincial and federal governments have critical roles to play in their respective jurisdictions to ensure that food producers are adequately supported and cared for. This support will only become increasingly important and necessary as our climate continues to change and farmers are faced with increasing challenges as they focus on being able to make a living, all the while providing a very essential service. Providing the tools that farmers need to support themselves and adapt quickly so that they can continue to produce the food needed to feed our population is critical for moving forward towards uncertain times.

If we want to prioritize improving the food system, this especially means supporting farmers who are community minded, who want to grow food in ways that improve our communities, to support new farmers who are choosing to become food producers with the interests of their larger community at heart. According to this research, it is clear that some farmers and organizations are ready and willing to fulfill some of the roles needed to improve the food system by sharing knowledge on food production, by creating spaces for and empowering those less represented and seen in the food system, and by helping to increase access to food in meaningful ways. In the context of this particular research, I believe an important course of action would be for the provincial government to provide the resources required by organizations to perform the

important work they are prepared to complete, as well as to build capacity in Manitoba's local food system by working with farmers and other important stakeholders to increase infrastructural capacity and provide needed supports.

6.1 Limitations

Like any research**,** the scope set for this research results in limitations as to my findings on the role of farmers in working towards a more just food system. In order to maintain this research within the scope of a Masters' thesis, I decided to focus specifically on farmers' perspectives. However, this did not include all farmers in Manitoba. Because this research focuses specifically on farmers who distribute their agricultural products locally, it excludes the perspectives of Manitoban farmers who primarily participate in other forms of food distribution. The absence of their perspectives in this research does not mean that these farmers do not hold any interest in working towards a more equitable food system – it simply does not fit within the scope of this research. Including their perspectives in conversations on working towards a more just food system at the provincial scale may prove useful. Agriculture is also influenced by a variety of stakeholders other than farmers, including governments, businesses, NGOs, experts, and social advocacy groups (Talukder et al., 2020). On a similar note, this research topic can and should also be studied from the perspective of key stakeholders in Manitoba's food system – some recommendations on further research are given below.

Another way in which scope may have limited this research is through the decision of using local as a scope for this research. As seen in the literature review, local food movements have various characteristics that may help facilitate the creation of more

equitable food systems, but local on its own does not guarantee transformative potential of foods systems. As a result, use of local as a scope throughout this research may have limited my findings for moving towards a more just food system, as it leaves out various other aspects of the food system in Manitoba. Future research could consider other levels of food production in Manitoba to gather a larger scale perspective on the possibilities for food systems change throughout the province, as is likely needed for transformative food systems change.

This research also has methodological limitations, particularly in the way that participants were reached. Because not all social justice work that is completed by farmers takes place in the public eye, this work likely did not reach all food producers in Manitoba who create and participate in social justice initiatives. Though the use of snowball sampling did help address this as it led me to interview participants I was not able to find through public information, this creates potential other limitations. Since farmers operate within specific social networks, it is possible that my sampling methods led me to only access certain networks of farmers, while others were not accessed at all. Accordingly, these results should be taken at face value, and should not be generalized as representative of all initiatives in the province, nor in the views of all farmers in the province who distribute their food within Manitoba.

There are also other limitations to consider regarding the participants included in this research. First, the fact that disproportionately more direct-marketing farmers were included in this research compared to producer organization farmers merits consideration. Though both these types of farmers have clear overlapping interests, I did also witness some clear differences in the way in which these farmers approach working towards a

more just food system. These differences were discussed throughout the results and discussion sections, but since this research only included three producer organization farmers that represented two of four supply management systems in Manitoba, statements made about producer organization farmers should not be generalized nor seen as ultimate. The results of this research were framed based on the participants involved, however different patterns and themes may have emerged if other producer organization farmers were involved as well. Second, though demographics were not collected from participants, the diversity of participants from a racial perspective was quite limited, with many self-identifying as being of settler origin. Though this is reflective of the settler origins of farming in Manitoba and the disproportionately white-owned farmland in the province, it is also not completely reflective of the diversity of farmers in Manitoba's local food system. I mention this here to acknowledge that certain perspectives are not included in this research, and that any large-scale undertakings towards a more just food system should, at the very least, ensure the inclusion of the various intersections of identities that exist in the food system and beyond.

6.2 Future Research

Several potential pathways for future research emerged at the level of these specific initiatives as well as at the larger level of the food system. Future research specific to the initiatives like the ones included in this thesis should aim to assess their collective impacts on Manitoba in terms of food security, as well as non-nutrition factors such as empowerment and other potential benefits experienced by the recipients of these initiatives. Such research would help us understand the real-life collective impact created

by these initiatives on Manitobans, and may provide useful information that could help in the justification of such initiatives receiving public funding. Another point of interest that has emerged is the importance of understanding why certain initiatives in this research (e.g. The Good Food Club) have been able to exist consistently over a long period of time, while others do not. Research could be useful for understanding what makes certain initiatives successful over time to understand how those successes could be applied to other similar initiatives. A third potential space for research is provided in the fact that these initiatives continue to evolve, and that new relationships are continuously emerging which will lead to new partnerships and potential initiatives. Additional research could explore these as they develop in order to understand what they tell us about the continuously evolving local food system in Manitoba.

Throughout this research, there was some mention for the desire to create a more comprehensive plan such as a regional food strategy. A regional food strategy could consider the initiatives like the ones included in this research, and also provide more focused guidance as to how these initiatives can contribute to greater goals in the food system. Such a plan could also include various types of farmers, including direct marketing and producer organization farmers – as we've seen, the potential for collaboration between these two farming sectors remains unexplored when it comes to their potential to work towards a more just food system together. A plan such as a regional food strategy could provide an opportunity to explore that potential.

Other potential province and/or nation-wide approaches for working towards a more just food system could also be explored. An example of this includes the possibility of considering food as a public good in Manitoba and the way in which this would impact

the food system in the province. Another example would be to explore how the implementation of a rights-based approach to food in Manitoba. Both these approaches could look specifically at the impact these approaches would have on addressing equity issues in Manitoba's food system.

6.3 Recommendations

These initiatives provide an important pathway towards addressing inequities in Manitoba's local food system, and as a result, should be taken seriously and supported. To reduce energy and labour demands on farmers which are already high, such initiatives should be prioritized at the organizational level. When initiatives are run using organizational capacity rather than relying on increased self-exploitation of farmers, this generally creates greater possibility for long-term initiatives that have the capacity to evolve and expand. That being said, there are certain items reviewed in this research, such as sliding-scale pricing, that can be applied at the farm level to increase access to food. In order for organization-run initiatives to be sustainable, there's a need for increased (financial) capacity for direct marketing organizations such as Direct Farm Manitoba, to ensure that initiatives can be funded sustainably. This could be achieved with consistent government funding, or if this is not possible (nor reliable), community-funded structures, or a structure similar to the ones utilized by supply management producer organizations, should be explored.

There is also unexplored potential that exists between different food producers that are community minded, such as the potential for collaboration between direct marketing farmers and producer organization farmers. Though these farmers are often seen as belonging to vastly different farming groups, their community mindedness

provide a space for overlap, in which collaborations for working towards a more just food system could be explored. Both of these distribution systems have their strengths; while direct marketing structures provide more room for creativity in terms of designing initiatives to address inequities, supply management systems provide more consistent capacity for farmers and their initiatives. Combining these strengths could potentially create impactful future collaborations. For these collaborations to occur, it would be useful to explore common perspectives of what a more just food system could look like, so that collaborative energy could be put towards those specific overlapping goals. In relation to this, it would be useful to create a larger, coordinated vision for what a more just, local food system in Manitoba could look like. This should include the perspectives of those who aren't as commonly represented in food systems decision-making, including those who experience barriers to access to food. Importantly, it should also include the perspectives of First Nation communities whose traditional lands this agricultural activity is occurring upon. Creating this clear vision would help ensure that the limited capacities that are put towards creating a more just food system are coordinated and informed. Such coordination could turn these often segmented initiatives into a concerted effort towards transformative food systems change that is also rooted in the historical, social, and political context of Manitoba.

Overall, the initiatives in this research are a symptom of a food system that does not succeed at adequately distributing food nor providing access to the means of producing food to everyone who needs it, and in this case, food producers are picking up some of this responsibility to try and address these gaps. Since many of these inequities are caused by existing market systems and land distribution systems, it's reasonable to

expect that solutions to these inequities will have to lie outside of these market mechanisms. As a result, the involvement of public sector and/or community is a reasonable expectation for addressing these inequities. Concerted efforts to work towards a more just food system requires the meaningful involvement of government, which also holds immense responsibility in ensuring everyone is fed, to help provide the capacity needed and desired by farmers in the local food system for addressing these increasingly exacerbated inequities in the province. This research provides an important start to identifying potential sustaining pathways for food producers to work towards a more just food system, and ways in which the larger community can participate in facilitating these roles. More work is needed to integrate the perspectives of those on the receiving end of these inequities to ensure that work towards creating a more just food system is effective, and to understand how to effectively direct and coordinate efforts to work towards transformative food systems change.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide for Farmers with Initiatives

1. How did you get into farming?
2. Why this scale and type of farming?
3. How do you define yourself as a farmer/food producer?

Information on the initiative:

4. When did the [name of initiative] start?
5. What led up to your decision to create it/participate in it?
    a. Was there a particular event that initiated this?
    b. Did you have to spend some time reflecting or examining your assumptions?
    c. When did you start planning this [name of initiative]?
    d. Were there any new skills you had to acquire to follow through with it?
6. Is there anything about your own experiences as an individual that encouraged you to start this/participate in it?
7. Is there anything about the community in which you farm and distribute your food that encouraged you to start this/participate in it?
8. Is there a long-term plan for this initiative?

Experiences participating in the initiative:

9. How has your experience been with creating/participating in [name of initiative]?
    a. Have you encountered any challenges or limitations?
    b. Have you experienced any benefits?
10. Is the initiative operating the way you expected it to?
    a. Is it achieving what you had intended it to?
    b. What kind of impact is it having?
    c. Do you think it's creating any unintended consequences?
11. What have you learned throughout this process of starting/participating in [name of initiative]?

Perspectives on the role of farmers in addressing inequities:

12. Do you think farmers in Manitoba have a role to play in making the food system more equitable and just?
    a. If yes: What is it/what should it be?
    b. If no: Why not?
    c. What, if anything, would allow farmers to make the food system more equitable and just?
13. How did you come to have this perspective?

Knowledge Product

14. For part of my thesis, I am working towards putting something together with my resources as a researcher, some sort of knowledge product, that I can give back to the community. Is there anything that I as a researcher can put together that would help farmers like yourself?

15. I plan on hosting a small focus group, later in the fall/early winter, where we can decide together what to do with this. Is this something you would be interested to participate in?

Appendix B: Interview Guide for Organizations with Farmer-Involved Initiatives

1. Tell me about the organization: How did it come to exist and what role does it play?
2. What is your role there?
3. How do you define or describe the farmers/food producers that you work with?

Information on the initiative:

4. When was the [name of initiative] created?
5. What led up to the decision to integrate this into the organization?
    a. Was there a particular event that initiated this?
    b. Did the organization have to spend some time reflecting or examining your assumptions?
    c. When did the planning begin for this and who was involved?
    d. Were there any new skills that had to be acquired to follow through with it?
6. How do farmers specifically participate in that initiative?
7. Have you received any feedback from those who participate in this?
8. Is there anything about the identity of the organization (and its members) that encouraged this?
9. Is there anything about the community in which you farm and distribute your food that encouraged the organization to do this?
10. Is there a long-term plan to this initiative?

    Tell me about what you had to do to make it happen

Experiences participating in the initiative:

11. How has your experience been with integrating this into the organization?
    a. Have you encountered any challenges or limitations?
    b. Have you experienced any benefits?
12. Is the initiative operating the way it was expected to?
    a. Is it achieving what you had intended it to?
    b. What kind of impact is it having?
    c. Do you think it's creating any unintended consequences?
13. What have you learned throughout this process?

Perspectives on the role of farmers in addressing inequities:

14. Do you think farmers in Manitoba have a role to play in making the food system more equitable and just?
    a. If yes: What is it/what should it be?
    b. If no: Why not?
    c. What, if anything, would allow farmers to make the food system more equitable and just?
15. How did you come to have this perspective?

Knowledge Product

16. For part of my thesis, I am working towards putting something together with my resources as a researcher, some sort of knowledge product, that I can give back to the community. Is there anything that I as a researcher can put together that would help the farmers that you work with?

Appendix C: Focus Group Guide

Introductory questions and check-in since interview:

1. What is your relationship to growing/producing food?
2. How have you been since the interview?
3. What is your favourite meal right now and why?

Presentation of results related to motivations and experiences:

4. What are your thoughts on these results?
5. Are there any motivations not covered here that you would like to share?
6. Are there any experiences not covered here that you would like to share

Presentation of results related to the roles and responsibilities of farmers:

7. What are your thoughts on these results?
8. Based on this, how do you think that you as farmers should move forward with this work?
9. What supports would you like to see to help you do this work?

Appendix D: Focus Group Reflection Sheet

Name:

1. How was your experience in this focus group? Is there anything you would like to add related to the conversations that occurred?

2. Based on the results you heard today, do you feel like your perspective is represented in this research?

3. Regarding sharing the results of this research (knowledge dissemination):

    a. Is there any specific information that you are hoping to learn from the results of this research?

    b. Is there anyone in particular that you believe the results of this research should be sent out to?

    c. Do you have any thoughts as to how this information could be shared with the farming community and beyond in an effective way?

4. Any additional thoughts/feedback you'd like to share?