

FORGING THE ORGANIC-INDUSTRIAL DIVIDE: THE NATIONAL ORGANIC
PROGRAM AND SMALL-SCALE ORGANIC AGRICULTURE IN
NEW YORK STATE

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In the last two decades, organics has become the fastest growing sector in U.S. agriculture, transforming the organic movement into an organic industry. However, organic agriculture currently finds itself at a historical crossroads with the 2002 implementation of the USDA's National Organic Program (NOP), prompting several questions: To what degree will the NOP reflect the goals of the organic movement or work as a proxy for the conventionalization of organic agriculture? How will the NOP affect the structure of organic agriculture? Will the small-scale organic producers that traditionally formed the core of organic agriculture become marginalized or will they continue to thrive?

To answer these questions, this work examines the role that the NOP plays in shaping the social organization of the organic marketplace. To begin with, utilizing agrarian political economy and food regime analysis this study places organics more centrally in the emerging trends of the global agro-food system by situating it within the larger historical context of modern food system. In doing so, it explores how agro-food movements, like organic agriculture, play a significant role in a modern food-system that is shaping up around the tensions between the drive by agro-food capital to further embed commodity relations in food production and the resistance to these efforts by agro-food movements.

Next, this study examines the national organic standards in a normative framework, an *organic standards moral economy*, whereby normative conceptions that construct ‘good’ organic production are codified and institutionalized. This reveals how the NOP facilitates the expansion of a certified organic market that privileges industrially organized production. In addition, this study utilizes interviews with organic producers in New York State to show that, although the NOP is an instrumental tool in reshaping the organic sector to favor conventional practices, due to a complex mix of economic and non-economic factors, the *agrarian footprint* in New York State supports a market space where small-scale producers are able to thrive. Lastly, this study concludes that there is increasing polarization in the organic marketplace along the lines of a sector organized by market values and one organized by the non-market values.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Robin Paige Kreider grew up in northern California. She attended the University of California at Davis where she earned a bachelor degree in Sociology in 1998, graduating with highest honors. After several trips to South Africa for work and volunteer activities, she attended Cornell University where she received a Master in Development Sociology in 2002. Her Master's thesis is entitled "Civic Community and Socioeconomic Well-Being in Upstate New York and the Canal Corridor Region." In addition to her work in small-scale agricultural production and organic agriculture, she has also researched civic participation and rural community development in New York State. Robin is currently head of the Sociology program at Gavilan College in northern California where she teaches courses on globalization, gender, community sociology, and social change. In addition, Robin leads the college's service learning program whereby students engage with their local community on social issues such as agricultural labor and community development as well as travel abroad to countries like Mexico, India, and South Africa to examine global development issues such as fair trade, industrial labor, and agricultural development.

This work is dedicated to my husband, Keith,
to my family, and to the memory of my friend and mentor Thomas A. Lyson.

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CHAPTER 1

ORGANIC STRUGGLES IN THE MODERN FOOD SYSTEM

“...[A]s food and eating are routinized on an everyday basis, food becomes a convenient medium for expression of social and ceremonial distinctions, and for naturalizing relations of community and hierarchy. As such, the symbolic meaning of food in any given context may be seen as sedimentation of historical structure of power and inequality that have been operating through generations.”

- Marianne Elisabeth Lien, *The Politics of Food*

Introduction

The National Organic Program (NOP) has found itself on the battlefield of food politics since its genesis. On October 23rd 2002, two days after the NOP was fully implemented, a Maine organic blueberry farmer and NOP organic inspector filed suit against then Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman. In the suit, Arthur Harvey charged that the USDA overstepped its boundaries in drafting the standards that guide the NOP – specifically, that the nine provisions of the new rule were out of sync with the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) of 1990 and dilute its organic standards. In 2004 a District Court in Maine granted summary judgment to the agricultural secretary with eight of the complaints and dismissed one. A year later, on January 26th 2005, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit reversed the District Court’s ruling with regard to two of the complaints. The court rulings • regarding the use of synthetic substances in processing organically labeled food and requirements for organic feed in transitioning dairy cows – will have a significant impact on the organic industry and the future direction of organics.

This court battle, one of several since the NOP was implemented, reflects the growing pains that organics is experiencing as it is transformed from a movement into an industry. But, it also has powerful symbolic meaning for many folks keeping a close eye on the NOP as the first few years of the federal regulation of organic agriculture unfolds. The ‘David and Goliath’ nature of the law suit – the small, organic blueberry farmer, who lives off the grid and without plumbing in a 168 year-old farm house, challenges the U.S. Department of Agriculture, promoter of pesticides and CAFOs¹ – reflects what many see as the battle between the true meaning of organics and the corporate/industrial vision of a profit generating organic industry. In this era of food politics, an enormous amount of economic, social, and cultural power is embodied in food, and organic agriculture finds itself in the middle of a contemporary struggle between *meaning* and *profit* in the modern food system. This study explores what role the NOP will play in the transformation of the organic sector and how small-scale organic producers will be affected by the new regulations.

The (Grass)Roots of a Movement

The modern agro-food system facilitates an increasing physical and psychological distance between people and the food they eat. Yet, with the current obesity epidemic and food safety issues such as mad cow disease and *E coli* contamination, consumers are looking for ways to wrestle back some control of the food they eat. Many believe that organic farming is the antidote to the social, health, and environmental ills of the industrial agro-food system and will help close the gap between consumers and their food (Sligh and Christman 2003; Halweil 2004). The organic movement is a critique of modern industrial methods of food production and a response to the extreme

¹ **Confined Animal Feeding Operations:** these operations confine hundreds and even thousands of animals in one indoor facility and produce large amounts of highly concentrated animal waste in the process.

commodification of food and the marginalization of rural livelihoods and culture. At its core, organic agriculture is a comment on society-nature relations, which are nowhere more manifest than in the production and consumption of food.

Over the last thirty years, as the organic farming movement emerged and grew, practitioners and consumers have seen organics as an environmentally friendly and sustainable alternative to the industrial food system. Proponents view organics as an alternative that produces healthier and cleaner food and promotes a socially just food system (Nestle 2002; Sligh and Christman 2002; Halweil 2004). Organics is also thought to usher in a ‘new agrarianism’ by enabling the resuscitation of the small family-farm, which has long considered by agrarian idealists to be the ideal social organization of cultural and environmentally sustainable farming. For most people organic farming brings forth the image of a farmer, not too different from Arthur Harvey, living close to land, tending a small farm, and placing his values and ideals above the pursuit of profits. Many fear the increasing conventionalization of organic agriculture will destroy the potential of organics to sustain an agrarian revival and support and nurture small-scale, family farms (Buck et al. 1997; Goodman 2000; Guthman 2004; Pollan 2006).

From its genesis organic agriculture was an agriculture of small-scale producers and family farms. In the beginning these small producers were often back-to-the land idealists and visionaries, but over time organics became a real alternative for small producers who wanted to stay viable in an industrial food system that was becoming increasingly hostile to them with its rapid vertical and horizontal concentration. There is a growing concern that conventional agriculture’s mantra of “get big or get out” will soon apply to organic agriculture and that organics will soon fit the same conventional mold it once stood in opposition to. In fact, these fears are not totally unfounded, as

most of today's corporate organic behemoths, such as Cascadian Foods² and Earthbound Farms³ started as small family farms decades ago (Pollan 2001; Sligh and Christman 2003).

However, since the mid 1980's small farms that focused on direct-marketing grew side by side with larger operations and the entry of corporate food giants. At the same time a system of self-regulation in the form of organic certification emerged to support and organize the growing organic sector, and both large and small, corporate and grassroots operations worked within a network of independent regional and state organic certification agencies (Guthman 2004). Some certification agencies served a specific group of producers, often in specific regions and of a specific scale; while others worked with a large variety of producers.

One of the greatest challenges to the organic movement's longevity and integrity since the emergence of the first certification agencies in the late 1970's has been the regulation and institutionalization of organic production and processing methods. Putting ideals into practice is always difficult and the development of organic standards over the last thirty years has been a challenging process. The organic farming movement, as socio-political force, has not always been easily translated into industry practices, standards, and labels. Early standards and certification programs attempted to operationalize and enforce the meanings, values, and philosophy reflected in the organic movement. The goal of these programs was to serve the broader public and keep organics accountable to consumers, but also to protect the

² Cascadian Foods started as small farm established in 1971 in the Cascadian mountains by Gene Kahn with the idea of growing food to fight the industrial food system. Today Cascadian Foods, one of the largest organic labels, is owned by General Mills of which Kahn is now a vice president.

³ Earthbound Farms was started in 1984 by two self-described hippies who started growing lettuce and berries and selling to restaurants and on roadside stands. In 1995, after 10 years of incredible growth, they merged with a conventional salad mix operation and since then have entered partnerships with several conventional vegetable growers. They have also expanded geographically with 1600 acres in Baja California growing off season lettuce and tomatoes.

organic industry (Guthman, 2004) by organizing and regulating the small but burgeoning organic market.

Prior to the NOP a multitude of certification agencies operated under their own certification standards facilitating a significant amount of variability among certification programs, creating some consumer confusion, and placing a significant strain on the growing market for processed organic foods. The 1990 Organic Foods Production Act was a response to these issues and required, via the USDA and the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), that a set of uniform national standards be determined for growing, processing, and labeling organic foods. What is now known as the USDA's National Organic Program emerged to monitor and implement the national standards and centralized certification, signaling a critical crossroads in the development of the organic marketplace as only one set of production standards behind the organic label is now possible. This is especially important given that the creation, monitoring, and implementation of the standards will be largely managed by the USDA – a governmental organization historically hostile to organic practices and the organic movement.

The research presented here revolves around two central issues in modern organic agriculture in which regulation plays a key role. The first is the tensions between the meanings/values that form the core of the movement today and the profitable industry it is becoming. These tensions come to a head in the regulation of organic agriculture when the philosophy and values behind a movement must be translated into standards that organize production for capitalist markets. The second, and related issue, is the ability of organic agriculture to hold onto its agrarian ideal and support small-scale family farmers as the industry grows and organic regulation changes. The regulatory structure created by the NOP through the (re)definition and codification of *organic*, will determine who can and cannot participate in the organic market and thereby allow

the producers who are most successful under those definitions to shape the conditions of market participation for other producers. In the following sections I will look at the organic movement's challenge to a profit driven agriculture and its focus on agrarian and relocalization ideals.

Challenging the Modern Food System: Tensions between Meaning and Profit

“There is a dialectical relationship between the greater abstraction associated with corporate foods and the intimacy of fresh and organic food that expresses both locality and sustainability.”

- Philip McMichael, *The Power of Food*

Organic agriculture emerged as response to the excesses of industrial, profit-driven agricultural production and the marginalization of rural culture. Towards the last quarter of the twentieth century social movements around food began to emerge, and organic agriculture was among them (Belasco 1989). These movements sought to challenge the forces of agro-industrialization that organized the production of food around market principles and that privileged economic relationships over social and ecological relationships. Proponents of organic agricultural practices see it as a way to narrow the gap between the field and the table and the producer and consumer by reembedding agriculture in communities and nature.

Although ‘organic’ ideas had already been planted in the early 1900’s by agricultural visionaries such as J.I. Rodale (Sligh and Christman 2003; Guthman 2004), organic agriculture remained on the fringe until after the second half of the century when the effects of the industrial food system were becoming more apparent. In 1962 the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* was perhaps the first great challenge to industrial agriculture, creating a public awareness to the dangers of

pesticides and launching a movement against the use of pesticides in food production. The organic counter-movement emerged in this context in a more radical form in the late 1960's and gained steam with counter-culture movements such as the back-to-land movement (Belasco 1989). But it wasn't until the 1970's, with the formation of state and local organic farmer organizations that the movement began to take a more concrete shape and evolve. Several organizations – Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association in 1971 and California Certified Organic Farmers in 1973 • began to form and define uniform standards for production and establish certification programs to verify farmers' practices. These organizations began the grassroots institutionalization of standards for organic production, which transformed the movement from one based on ideas to one in which those ideas were put into practice.

Today there is not one unified organic vision or argument but a multiplicity of actors and groups invoking different organic visions. Yet, the roots of the organic agriculture movement as a whole are grounded in an ideological and philosophical vision that rejects the major foundations of industrial agriculture – capital intensive, large-scale, highly mechanized, off-farm chemical inputs, and monoculture crops. From the beginning organic agriculture developed as the antithesis to industrial agriculture, with a focus on local knowledge, on-farm recycling and low inputs, small-scale, low mechanization, crop diversity, and care of the soil. Agro-industrialization follows a profit-driven model of development, in which rural products became disconnected from the local ecology, community, and culture (McMichael 2000; Lyson 2004). The farm-to-table and producer-to-consumer linkages are broken down and abstracted as agricultural products go from food to industrial inputs and rural labor is pulled from the countryside and into industry. While industrial agriculture seeks to control, simplify, and standardize complicated natural systems, organics seeks to work with and incorporate these systems.

Simply put, the organic philosophy focuses on nurturing the *meaning* in agricultural production or the ‘culture’ in agriculture. From this perspective, agriculture cannot be separated from the social and cultural nature of both production and consumption. Industrial agriculture, on the other hand, focuses on *profit* generation through a highly rationalized agricultural system that requires the suppression and appropriation of the cultural and natural foundations of agriculture. However, in this work I argue that there is new food politics emerging in the global agro-food system of the 21st century in which the line between *meaning/values* and *profit* is becoming obscured and often inconspicuous. The NOP reflects this blurring of *meaning* and *profit* as agro-food capital has begun to mobilize and articulate around alternative food production in response to environmental and food movements. This work will situate the NOP in the larger political economy of the current agro-food system shaped by the tensions between *meaning* and *profit* with the aim to understand how the structure of organic agriculture is changing and what role the NOP plays in these changes.

Agrarianism and Civic Agriculture

“If all farms in the country were managed organically, both our people and our land would undoubtedly be healthier and there would be a considerable ramification of the benefits. And yet the 700- or 900-acre organic farm equipped with up-to-the-minute machine technology cannot be considered the solution to all our agricultural problems, or to the problems that grow out of our agricultural problems. If we accept this as a solution, we forswear, for one thing, any further discussion of the cultural and political importance of the small landowner.”

-Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America*

The philosophy behind modern organic farming is not only to resist the extreme commodification of food, but to reverse the marginalization of rural culture and rural livelihoods. As a social and ecological movement, organic farming emphasizes local/indigenous knowledge, a sense of place, small-scale production, and re-embedding farming in community. This philosophy has its roots in agrarian philosophy, popularized most recently by writers such as Wendell Berry (1986) and Wes Jackson (1984, 1990), and agricultural localism, or as it has more recently been termed by Thomas A. Lyson, *civic agriculture* (Lyson 2004). These philosophical roots frame the big versus small dichotomy that structures the organic movement. Organic farming is envisioned as small-scale, family farming embedded in community, ecological sustainability, and embedded in rural culture. Conventional agriculture on the other hand tends toward large-scale, corporate farming that is anonymous, exploitative, and unsustainable. Although both agrarianism and civic agriculture link small-scale family farming with social and ecological sustainability, agrarianism is most concerned with the form of agricultural production and civic agriculture focuses on linking producers and consumers through localized distribution and consumption of agricultural products.

For many, an organic philosophy is an agrarian philosophy (Berry 1986; Jackson 1990) and the organic movement is seen as the latest manifestation of an on-going and historical struggle between agrarianism and industrial concentration. Agrarianism's primary focus is on the form that agricultural production takes (Guthman 2004) and the debates revolve around the big versus small philosophy. It is concerned with corporate power, concentration in the agro-food system, and the increasing large-scale organization of farming. The unit of production is linked with social justice and sustainability by claiming that the small-scale producer's

relationship to the land provides a more social and ecological management of the land and agricultural production (Berry 1986; Guthman 2004).

Good farming, according to agrarian philosophy, necessitates that farming be small-scale and family owned and operated. To begin with, the small farmer is coupled with the idea of responsible ownership. Small-scale producers are good stewards of the land because they own and they farm it. Only owners who work on their own land will be inclined to manage it in an ecological and sustainable way. But, a good steward will not own too much land, which will lead to oversimplification of management and a delinking of the farming process with the processes of nature (Berry 1986). Responsible farming therefore, is small-scale farming. Small-scale farming also supports what agrarianism considers the logical unit of production – the family. On a small farm the family provides the labor, and the income that is generated takes care of all family members. The small-scale family-owned and operated farm is also a self-sufficient farm.

In addition to focusing on the *production form* that agriculture takes, the organic movement has philosophical roots in agricultural localism or civic agriculture (Lyson 2004). Civic agriculture focuses on what happens ‘beyond the farm gate’ and the *form of distribution and consumption*. In civic agriculture farmers are directly or closely linked to consumers, relocalizing both production and consumption. Farmers’ markets, community supported agriculture (CSA), and community gardens are all forms of civic agriculture that are almost synonymous with organic farming and are popping up all over the country.

Proponents of civic agriculture say that agricultural activities are tightly linked to the social and economic development of communities and that, as farms are forced to get big or get out, there is a disconnect from local communities. A relocalization of agriculture, in terms of production and consumption, is both good for communities

and good for farmers. Localizing food production and consumption is seen as a way for small farmers to compete in the marketplace with highly industrialized corporate foods and as a way for them to remain viable. For communities, the localization of agriculture is a way for them to buffer themselves against the globalized food system and the increasing distance created between consumers and their food. It is also seen as a way to build healthy communities. According to Lyson (2001 et al., 2004), a smaller-scale, more localized farm system promotes civic engagement in communities and builds extra-market relationships between people, groups, and institutions.

Organic farming has embraced many of the ideals of agrarianism and the civic agriculture movement, focusing on small-scale family farming as the socially and ecologically superior form of production. Organic agriculture does more than just borrow these ideals; it also presents organic farming as a way to *achieve* these ideals. Organic farming and the consumption of organic food is often presented as a way of promoting the sustainability of communities, in addition to the sustainability of the environment, farm families, and rural culture. Organic farming and small-scale farming are synonymous for many people and is often seen as the only viable option for producers that want to start or remain small scale. Embracing the elements of agrarianism and civic agriculture, the organic farming movement has been presented and understood mainly as a small-scale farming movement. But, as the organic industry rapidly grows many have questioned whether the organic industry has remained, or can remain, true to its philosophical and ideological roots (DeLind 2000; Allen and Kovach 2000; Guthman 2004).

The shape and character of organic agriculture is changing from a sector primarily dominated by small-scale family and hobby farms and grassroots certification agencies to a production and retail sector in which a plurality of economic and ideological actors operate and potentially compete with each other for market

share (Buck et al.1997; Guthman 2000, 2004, 2004 [July]; Coombes and Campbell 1998). Even as agribusiness presence in the organic sector has increased, the sector has continued to be seen as a safe haven for small-scale producers and family farmers. But, many fear that this may be changing with the implementation of the NOP. Although the NOP does not signal the initial movement of large-scale, conventionally minded producers into the organic market – this is a trend that has been gaining momentum for well over a decade – it does signal a historic crossroads for organic agriculture. With a monopoly of the organic label, the USDA standards and regulation for organic production under the NOP are reshaping the character and nature of the organic marketplace. The universal organic standards define who can use the organic label and what is *organic* – concentrating an enormous amount of control over the organic sector that no one certifier had prior to the NOP.

Like earlier scholars (Buck et al. 1997; Guthman 2000, 2004, 2004 [July]; Hall and Mogyorodó 2001; Coombes and Campbell 1998; Lockie and Halpin 2005), I am concerned with the question of whether the changing organic sector will lead to a marginalization of small-scale organic producers. However, in this study I argue for an understanding of changes in the structure of the organic agriculture that goes beyond documenting the economic relationships in the organic marketplace by centering the focus on how the *normative framework* of organic regulation structures economic activities and relationships in the organic sector.

The Study: Whither the Small Farmer?

This study is one of the first extensive social science studies to examine the National Organic Program (NOP) and how it is likely to affect small-scale organic producers. In the following chapters I will consider how the NOP reflects a historic crossroads in the trajectory of organic agriculture and how the trends toward

conventionalization in the organic sector will not mean marginalization of the small-scale organic producer. The NOP reflects a historic turning point in organic agriculture as it is transformed from a social movement to an industry. Although we can assume that the effects of the NOP on organic agriculture will unfold over many years, an examination of the emerging trends surrounding the implementation of the NOP is timely. Organic agriculture is the fastest growing sector of U.S. agriculture and more and more consumers are looking to organic agriculture as an alternative to industrially produced food and looking to nurture both the ecological and social relations of food production. In Chapter Two I provide an overview of the growth of organic agriculture in the United States and the changing organic marketplace.

The data for this study come from two rounds of interviews with organic producers in New York State conducted between 2003 and 2004 and ongoing archival research on the origins and changes in organic regulation and the politics surrounding organic production, certification, and regulation. In addition, I met with and interviewed several employees of certification agencies and organic advocates in New York State and attended organic industry meetings and events between 2002 and 2005. New York State presents a good case study to examine the effects of the NOP on small-scale producers for several reasons: it has a large number of small-scale organic producers; there are a large number and variety of venues for organic products (farmers' markets, grocery store, wholesalers, etc.); and there is an active and vibrant alternative agriculture movement. Focusing on producers in one region also enables me to make some generalizations, but avoid a tendency toward universal claims. In Chapter Four I review my farmer-centered research design and my data collection and analysis methods.

The research for this study is designed around several goals. The first goal is to understand how the NOP reflects the tensions between *meaning* and *profit* in the

modern agro-food system. To do this, in Chapter Three I review the current literature and debates exploring organic agricultural change and I argue for the need to place these more centrally in the emerging trends of the global food system. I lay out a theoretical framework that draws on several literatures from agrarian political economy and economic sociology to understand the role of the NOP in the trajectory of organic agriculture. I place the NOP and organic regulation more centrally in the emerging trends of the global agro-food system by situating them within the larger historical context of modern food system through ‘food regime’ analysis first introduced by Friedman and McMichael (1989). Food regime analysis enables an understanding of the larger role of regulation and social movements in structuring agrarian relationships of the larger agro-food system. Agro-food movements like organic agriculture play a significant role in the emerging third food regime, because according to Harriet Friedmann (2005) the modern food-system is shaping up around the tensions between the drive by agro-food capital to further embed commodity relations in food production and the resistance to these efforts by social movements that articulate around food and agriculture. What results, Friedmann argues, is ‘green capitalism,’ whereby agro-food capital responds to the claims of agro-food movements such as organic agriculture through a selective appropriation of the demands that best fit with profit generation and market expansion. In this way, the NOP is significantly different than previous incarnations of organic regulation, especially as an example of public regulation in an era of increasing private regulation.

The second goal is to understand the regulation of organic agriculture in new ways that can account for the countermobilization of agro-food capital. Organic regulation is often understood as simply reflecting the practices preferred by those actors who have come to dominate the organic sector. However in Chapter Six I examine the NOP regulations in a normative framework – an *organic agriculture*

moral economy – whereby normative conceptions that define and construct ‘good’ organic production are codified and institutionalized. Using Foucault’s (1977) concept of a *disciplinary institution*, I examine how the NOP facilitates the development and expansion of a ‘certified’ organic market that privileges industrially organized production and reorganizes how power is distributed in this market. This framework enables a way to examine the apparent anomaly of organic standards whereby regulation can both encourage agribusiness appropriation of organic sector, but at the same time enable and support the transformative potential of organic agriculture. In addition, we are better able to see how the tensions between *meaning* and *profit* are played out in the regulation of organic agriculture and how the regulations provide a mechanism for the countermobilization of agro-food capital.

The third goal of this study is to understand how the NOP will affect small-scale organic producers and the structure of organic agriculture. Based on a case study of organic agriculture in New York State, I argue in Chapter Five that the historical and spatial development of agro-industrialization in the U.S. has led to a unique agrarian footprint in New York State that supports a market space where small-scale producers are able to thrive, due to a complex mix of economic and non-economic factors. In Chapter Seven, I argue that although it may appear that a food system organized around a ‘green capitalism’ will lead to the marginalization of small-scale organic producers, that in fact ‘new agriculture’ market spaces (Lyson and Green 1999) are emerging where producers who identify with and practice non-market values are likely to thrive. This results from the ability of small-scale producers to capitalize on the inherent contradictions of a growing industrial organic sector and maintain legitimacy with a growing number of consumers who are responding to increasing politicization of food and agriculture movements.

To conclude, in Chapter Eight I bring my analysis together to reflect on the main conclusions of the study. I present my argument for the bifurcation of organic agriculture along the lines of a sector driven towards *profit*, what I call ‘organic-industrial’, and a sector driven by *meaning*, what I call ‘organic-local’. In addition, I discuss what the changes in the organic marketplace tell us about the emerging trends in the larger agro-food system. To conclude this chapter I present suggestions for future research to address the questions that this study could not and to explore some new questions that this study has brought about.

CHAPTER 2

REGULATING THE GRASSROOTS: MODERN ORGANIC AGRICULTURE AND THE NATIONAL ORGANIC PROGRAM

"An organic farm, properly speaking, is not one that uses certain methods and substances and avoids others; it is a farm whose structure is formed in imitation of the structure of a natural system that has the integrity, the independence and the benign dependence of an organism."

- Wendell Berry, *The Gift of Good Land*

Introduction

In the last two decades, the consumption of organic food has steadily increased and organics moved from a niche market to the fastest growing sector in U.S. agriculture. Since 1990, growth in organic retail sales rose by twenty percent or more annually, and in 2000 organic sales reached \$7.8 billion (Greene and Dimitri 2003). As the organic market continues to grow, we see the steady entry of agri-business firms and conventionally-minded startups. The face and character of organic agriculture is changing from a sector primarily dominated by small-scale family and hobby farms, and grassroots certification agencies, to a production and retail sector in which a plurality of economic and ideological actors operate and potentially compete with each other for market share. Along with these changes, organic agriculture finds itself at a historical crossroads with the implementation of the USDA's National Organic Program (NOP).

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the current state of U.S. organic production and distribution, the history of organic certification, and recent changes

with the NOP. I begin by discussing organic production in the U.S. in terms of commodities produced, the number and size of organic farms, and the sale and trade of organics. Next, I examine the organic marketplace by looking at the concentration in the organic retail sector, the recent emergence of organic giants, and ‘Big Food’⁴ acquisitions. I then look at the early organic certification, the passing of the 1990 Organic Food Production Act, and the decade-long struggle to develop a Final Rule on national organic standards. I conclude by discussing the institutional structure of the NOP, the new organic standards for certification, and the ongoing political struggles surrounding these regulations.

What is Organic Farming?

Although the organic movement encompasses a diversity of issues surrounding food production and consumption, organic farming in particular refers to agricultural production systems used to produce food and fiber. According to the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (“The principles of organic” n.d.):

Organic agriculture is an agricultural system that promotes environmentally, socially, and economically sound production of food, fiber, timber, etc. In this system, soil fertility is seen as key to successful production. Working with the natural properties of plants, animals, and the landscape, organic farmers aim to optimize quality in all aspects of agriculture and the environment.

Organic farming management relies on both developing biological diversity in the field to disrupt habitat for pest organisms, and maintaining and replenishing of soil

⁴ The term ‘Big Food’ is often used to refer to the largest food manufacturing and retail companies such as Nestle and Philip Morris (Lyson and Raymer, 2000).

fertility. All kinds of agricultural products are produced organically, including produce, grains, meat, dairy, eggs, fibers such as cotton, flowers, and processed food products. Some of the essential characteristics of organic systems include the design and implementation of an "organic system plan" that describes the practices used in producing crops and livestock products, a detailed recordkeeping system that tracks all products from the field to point of sale, and maintenance of buffer zones to prevent inadvertent contamination by synthetic farm chemicals from adjacent conventional fields.

Yet the public commonly understands organic farming more narrowly, as a way of producing food and other agricultural products without the use of synthetic or chemical pesticides and fertilizers. This limited connotation arose in part as organic agriculture gained significant popularity and consumer support in the late 1960's. Specifically, people became more concerned about the effects of industrial food production on their health, the environment, and issues surrounding both agricultural labor and the decline of the family farm. As the public became more aware of the negative environmental effects of pesticides like DDT, people began to think about natural alternatives to pesticide use, and organic agriculture became popularized in the American consumer's consciousness as 'pesticide-free' production. However, organic farming methods go far beyond the production inputs.

Thirty years of evolving organic certification organizations and standards have struggled to find a common definition of organic farming and a set of standards that reflect the philosophy of the organic movement, respond to consumer desires for healthy and sustainable food, and support the growing organic industry. The challenge faced by the National Organic Program (NOP) was to create a set of standards that respected the legitimate regional variations for production and distribution, streamlined trade, and minimized costs and requirements that might block market

access. While doing so the NOP was to remain true to the vision of the organic movement and consumers' perceptions of what organic means.

Organic Production in the U.S.

In the U.S. the organic subsector is quite small in comparison to conventional agriculture, with less than one percent of U.S. farmland certified as organic. In 2001 48 states had over 2.3 million acres devoted to cropland and pasture, yet only 0.3% of all cropland and 0.2% of all pasture and rangeland was certified organic. California led the pack with around 150,000 certified acres in mostly fruit and vegetables, while North Dakota had almost 145,000 certified acres dedicated mostly to field crops (Greene and Kremen 2003)⁵. There is a strong geographical division in all organic production, with almost two-thirds of organic cropland in the western half of the U.S. (Klonsky et al. 2001).

In terms of dedicated acreage, certified organic does not mimic conventional agriculture. In 1995, field crops such as corn, hay, wheat, and soybeans comprised over 80% of U.S. farmland, while only 49% of organic cropland was devoted to these crops. A higher percentage of organic land is dedicated to fruit, vegetables, and specialty crops than in conventional agriculture. Orchards were 8% of organic cropland, compared with only 2% of all crop land, and 12% of organic cropland was dedicated to vegetable production, compared with only 1% of all cropland (Klonsky et al. 2001). These figures show that, in general, organic production remains concentrated in fruit, vegetables, and specialty crops.

⁵ Unfortunately these statistics are only for certified organic acreage and do not take into account land that is managed organically, but not certified.

Organic acreage has increased significantly in the last decade, and production in specific sectors has skyrocketed. Table 1 shows a snapshot of the changes in the last decade focusing on the years with the most rapid growth (1997- 2001).

Table 1

U.S. certified organic farmland acreage, livestock, and farm operations, 1997-2001

Year	1997	2000	2001	Change	
				1997-2001	2000-2001
U.S. certified farmland (acres):					
Total	1,356,558	2,029,073	2,344,272	74%	16%
Pasture/rangeland	496,385	810,167	1,039,505	109%	28%
Cropland	850,117	1,218,905	1,304,766	53%	7%
U.S. certified animals (number):					
Livestock					
Beef cows	4,429	13,829	15,197	243%	10%
Milk cows	12,897	38,196	48,677	277%	27%
Hogs & pigs	482	1,724	3,135	550%	82%
Sheep and lambs	705	2,279	4,207	497%	85%
Total Livestock*	18,513	56,028	71,216	285%	27%
Poultry					
Layer hens	537,826	1,113,746	1,611,662	200%	45%
Broilers	38,285	1,924,807	3,286,456	8484%	71%
Turkeys	750	9,138	98,653	13054%	980%
Total Poultry**	798,250	3,047,691	4,996,771	2110%	64%
Total certified operations:	5,021	6,592	6,949	38%	5%
*Total livestock includes other and unclassified animals.					
**Total poultry includes other and unclassified animals.					
Source: Economic Research Service, USDA					

Total certified organic acreage increased 74% between 1997 and 2001, with the largest percentage increase in pasture and range land. The number of livestock certified

organic also increased significantly during this period with a 285% increase. Dairy cows continue to be the largest number of certified livestock, accounting for over half of certified animals, however beef and dairy cows increased 200%. Poultry increased a whopping 2110%, with turkey increasing 13,054%, and broilers increasing 8484%.

Although poultry and livestock grew the fastest, organic field crop production (soybeans, wheat, hay, and corn) doubled between 1992 and 1997 and doubled again between 1997 and 2001 (Greene and Dimitri 2003). Although only a few other crops are tracked by the USDA, vegetable and fruit production also increased between 1997 and 2000, though not as rapidly. Lettuce grew 180%, tomatoes grew 49%, and carrots grew 43%. There was a 60% increase in citrus production and a 38% increase in apple production. A few other crops such as oilseeds, potatoes, and dry beans saw a significant increase in organic production. Only a few commodities saw a drop in production, mostly maple syrup (-13%), grapes (-25%), and cultivated (-11%) and wild (-90%) herbs.

Price Premium

Anyone who has bought organic food before knows that organic food usually costs more than conventional food. The price differential between conventional and organic food is often referred to as the “price premium.” Organic dairy products in the U.S., for example, have about a 50% price premium, much of which goes to the producer (Sligh and Christman 2003). Price premiums for organic foods vary according to crop, time of year, locality, country, and the type of retail outlet. The greatest price premium of organic over conventional food is often determined by the crop and the supply. Off-season and exotic crops often bring in the highest prices. The price premium for organic products generally results from the higher costs of organic production.

In the U.S. price differentials between conventional and organic often range from 0% to 100%. Wholesale organic prices, tracked by the USDA between 1989 and 1992, showed that annual average prices were generally double conventional prices (with a wide variation on a weekly basis). In addition, between 1992 and 1996 monthly farm-gate price premiums for several major fruits and vegetables generally exceeded conventional prices by 100%. And supermarket scanner data showed similar results for frozen vegetables and milk. Organic field crops also experienced high price premiums, with more than 50% for corn, soybeans and wheat during the period of 1993-1999 (Greene and Kremen 2003). The high price of organic field crops is often cited by larger dairy and poultry organic producers as one of the obstacles they face to entering the organic market and expanding. This is because larger producers buy these expensive feed crops instead of growing them on the farm as smaller producers do. A lot of controversy has surrounded the high price of organic feed crops in the first few years of the NOP.

Consumer prices for organic foods have come down recently, especially for products such as cereal and other processed foods that have attracted attention from conventional retailers. Consumer prices may continue to fall as supermarkets begin to offer private-label organic products (Sligh and Christman 2003), which compete with the branded products of established manufacturers and drive prices down (Burch and Lawrence 2005). Retailers are expanding their private-label product lines to respond to changing consumer tastes and preferences and are likely to focus on high-value niche products such as organically labeled foods⁶. The integration of organic foods into the private-label trend was made significantly easier by two reasons. First, the retail sector has experienced significant consolidation and concentration. Second, universal

⁶ Many of the top retailers have developed private-label organic brands. Safeway and Costco Wholesale, both in the top ten grocery retail chains, have private-label organic brands. And Whole Foods Market, the fastest growing grocery chain, also has a private organic label.

production and processing standards under the NOP were established. Whether or not the price gap between conventional and organic products begins to close, producers are less likely to realize a large share of the price premium as more organic products are sold in conventional supermarkets and the distance between organic producer and organic consumer widens.

The share of the price premium that organic producers are likely to capture will most likely vary by the retail outlet. In farmers' markets, community supported agriculture (CSA), and other direct market venues the majority of the price premium will be captured by the producer. The greater the distance between producer and consumer, the smaller share of the price premium will be realized by the producer due to middle men, such as wholesalers and processors. This is a trade off that many farmers are willing to make to guarantee a steady market for their crops. Also, with some commodities, such as dairy, there are limited opportunities for direct-marketing. However, with the steady growth of both direct-retailing venues and the presence of organics in conventional stores, it appears that farmers currently have several options.

The Organic Marketplace

Consumer demand for organically produced products has grown significantly over the last decade, and organic sales have sky-rocketed. While growth has been the greatest in North American and Europe, the market values of organic products worldwide reached \$25 billion in 2003, up from \$10 billion just six years earlier (Sligh and Christman 2003).

The growth in organic sales reflects a concern among consumers about the excesses of the modern food system. An increasing number of consumers are troubled by food safety issues, such as pesticide residues, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), hormones and antibiotics in meat and dairy. For example, consumers'

concerns over bovine growth hormones (rBGH or rBST)⁷ have made organic dairy the fastest growing organic sector. In addition, consumers are increasingly concerned about the environmental impacts of industrial agriculture, and its long-term sustainability, and are looking for ways to support ecological land management and rural life.

According to a 2000 study by Hartman (Dimitri and Greene 2002) approximately one-third of the U.S. population currently buys organically grown food. Of those who buy organic products, 29% are 'light' organic buyers (those who buy some organic food) and 3% are 'heavy' organic buyers (buying mostly organic foods). Another study by the Food Marketing Institute found that in 2001 66% of shoppers surveyed bought some organic foods. According to *The Packer's* Fresh Trends survey in 2001, 12% of surveyed shoppers said that the organic label was a primary factor in their decision making (Dimitri and Greene 2002). Consumers are motivated by many different factors when purchasing organic foods, but the idea that organic food is healthier is often the strongest motivating factor. According to the Hartman survey, 66% said that they bought organic food for health reasons, while 38% because of taste and 26% because of environmental concerns.

The consumption of organic food is associated with specific consumers. Studies have found that the most likely purchasers of organic foods are younger, female, richer, more educated, have children under 18, and come from smaller households (Dimitri and Greene 2002). Organic food consumption is also skewed

⁷ When injected into milk cows bovine growth hormones stimulate the mammary tissue and increase milk production by anywhere from an average of 10% up to 40%. Monsanto developed a synthetic version of rBST, known as *recombinant bovine somatotropin* (rBST), which goes by the brand name Posilac®. According to Monsanto, approximately one third of dairy cattle in the U.S. are injected with Posilac. It is now the top selling dairy cattle pharmaceutical product in the U.S. The FDA does not require special labels for products produced from cows given rBST, but it is not allowed for use in certified organic milk operations. Consumer concerns around rBST include health risks for human as well as health risks for cows.

geographically, with the greatest demand for organic foods being in the western U.S. and urban areas (Klonsky et al. 2001). Because of this geographical variability, retailers are focusing on giving shelf space to organic products in more responsive geographies.

Organic Sales and Retail

Organic food sales in the U.S. have experienced a growth rate of more than 20% per year since 1990 (Greene and Dimitri 2003), outpacing most other agricultural sectors. The organic sector is still very small and can therefore maintain a steady growth rate as compared to other sectors. However, organics is beginning to make an impact at the retail level and conventional retailers are taking notice. In the highly competitive food retailing market, 1% of sales in a category is considered significant. Organic products are viewed as specialty items, which can act as points of differentiation in influencing where people shop (Klonsky et al. 2001). Even though organic products are still a small part of the U.S. food system, rapid growth in this sector has prompted conventional retailers to expand natural food sections and increase the amount of shelf space dedicated to organic products.

In 2000 the U.S. organic food industry crossed a threshold: more organic food was purchased in conventional supermarkets than in any other venue. Once a niche product sold in a limited number of retail outlets, organic foods are currently sold in a wide variety of venues, including traditional venues, like farmers' markets and health food stores, as well as conventional venues, like supermarkets and bulk club stores. Consumers purchased 49% of organic products in conventional food stores and 48% in natural and health food stores in 2000, a huge increase from 1990 when 7% were purchased in conventional food stores and 68% in natural food stores. In the early

1990's conventional supermarkets began to sell organic foods, and organic products are now sold in 73% of all conventional supermarkets (Dimitri and Greene 2002).

Organic farmers have three distribution and retail pathways to sell their organic products: sell direct to consumers, restaurants, or retailers; sell direct to processors; sell through brokers and wholesalers for resale in supermarkets and natural food stores. It is estimated that in 2001 only about 3% of organic foods were purchased at farmers' markets (Greene and Dimitri 2003). This is a significant change from the early to mid 1990's when direct-markets accounted for between 17% and 22% of total organic sales.(this does not necessarily indicate that less organic foods are purchased through direct-markets outlets, but rather that the increase in organic retail has mainly taken place in conventional outlets). The number of farmers' markets has grown steadily in the U.S. from 1,755 in 1994 to 2,863 in 2000 (Greene and Dimitri 2003). Part of this growth can be attributed to the boom in the organic market and consumers' increasing preference for fresh foods that are locally grown and organically produced.

Farmers also make direct sales to retailers, such as local stores and co-ops. A direct farmer-to-retailer relationship is more likely to occur with small stores, since large retailers often find it too cumbersome to deal with a large number of farmers, given the scale of produce they buy. Although more and more organic food is being sold in conventional grocery stores, the 'core channel' for organic sales is natural food retailers, such as natural supermarkets chains, independent natural retailers, and cooperative markets. These types of markets represent the traditional channels for organic food and continue to offer the largest variety of organic foods. The most rapidly growing part of this category is the natural supermarket chains, like Whole

Foods Market. Whole Foods Market is the largest natural supermarket chain by sales and number of stores and is also the first ‘certified organic grocer.’⁸

Large retailers, like Whole Foods Market, have begun buying from regional warehouse hub systems instead of working directly with producers.⁹ As the organic market expands, conventional and natural retail outlets are beginning to require farmers to sell through a distributor, which is pushing more and more farmers to sell to brokers and wholesalers. One of the consequences of these trends may be pressure on producers to expand in scale and specialize in only a few products. About two-thirds of organic products in the U.S. are sold through distributors (Sligh and Christman 2003), and distributors are expanding to meet growth in organic sales. In addition, the links between the largest distributors, the largest manufacturers, and the largest retailers are getting stronger and more concentrated with increasing vertical integration. For example, United Natural Foods (the largest distributor) links Hain-Celestial (UNF’s single largest supplier and one of the largest organic/natural food companies) with Whole Foods Market (UNF’s largest single buyer) (Sligh and Christman 2003).

Farmers can also sell directly to processors, and for some organic sectors this is the norm. For example, the majority of organic dairy producers do not bottle and sell their own milk or turn it into cheese and yogurt. These farmers sell raw milk directly to processors who bottle and distribute the milk. With the boom in the organic market and consumer demand for processed organic foods, more farmers in other sectors, such as vegetable and fruit production, are selling to processors. In these

⁸ According to Whole Foods Market, being a certified organic grocer means “organic integrity is ensured from the farm to shopping bag” (Whole Foods Market, 2003).

⁹ Due to recent criticism from NYT journalist and author Michael Pollan, Whole Foods Market has publicly declared to work directly with more small-scale producers and source from local farms when possible.

organic sectors, farming often means entering into contract relationships with processors (Dimitri and Greene 2002). Because processors need specific and uniform crop varieties and predictable harvest schedules, contracts allow processors to exercise a significant amount of control over farmers. These types of contracts allow processors to control most aspects of production from planting to the harvest schedule. How these types of contract relationships emerge and take form in organics will most likely be one litmus test of whether or not organics shifts towards the organizing principles of conventional agriculture.

Rapidly Growing Organic Sectors

Although fruits and vegetables are a fairly small sector of the conventional agriculture market, fruits and vegetables have traditionally been the largest sector of the organic market. Fruits and vegetables are still the top selling category of organic products, but organic production has also crept into other food categories. In 2002 produce accounted for 43% of U.S. organic food sales, followed by breads and grains (13%), packaged and prepared foods (11%), dairy (11%), beverages (11%), soy products (7%), snack foods (3%), and meat, fish, and poultry (3%). Organic produce still remains a small niche of the retail produce market - in 1998 organic produce accounted for 1.7% of total produce sales. And organic produce is not experiencing growth as rapidly as the other categories of organic foods. However, organic vegetables remain important 'gateway' foods for organic consumers, since most consumers, who buy fresh produce, tend to buy foods in other organic categories (Klonsky et al. 2001). Organic produce also presents the greatest opportunity for direct market sales to restaurants and in venues such as farmers' markets and community supported agriculture (CSA).

The boom in conventional supermarket retailing of organic foods is correlated with an increase in organic dairy and processed organic foods on the market – the fastest growing segments of the market. Sales of organic dairy products –milk, cheese, butter, yogurt, and ice cream – have been growing in both conventional and natural food stores, but supermarkets have captured a larger percentage of these sales. Conventional supermarkets now sell 70% of organic milk, 55% of organic cheese, and 65% of organic eggs.

New organic processed foods are rapidly entering the market everyday. In the first half of 2000 there were over 800 new organic products introduced on the market most of them dessert foods (Dimitri and Greene 2002). The most rapidly growing processed organic foods are frozen foods, ready-made meals, baby food, baked goods, and cereals. Sales of all these products are growing at four times that of organic produce (Sligh and Christman 2003). The increasing presence of processed organic convenience foods, such as frozen entrees and snack foods, shows that organics is keeping pace with other trends in the retail sector toward packaged and prepared foods (Sobal 1999).

Concentration: The Organic Giants and Acquisitions by Big Food

In the increasingly globalized agro-food system, retailers are gaining and consolidating a significant amount of control over both conventional and organic food. Concentration in the conventional food industry has created a few corporate giants with an enormous amount of buying power and control of the production, distribution, and consumption of food. These conventional corporate giants are able to set prices and control market access (Lyson 2004, Burch and Lawrence 2005, Heffernan 2000), thereby limiting farmers' returns. Going hand in hand with the growth of organic sales in conventional supermarkets and the growth of manufactured and processed organic

foods is the emergence of organic giants and acquisitions of smaller firms. Although the organic sector is undergoing some level of concentration, it is yet to be seen if the effects of concentration in this sector will mimic those in the conventional sector.

Processed and value-added organic foods have traditionally been manufactured by small businesses that fit into a profit niche in a specific region, but with the growth of the organic markets, the companies behind the familiar organic labels are generally not very small anymore. The two largest organic companies in the market right now are Natural Selection Foods and Hain-Celestial Group. Natural Selection Foods, the leader in pre-washed and bagged salad mixes, operates under the label Earthbound Farm and grew from a small raspberry farm to a \$200 million organic produce firm. Hain-Celestial has annual revenues over \$400 million and is the largest processor of organic and natural foods in the world. Hain-Celestial owns many familiar organic and natural food labels, such as Walnut Acres and Earth's Best baby food (Sligh and Christman 2003).

With the rapid growth of the organic sector, the most successful and profitable organic companies are often targets for corporate acquisitions. In addition, many multinational food corporations have entered into partnerships with organic companies or started their own organic product lines. The multinational firms entering the organic market are big conventional players. Coca Cola's Minute Maid division now owns Odwalla Organics, which sells organic fruit juices and water. In 2000 General Mills purchased the well-known Cascadian Farms and Muir Glen brands. The French-based Danone Group recently purchased a 40% share in Stoneyfield, a leading organic and natural yogurt brand. Organic dairy has seen perhaps the greatest concentration and control. Horizon Organic Dairy processes and distributes 70% of the organic dairy in the U.S. and has gained market share through the acquisitions of local and regional dairies, such as the Organic Cow of Vermont. In 2003 Dean Foods, the largest

conventional milk processor, acquired control over Horizon Organic Dairy, making it the largest organic milk producer in the U.S.

Although some of these trends can be seen as corporate ‘green washing’, such as Heinz’s launch of Heinz Organic Catsup in 2002, most of these acquisitions are unknown to the average consumer, since the organic brand names are retained. For example, General Mills continues to sell organic products under the brand names Muir Glen and Cascadian Farms, and Dean Foods-Horizon Organic Dairy continues to utilize the label The Organic Cow of Vermont in some regions of the U.S.. Some call this “stealth ownership” (Sligh and Christman 2003), because the General Mills or Dean Foods name would not be as salient to organic consumers as well-established organic and natural brands are.

Organic Certification

As the organic market expands and more producers enter into organic farming, organic certification and the regulations that dictate methods of organic production yield significant power over the future of organic agriculture in the U.S.. Organic farming is the only alternative farming movement that currently has far-reaching legitimacy and meaning in the market and for food consumers (Raynolds 2000). The salience that the organic label has for consumers is something that has been developed over thirty years. Early certification programs grew out of a grassroots process of learning, sharing knowledge, and working together by farmers, consumers and organic farming activists to develop guidelines for organic production (Vos 2000; Kovach and Allen 2000).

The institutionalization of the organic movement began with the development of organic certification organizations, which codified standards and established regulations for organic production methods. According to Guthman (2004 [July]), the

movement quickly became focused on the regulation of the term ‘organically grown’ in the interest of expanding the organic market and increasing trade. This led to a drive for regulatory legislation that started the shift from an organic movement into an industry. Some of the more radical elements of the organic and alternative farming movements had to be sacrificed with the codification process. Broader meanings were narrowed, and regulations began to focus on organic inputs, while neglecting the more agro-ecological processes supported by the organic farming movement. As organic farming grew certification agencies turned into agents of surveillance, and the certification environment took on a competitive character.

Early Certification and Standards

The farm organizations that initially set U.S. certification standards were usually influenced by local growing and marketing conditions. Hence the roots of early certification were characterized by local control and diversity. In the early 1970’s private organizations and non-profits began developing certification standards to legitimate organic claims and farming. Through their agricultural departments, states began to create certification organizations in the 1980’s. The first certification organization was the California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF), which was established in 1973. The number of certification entities grew rapidly over the next 30 years: from 12 in 1985, to 35 in 1995, and 53 in 2001.

The CCOF emerged as one of the leaders in early certification. Shortly after the organization was founded its members became interested in formalizing organic production guidelines and setting production standards. At this early stage the certification process and standards were more informal than they are today, but they emerged directly from the heart of the organic farming movement. The standards were intended to protect and inform consumers and allow producers to be recognized with

legitimacy in the market. Shortly after this initial certification push by CCOF, California passed the first Organic Foods Production Act in 1979, which was amended in 1982. This provided the first legal definition of the term ‘organic’. In the following years, several other states followed California and passed laws providing legal definitions of ‘organic’ and some states developed certification services. In 1999 seventeen states required certification to label products ‘organic’ and thirteen states had laws that required registration and compliance with standards, but no third-party verification (Klonsky et al. 2001).

Prior to the National Organic Program, certifying agencies generally followed their own standards, which may or may not have been stricter than state laws regarding organic production. Certifiers’ standards often varied among the different categories of production, such as livestock practices, allowable inputs, buffer zone requirements and other areas. This let producers shop around and find the certifier that best fit their needs and production practices. Some certifiers began to tailor their services to specific producers, such as field crop and dairy producers, or to specific regions. The variability and reputation of certifiers also allowed producers to align themselves with certifiers that were considered more ‘organic’ than others and gain a market advantage. For some producers and processors the lack of agreement among different certifiers was a headache. For example, livestock producers who needed to purchase inputs, such as organic feed, sometimes had a difficult time tracking down feed that was certified by an organization that their own certifier accepted. The lack of universal standards made one certifier’s ‘organic’ label and standards different from another certifier – sometimes significantly different.

In the 1970’s and 1980’s federal support for organic farming, labeling, and certification was minimal, if not antagonistic. The FDA, in the early 1970’s proposed to eliminate such terms as ‘organic’ and ‘natural,’ but instead adopted regulations that

claims could not be made that organic or natural was healthier or superior. The USDA also forbid any organic claims to be made about livestock. Until recently, the USDA held fast with dismissing organics and organic farming as backward, primitive and unscientific. However, during the energy crisis of the 1970's and the 1980's farm crisis criticism of conventional agriculture from organic farming and other alternative agriculture movements became more salient to the public. Federal regulators needed to develop alternative terms that were much more friendly to industrial agriculture than 'organic' was. The pliable term of 'sustainable agriculture' fit their needs.

Sustainability came to mean economic viability and sustainable profit margins (Guthman 2004; Beus and Dunlap 1990), but what emerged out of this appropriation of progressive language was the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program and Low Input Sustainable Agriculture (LISA) program. These programs were intended to secure research and extension funds for agriculture that qualified as sustainable, but they had little in common with the growing organic industry.

In 1984 the first nation-wide organic trade group emerged, calling itself the Organic Foods Production Association of North America (OFPANA) and later changing its name to the Organic Trade Association (OTA). Traditional certifiers and large producers initially made up this group, and later consumer groups joined the ranks. The OTA's goal was to develop a national label – to prevent the term 'organic' from following the same path as the term 'natural' and become meaningless to consumers and in the market. They wanted a national label to move organics into the mainstream, but to maintain its meaning and salience. After some initial setbacks and strong opposition from the USDA, the OTA helped draft a bill, with Senator Leahy of Vermont, that was passed as law with the 1990 Farm Bill. The federal law was called the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA).

1990 Organic Foods Production Act

The OFPA was passed largely on the momentum of the Alar apple scare¹⁰ (Vos 2000; Guthman 2004). The purpose of the bill was to establish a national organic program and give a universal definition to the organic label, thereby encouraging and supporting the organic market premium. In general, the OFPA had four objectives: (1) to establish national standards for the production and handling of foods labeled as ‘organic’; (2) to universalize and nationalize organic certification requirements; (3) to require all organic operations have a ‘farm plan’; and (4) to establish the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) to work with the USDA to ensure the integrity of the NOP, organic regulations, and the organic label.

The OFPA authorized the formation of a National Organic Program (NOP) within the USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Services (AMS) to establish universal organic standards for production and processing and to require and oversee the mandatory certification of organic production. The creation of universal organic standards meant that, across all states, certifiers would follow the same certification standards and producers would operate under the same standards for organic production. The universalization of standards would make interstate and international trade easier, would ease access to inputs for processors, and lessen consumer confusion regarding the organics label.

The statute required that organic certification be administered by state and private certification agencies and not the federal government. This was to guarantee that the structure of organic certification in the U.S. would be left intact. The USDA

¹⁰ Alar is Uniroyal Chemical Co.’s trade name for the compound daminozide and was sprayed on apples so that entire crops would ripen at the same time. In 1989, after 40 million Americans saw a *60 Minutes* story about a Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) report on Alar as a human carcinogen - one that posed particular risks for children. Public outcry forced apple growers to stop using it, and Uniroyal had to pull it off the market.

would not operate as a certifier, but instead would accredit private and states agencies to certify organic producers and processors. The OFPA required that all producers and processors, that wanted to use the organic label in the U.S., be certified through third-party verification and operate according to a “farm plan” to reduce the tendency for some inexperienced organic farmers to practice “farming by neglect” or “input overuse” (Klonsky et al. 2001). A farm plan requires both handlers and producers to create an organic farming plan that meets the standards for organic production, such as crop rotation and pasture for animals (Amaditz 1998; NOFA-NY 2004). The farm plan must be submitted annually to a certifying agent and requires detailed records of the organic operation. Many certifiers already required something similar to a ‘farm plan,’ and its inclusion in the Act was an attempt to ensure that the NOP did not simply become a list of allowable products and inputs, but continued to focus on the process of organic production.

The OFPA also created the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), in January 1992, to advise the Secretary of Agriculture regarding the standards under which the NOP is based and other aspects of implementing the law. The NOSB is a 15-member board appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture. The role of the NOSB is to make recommendations to the Secretary who has final authority on determining official policy of the NOP. The current board is comprised of four farmers/growers, two handlers/processors, one retailer, one scientist, three consumer/public interest advocates, three environmentalists, and one certifying agent, who sit on various committees. Members come from all four U.S. regions and serve 5-year terms. The NOSB is also authorized to convene technical advisory panels to propose recommendations for guidance on interpreting and complying with standards. These recommendations range from pasture requirements to allowable inputs. Although the NOSB has an on-going role to play with the NOP, it was initially mandated to advise

in the development of national standards for organic certification and what has been called the Final Rule.

Although a divide between the organic movement and the organic industry had been growing for some time, the OFPA further drove a wedge between the two through the national institutionalization and codification of organics. The law was pushed forward and supported mostly by large producers, processors, and those looking to increase trade in organics (Amaditz 1998). Consumer desire to have a label with universal meaning also played a significant role in pushing the bill through. For activists, consumers, and producers that were motivated by the organic philosophy and not expanding markets, the passing of the OFPA was a symbolic loss (Guthman 2004). They now found themselves working with the very conventional and industrial institutions that the organic movement opposed – the USDA. These tensions can be seen in the struggle of over ten years to realize the goals of the OFPA and nationalize organics.

Getting to the Final Rule

Even though the OFPA was passed in the 1990's it took over a decade to begin implementation. Lack of agreement between the USDA and NOSB recommendations and contestation on many organic principles by the USDA stalled the publishing of the first proposed rule for implementing organic standards. Although the initial struggle over the first draft of the proposed rules happened behind the scenes, the battle became public and very visible when the rules were finally published on December 16, 1997 by the Federal Register.

By April 1998 the USDA had received nearly 300,000 comments on the rule. This volume of comments was more than any other legislation in the history of the country (Vos 2000). What had caused such a prolific response? The public outcry was

mostly due to the inclusion of what became known as the “Big Three” – genetically modified organisms (GMOs), sewage sludge, and irradiation - in the proposed organic standards. The “Big Three” elicited a huge public outcry and proved to be the catalyst for the massive public response. Although the large number of responses was partially due to the efforts of food retailers to organize consumers, the opposition also included certifying agencies, producers, processors, trade groups, environmentalists, and other advocates.

In general there were two types of responses to the first proposed rule: (1) responses to specific sections, rules, and terminology; and (2) response to general principles. The more specific responses tended to see the proposed rule as initiating a shift from process-based standards to product-based standards, by focusing on what inputs were allowed. The most widely criticized aspects of the rule were the National List, the animal husbandry section, and issues surrounding labeling and certification. For the most part, the rule rejected or ignored NOSB recommendations in these areas of the rule. A dizzying number of substances were allowed on the National List, including a large number of synthetic inputs. The animal husbandry section allowed intensive confinement of animals and at least some non-organic feed, in addition to ambiguous language on antibiotics and hormone use. Labeling and certification issues revolved around the prohibition of additional labels and a flat certification fee that would be burdensome to small producers.

The inclusion of the Big Three, which have never been part of organic farming, had immense symbolic meaning for many organic advocates and showed many people that the ideological divide between organic farming and the USDA was going to be a huge hurdle to overcome if the NOP was going to remain true to the philosophical roots of organic farming. Part of the irony of including the Big Three in the first proposed rule was that these are highly controversial practices even among

mainstream agro-food systems (Vos 2000). Their inclusion in a set of standards that were supposed to provide an alternative to industrial agriculture's 'business as usual' proved that the USDA was antagonistic to organic agriculture.

As a whole the proposed rule significantly blurred the lines between organic and conventional agriculture and opened the organic sector to producers and processors that wanted access to the growing organic market without actually farming according to long- established organic methods. Many saw the proposed rule as attempt by conventional agriculture to appropriate the consumer confidence in the organic label so as to extract profit from the growing organic market. As one small farmer put it (J. Coronea quoted in Vos 2000):

What I would like to say is that the proposed rule is not consistent with time-tested and proven methods of organic agriculture. We can only construe them to be an attempt by conventional agriculture and processors to steal the hard-earned confidence built between organic producers and consumers.

Between 1998 and 2000, activists as well as the NOSB worked tirelessly to convince the Secretary of Agriculture to revise the proposed guidelines. On May 8, 1998, the USDA agreed not to include the Big Three in the rule. Several months later in the fall of 1998, the USDA asked for public comment on three other issues: livestock confinement, use of antibiotics and parasiticides with livestock, and certifier's authority to decertify producers. The comment period lasted a few months and the USDA received 9,000 comments on those issues. On March 13, 2000 a revised proposed rule was published and the public had until June 2000 to comment on this version. Eventually many of the main goals of the NOSB were included in the final

rule, which was published in December of 2000. There were many key victories in the struggle over the Final Rule:

- Synthetic pesticides, including herbicides, fungicides and other chemicals are prohibited;
- Genetic modification, or the splicing of genes between species, is prohibited;
- Irradiation of foods is prohibited;
- Use of processed sewage sludge, or biosolids, as fertilizer is prohibited;
- Livestock must be given access to pasture;
- Livestock are not given growth hormones or antibiotics (sick animals are treated, but removed from the herd and not sold as organic);
- Livestock are given organically grown feed;
- Land must be free of chemical applications for three years before its crops can be considered organic; and,
- Written farm plans and audit trails are required.

December 21, 2000, marked the publication of the 554 pages of the Final Rule by the USDA. It went into effect on April 21st, 2001, but gave farmers and industry members 18 months to reach compliance. October of 2002 marked the first time that consumers saw the USDA organic label on the shelves.

The USDA's National Organic Program (NOP)

The USDA has been very explicit that the NOP is simply a labeling and marketing program. The USDA is careful to note that the program merely provides a way for organic producers to distinguish their products on the market, but does not make any claims that products with the organic label are healthier, safer, or superior to non-organic products. As such, it is part of the USDA's Agricultural and Marketing

Services (AMS) which oversees six commodity programs¹¹ that provide standardization, grading, and market services for these commodities. The goal of the NOP is to standardize production and processing of organic products to ensure consistency and uniformity. There are three main categories of standards under the NOP: accreditation and certification, labeling, and production standards.

Accreditation and Certification Standards

Under the NOP, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is the official regulatory and enforcement agency for organic agriculture, food and other products. Organic certification under the NOP works through a process of accreditation, whereby the USDA does not certify organic operations directly, but accredits the state, private, and non-profit agencies through which organic operations can become certified. The system of accreditation leaves the grassroots structure of organic certification intact, but takes away the sovereignty of certifying agencies when it comes to the standards and guidelines for certification. For example, one certifier said, “The thing that is most disappointing to me is that the certifiers are...basically federal agents at this point in terms of the regulatory agency – doing the inspections, doing the certification work for the USDA and the National Organic Program.” (Sullivan 2004).

The NOP drastically reworked organic certification and how organic certification agencies operate. Prior to the NOP, certification agencies developed their own certification standards, review process, and labeling scheme. Now all certification agencies accredited with the NOP must follow the NOP guidelines exactly, meaning that no certification agency may enforce guidelines that are stricter than the NOP

¹¹ The commodities the AMS focuses on are: Cotton, Dairy, Fruits and Vegetables, Livestock and Seed, Poultry, and Tobacco.

standards or more lax. For many certification agencies this required a significant shift in their standards for certification. According to a few certifiers, some of the standards for certification became stricter and some become much more lax (Sullivan 2004). However the number and the degree of changes that had to be made in certifiers' guidelines for compliance depended on the certifier, since, prior to the NOP, certification standards varied significantly among certifiers.

In addition, certifiers are no longer allowed to make recommendations on how applicants can comply with organic productions guidelines. Prior to the NOP, many certification agencies operated as both educational and advocate organizations as well as certifiers. According to the USDA, this blurred the line between certifier and certified that is necessary for third-party verification. Therefore, the NOP requires certification agencies to split into two separate entities if they want to carry out advocacy and education in addition to certification.

The process of certification that certifiers engage in has not changed significantly with the NOP. The certification standards require on-site inspections by certification agents. Although most certification agents are certified organic farmers themselves, to avoid conflict of interest they are not allowed to be certified with the same agency they work for. An applicant must submit to the certifying agent the applicant's organic system plan, which describes practices and substances used in production, record keeping procedures, and practices to prevent commingling of organic and non-organic products. The on-site visit guarantees that this plan has been followed and that the plan follows the required organic production standards.

With the advent of the NOP, the structure of organic certification began to change significantly. Prior to the NOP, the majority of certifiers were not-for-profit or public institutions, but soon several for-profit organizations sought accreditation from the NOP. This has resulted in the growth of a certification market along with the

growth of the organic market. Because all certifiers have to follow the same standards and guidelines for certification, market competition revolves around the cost of certification. In addition, more international and foreign certification agencies are emerging. Many organic products bought in U.S. supermarkets today are now being produced outside of the U.S.. Due to the increasing organic acreage outside the U.S. that is dedicated to U.S. consumption, the USDA has accredited several foreign certifiers. In lieu of USDA accreditation, a foreign certifying agent may receive recognition when USDA has determined, upon the request of a foreign government, that the foreign certifying agent's government is able to assess and accredit certifying agents as meeting the requirements of the USDA National Organic Program. Currently the USDA is working with New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Spain, Canada (and two of its provinces), Israel, and Denmark on this type of agreement.

Another significant change that has been brought by the centralization of certification under the NOP is the USDA's monopoly on the word organic. Prior to the NOP anyone could use the word organic to advertise and market their products, whether certified or not. Although this had the potential to create rampant fraud (and in some cases this happened), it was the term "certified organic" that really carried weight. The USDA's ownership of the word organic was viewed as necessary to achieve the OFPA's goal of universally clear and consistent standards for organic certification that would increase consumer confidence in organics. It was argued that this would be increasingly difficult to achieve if the word organic was used outside of a national certification structure.

Under the NOP rules, the word organic can only be used by those who are certified organic under the NOP guidelines, or are exempt from certification. A fine of \$10,000 for every incident is enforced if an operation is caught using the word organic without certification. However, farms and handling operations that sell less than

\$5,000 a year in organic agricultural products are exempt from certification. They may label their products organic if they abide by the standards, but they cannot display the USDA Organic Seal. In addition, retail operations, such as grocery stores and restaurants, do not have to be certified.

Production and Labeling Standards

The USDA is explicit in reminding consumers that the organic label makes no claims about the quality, safety, or health and nutritional value of organic products. According to the USDA's NOP website, the "requirements apply to the way the product is created, not to measurable properties of the product itself." ("Organic Food Standards" n.d.) The organic program is a labeling and marketing program that indicates a minimum level of production standards, but makes no claims that those production standards are better than those practiced in conventional agriculture. In this way the USDA could guarantee that it did not change its long held implicit position that organic agriculture is not significantly different from conventional agriculture. The NOP standards then fall under two categories: production standards and labeling standards.

The NOP outlined a set of universal certification standards that all certifiers must enforce when determining the compliance of organic operations. In general, the production and handling standards address organic crop production, wild crop harvesting, organic livestock management, and processing and handling of organic agricultural products. The regulations prohibit the use of genetic engineering, ionizing radiation, and sewage sludge in organic production and handling. Organic crops are raised without using most conventional pesticides, petroleum-based fertilizers, or sewage sludge-based fertilizers. Animals raised on an organic operation must be fed organic feed, given access to the outdoors, and no antibiotics or growth hormones are

allowed in their production. As a general rule, all natural (non-synthetic) substances are allowed in organic production and all synthetic substances are prohibited. The National List of Allowed Synthetic and Prohibited Non-Synthetic Substances, a section in the regulations, contains the specific exceptions to the rule (NOFA-NY 2004).

The NOP created one organic label -the USDA organic seal - to indicate if a product is organic. In addition to the USDA organic seal, producers and processors may also include their certifier's label. The USDA created uniformity with the USDA organic seal by requiring that it is the only organic seal that can be used. However, the USDA also created a labeling hierarchy to determine which products can use the word "organic." According to the USDA labeling standards, products can be labeled "100 percent organic", "organic", or "made with organic ingredients". This labeling hierarchy, presented in Table 2, shows that the 'organic-ness' of a product is based on the percentage of certified organic ingredients in the product.

Products labeled "100 percent organic" must contain only organically produced ingredients. Products labeled "organic" must consist of at least 95 percent organically produced ingredients. Products meeting the requirements for "100 percent organic" and "organic" may display the USDA organic seal. Processed products that contain at least 70 percent organic ingredients can use the phrase "made with organic ingredients" and list up to three of the organic ingredients or food groups on the principal display panel. This labeling scheme reflects the growing market for processed and prepared organic foods in which many ingredients are used and all may not be certified organic. For example, soup made with at least 70 percent organic ingredients and only organic vegetables may be labeled either "made with organic peas, potatoes, and carrots," or "made with organic vegetables." The USDA seal cannot be used anywhere on the package. Processed products that contain less than 70

Table 2.
The National Organic Program's labeling guidelines for certified organic products

Label Claim	Product Must:	Label Must Show	Label May Show	Label May <i>Not</i> Show
<i>“Organic”</i>	Contain at least 95% organic ingredients; not contain added sulfites	Show an ingredient statement; list the organic ingredients as "organic"; name of certifying agency	The term "organic" to modify the product name; "X% organic" or "X% organic ingredients"; the USDA Organic seal and/or certifying agent seal(s).	N/A
<i>“100% Organic”</i>	Contain 100% organically produced ingredients	Show an ingredient statement when the product consists of more than one ingredient; name of certifying agency	The term "organic" to modify the product name; the USDA Organic seal and/or certifying agent seal(s)	N/A
<i>Made with “organic” ingredients</i>	Contain at least 70% organic ingredients; not contain added sulfites	Show an ingredient statement; list the organic ingredients as "organic"; name of certifying agency	The term "Made with organic ____."; "X% organic ingredients"; the certifying agent seal(s)	The USDA Organic seal
<i>Label specific ingredients “organic” or claim “X% of ingredients are organic”</i>	Some organic ingredients	Show an ingredient statement when the word organic is used; identify organic ingredients as "organic"	The organic status of ingredients	The USDA Organic seal; the certifying agent seal

Source: National Organic Program, USDA

percent organic ingredients cannot use the term “organic” other than to identify the specific ingredients that are organically produced in the ingredients statement.

Summation and NOP Controversies

In this chapter I have provided a brief overview of the current state of organic agriculture, the organic industry, and the evolution of organic certification in the U.S.. Many different economic and ideological actors have been involved in shaping the organic sector and the meaning of *organic* has evolved and been constituted in different ways since organic food production first gained a following in the early 1900’s. In the U.S., the arena of political discourse surrounding the meaning of organic production has taken shape over time to include producers, processors, consumers, advocate groups, certification agencies, and more recently the federal government. However, the implementation of the NOP under the direction of the USDA places organic agriculture in the center of the new food politics of the 21st century and exposes organic production standards to new avenues of influence. The shift from self-regulation under a patch-work of state and not-for-profit agencies to the centralized public-regulation under the USDA has dramatically altered the regulatory structure of the organic sector of the institutions that reinforce and define what organic production is and who can practice it.

In conclusion I will look at a few controversies that emerged in the first few years of the National Organic Program and highlight the tensions surrounding the implementation and enforcement of organic production standards. The publishing of the Final Rule and the implementation of the NOP marked a new era in organic activism as citizen groups, industry advisors, farmers, retailers and certifiers focus on a new set of problems. It took 12 years of hearings, hundreds of thousands of

comments from the public, and the drafting of 600 pages of proposed standards to create the "USDA Organic" label. However not long after the NOP was implemented, the organic movement found its energy funneled into defending the NOP production standards from being watered down.

The first year the NOP was in effect, conventional poultry and egg producers put significant pressure on the standards for organic poultry production. One of the first controversies surrounding the NOP organic production standards was an exemption that allowed chicken farmers to call their product organic even if the chickens were never fed organic feed. Several chicken producers in Georgia convinced Rep. Nathan Deal (R-Ga.) to push through Congress a rider to the 2003 Omnibus Appropriations bill • a nearly \$80 billion bill to pay for the war in Iraq and new homeland security measures • saying that if organic feed cost more than twice as much as regular feed, organic livestock could eat non-organic and still be labeled organic. This drew significant public outcry and Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) amassed enough support to repeal the feed exemption. The effort to politically side step the organic poultry standards by a few conventional poultry producers entering into the organic marketplace revealed the new political vulnerability of the organic standards and the increasing presence of producers in the organic marketplace who are more interested in the organic price premium than upholding the principles of organic production.

In addition to political efforts to weaken the standards for organic poultry production in the first year, the USDA also showed its willingness to support with conventional production principles over organic production principles. As I will discuss in more depth in Chapter Six, in 2002, a Massachusetts egg producer was denied certification by NOFA-Mass Organic Certification Program because his barns housing over 87,000 chickens did not have outdoor access, except for future plans to

build a few porches on the multi-story complex. According to NOFA-Mass this was a clear violation of the organic livestock/poultry standard requiring access to pasture. The producer appealed it to the NOP who overruled the certifier and said that the NOFA/Mass Organic Certification program needed to certify the facility in question or lose accreditation for three years. NOFA/Mass is currently repealing the case, but this issue has worried many in the organic community about the sovereignty of certifiers and the ability to loosely interpret several of the organic production standards.

As I mentioned at the beginning of Chapter One, two days after the NOP was fully implemented, Arthur Harvey filed suit against the Secretary of Agriculture charging that nine provisions of the new rule were out of sync with the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) of 1990 and diluted its organic standards. In the beginning of 2005 Harvey won the ruling with regard to two of the complaints - the use of synthetic substances in processing organically labeled food and requirements for organic feed in transitioning dairy cows. However the organic industry did not sit by idly, since, according to an industry estimate by the Organic Trade Association, the lawsuit would cost manufacturers \$758 million in annual revenues. In September 2005, under pressure from organic manufacturers and processors, the U.S. Senate passed a resolution requiring USDA to study the ramifications of the Harvey suit, giving more time for the organic community to reach consensus. Thousands (over 320,000) of organic farmers, consumers, and activists protested the industry attempts to bypass the ruling. However at the end of October 2005, due to successful lobbying efforts by the organic industry and agribusiness giants like Dean Foods, Congress placed a rider into the appropriations bill containing an amendment to the OFPA that effectively negates the court ruling in favor of Harvey¹².

¹²As passed, the amendment allows: (1) numerous synthetic food additives and processing aids to be used in organic foods without public review, (2) young dairy cows to continue to be treated with

These controversies can be seen as growing pains of the NOP, but they also highlight some of the fissures between those representing the organic industry – processors, manufacturers, and factory-farm like organic enterprises – and organic consumers, activists, and farmers. Although organic regulation and standards have always been at the center of food politics, these controversies around the NOP reveal that the battles over the meaning, values, and practices behind the organic label will now be fought in the courts and on Capitol Hill where certain actors have more power than others.

However a backlash is growing among organic consumers who have been disappointed by many of the recent decisions regarding the organic standards. They have taken their concerns to the organic market by initiating boycotts of certain producers and their products. For example, the Organic Consumers Association, a non-profit public interest organization, and several food co-ops and consumer groups across the country have called for a boycott of two of the largest organic dairy companies in the nation: 1) Horizon Organic (a subsidiary of Dean Foods), a supplier to Wal-Mart and many health food stores; and 2) Aurora Organic, a supplier of private brand-name organic milk to Costco, Safeway, Giant, Wild Oats and others. These companies, who together control up to 65% of the organic dairy market, are purchasing the majority of their milk from feedlot dairies where the cows have little or no access to pasture – a violation of the NOP regulations regarding livestock production. So far, the boycott has generated national coverage in news outlets such as NPR, the New York Times, and USA Today.

antibiotics and fed genetically engineered feed prior to being converted to organic production, and (3) loopholes under which non-organic agricultural ingredients could be substituted for organic ingredients without any notification of the public based on emergency decrees.

The implementation of the NOP and the interpretation of organic standards have been controversial since the beginning and raise many of the questions that this study addresses: Will the NOP help small, locally-oriented producers participate in the growing sector or will it hurt them? Will the production standards simply become a how-to-manual for industrial, conventionally-minded producers and put a low ceiling on organic practices? How will the meaning of organic, and the institutions that define and codify it, change under the direction of the USDA's NOP? In the next chapter, I will develop the theoretical framework to begin answering these questions through a case study of New York State organic producers.

CHAPTER 3

THE ORGANIC-INDUSTRIAL DIVIDE: THE NOP, THE COUNTERMOBILIZATION OF AGRO-FOOD CAPITAL, AND THE BIFURCATION OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

“I began my lawsuit because USDA was moving steadily away from organic integrity as envisioned by people who got Congress to approve OFPA in 1990. At present, organic eggs are dipped in bleach before packaging. Whole chickens are being sealed in plastic bags containing up to 10% by weight of water containing up to 200 ppm of chlorine. These same chickens have never been outdoors or exposed to direct sunlight. As a consumer, I would not have suspected any of these facts which I learned as an inspector. USDA may not even know about some of them---and I cannot report specifics because of confidentiality. At a certain point, I have to choose between denouncing organic food as a fraud, or try to change the regulation. I chose the latter.”

- Arthur Harvey, organic farmer and inspector

Introduction

The ongoing process of social, cultural, and environmental destruction that accompanies market liberalization, industrialization, and globalization has encouraged the development of counter-movements that strive to bring about more socially and ecologically sustainable societies. In the U.S. the organic agriculture movement has been one of the most successful, widespread, and mainstream of these movements challenging the commodification of life, even though organic agriculture has occupied a peripheral space in the modern food system until the last two decades. In the Global North there is a new brand of food politics (Nestle 2002, 2003; Schlosser 2002; Pollan

2005; Singer and Mason 2005) and a growing public concern around food consumption issues - such as food quality, consumer protection, and dietary balance - that has brought an increased demand for alternatively produced foods. In the last two decades, the consumption of organic food has been steadily increasing, and organics moved from a niche market to the fastest growing sector in U.S. agriculture. The organic farming movement, like many counter-movements, hopes to reveal the social relations behind the production and consumption of food that become obscured when the relations of production are reduced to quantifiable and monetized standards. Yet, the relationship between organic agriculture and the agro-food system at large is being called into question with the expanding markets for organic food and the federal regulation of organic agriculture in the U.S. under the USDA's National Organic Program (NOP). The potential of agricultural regulations to provide a mechanism for capital to counter-mobilize and potentially diffuse food-centered social movements is a timely issue.

Several questions are raised by the implementation of the NOP: How much will the organics standards reflect the goals of the organic movement or work as a proxy for the conventionalization of organic agriculture? How will the NOP affect the structure of organic agriculture? How much will small-scale organic producers become marginalized, or will they still continue to thrive? In this chapter, I lay the theoretical groundwork for exploring these questions. I will begin by reviewing the current scholarship and debates in the agrarian political economy literature about organic regulation, and argue that although most of the current scholarship has given us a better understanding of the relationship between the organic movement, organic regulation, and the growing organic industry, it places organic agriculture on the margins of the modern food system as simply a challenge to the status quo. The theoretical marginalization of organic agriculture in the development of the modern

agro-food system neglects to recognize and account for what I argue is an important, if not central, role of the organic sector in the development of the modern food system.

Taking this into consideration, I lay a theoretical foundation to understand the current position of organic agriculture and organic regulation in the global agro-food system and why the NOP may signal a new era of food politics around organic agriculture. The framework I propose is grounded in agrarian political economy and economic sociology. This enables an understanding of how the regulation of organic agriculture, through the NOP, will affect the trajectory of organic agriculture and its potential to criticize and challenge the industrial agro-food system, as well as, an understanding of how the new regulations will affect the small-scale producers that historically formed the core of the organic movement. This chapter will offer an account of the role of organic agriculture and organic regulation in the development of the modern food system, which foregrounds the place of the NOP in the changing relationships of the agro-food system and the structural consequences for organic agriculture.

Regulating the Grassroots: Organic Standards and the Organic Movement

Scholars in the social sciences have just recently started to examine organic and alternative agricultures, producing a small body of literature focusing specifically on organic agriculture has been relatively small in the last fifteen years. Most of the current analysis of organic agriculture has focused on different national and regional spaces in the Global North, such as; the UK (Clunies-Ross 1990; Clunies-Ross and Cox 1994; Reed 2001; Padel and Foster 1999), Ireland (Tovey 1997), Denmark (Kaltoft 1999; Kristensen 1999), Canada (Hall and Moggyorody 2001), USA and California (Vos 2000; Buck et al. 1997; Guthman 1998, 2004), Australia and New Zealand (Campbell 1996, 1997; Lyons 1999; Coombes and Campbell, 1998; Campbell

and Liepens, 2001; Lockie and Halpin, 2005). In addition, a few studies have examined organic agriculture and alternative agricultures in the global food system (Barham 2002; Raynolds 2000).

As organic agriculture began to expand both globally and in domestic contexts, in the 1990's, references to organic agriculture began to emerge in the scholarship and analysis of the global food system (Arce and Marsden 1993; Marsden and Arce 1995; Goodman 1999, 2000; McMichael 2000; Friedman 1993, 2000, 2005). Most often the scholarship on the global food system has mentioned organic agriculture in passing, either as part of the new counter-movements and discursive politics challenging the status quo, or as agriculture growing on the margins in the uncharted territory of agribusiness. In either case organic agriculture is viewed as a response to the larger trends in the agro-food system. However, according to Goodman (2000: 215), the “[l]ines that once appeared to delineate apparently polar opposites have become fuzzy and blurred, confounding previous certainties and stereotypical representations.” And, as the organic industry began to expand at a rapid rate, the scope and complexity of organic trade grew, and political contests around regulation grew more intense, and scholars soon began to focus specifically on the changes taking place in organic agriculture. Efforts to distinguish boundaries between the trends in organic agriculture, and those in the larger agro-industrial food system, have agitated many new and longstanding debates in the agrarian political economy literature.

In the last decade the social science literature on organic agriculture has been dominated by what can be called the ‘conventionalization debate’. The debate emerged with the publication of a seminal work by Buck et al. (1997), in *Sociologia Ruralis* exploring the trends in organic agriculture in California over the last several decades and a second article, by Tovey (1997), published in the same journal. Buck et al. and Tovey painted a bleak picture for the organic movement, arguing that it was

well on its way to conventionalization with the increasing penetration of agro-food capital. The argument presented in the Buck et al. paper (1997) and later canonized as the ‘conventionalization argument,’ chronicled the transformation of organic agriculture in California from a social movement into an industry. In the following years several other studies were published (Coombes and Campbell 1998; Hall and Moggyorody 2001; Campbell and Liepens 2001; Lockie and Halpin 2005) challenging the conclusions of the ‘conventionalization argument’ and claiming that the transformation of organic agriculture is not as linear or universal as the ‘conventionalization argument’ suggests. At the same time, Guthman (1998, 2000, 2004) continued to develop and fine tune the ‘conventionalization argument,’ and after it sparked significant debate, Guthman rallied to its defense in a 2004(July) article published again in *Sociologia Ruralis*.

One of the new debates to emerge from the discussions surrounding the ‘conventionalization argument’ is the role of standards and certification in the transformation of the organic sector. The debates around organic regulation, like the other debates regarding organic agriculture, tend to pivot around the question of whether organic agriculture is exceptional or unexceptional when compared to conventional agriculture. Scholars are divided as to the role that regulation plays in the transformation of the organic sector. Some see regulation as one of the factors contributing to the conventionalization of organic agriculture through a lowering of production standards and by stifling the critique posed by the organic movement. While others see regulation as evidence that the organic movement is having a significant impact on agro-industrialization and the food system as a whole.

According to Buck et al. (1997) and Guthman (2000, 2004) regulation plays a key role in the conventionalization of organic agriculture and obscures the lines between organic and conventional practices. They argue that the regulatory structure

of organic certification in California was one of the key mechanisms that made possible the penetration of agri-business and the marginalization of small-scale producers. This was possible because the regulatory emphasis on inputs (as opposed to processes and methods of production), and protection of the price mechanism decreased the barriers presented to agri-business firms and the capitalist penetration of organics. Agri-business firms benefited from the price premiums associated with organic certification by using only allowable inputs, but otherwise operating on a conventional model.

Guthman (2000, 2004[July]) argues that in the case of organic agriculture a regulatory structure that focuses exclusively on supporting a price premium creates an erosion of organic practices and opens the sector to penetration by agribusiness capital. The codification of organic practices in certification standards has a leveling effect on producer practices, resulting in actual practices falling short of agroecological ideals. She found that in California the variation in production practices are due less to farm scale and grower commitment than to the biophysical constraints and climatic conditions combined with institutional support through production standards. The interaction of conditions of production and production standards is crucial because how “organic” is defined determines the technology and inputs (and therefore practices) that producers use to minimize the environmental constraints of production. By putting organic agriculture into a legal framework and reducing biological and social process to a set of rules, a floor is set determining who can produce and how effectively. In addition, a ceiling is also set by determining the minimum standards of organic production which creates significant downward pressure on producers who want to incorporate more ideal practices.

Guthman’s (2004) analysis of California’s organic regulatory structure reveals that government support, through the institutionalization and codification of specific

production practices, plays a key role in shaping the rules and setting the context for specific structures of organic production. Government regulation of agricultural production has been shown to be instrumental in shaping the global food system (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989) and Guthman's thorough analysis (2004 [July]) of the changing regulatory structure in California's organic sector reveals its significance in shaping the structure of organic agriculture. California was the first state to develop a legal definition of organic agriculture and in the process the first to develop a legal structure that provided a favorable context for the agro-industrialization of organics without the direct intervention of agribusiness. While Guthman's analysis is specific to the regulatory structure in California prior to the NOP, what it reveals is that state support, government policies, and regulation matter tremendously in determining whether or not organic agriculture in other regions will follow the path of California.

Several others have investigated how government involvement in the process of organics regulation and standards-making is affecting the original goals of the organic movement. Public policy in Europe turned a favorable eye on organic agriculture about a decade sooner than North America did, and much of the analysis into government policy surrounding organic agriculture was initiated by European scholars. The first to raise concerns about the effects of government regulation on organic standards was Clunies-Ross (1990) who suggested that the possible ramifications of government appropriation of organic regulation in the U.K. would be the lowering of production standards and the sacrifice of the agroecological principles on which the organic movement was built. Tovey's (1997) examination of Irish organic agriculture found the state-run regulatory framework stifled the oppositional potential of organic agriculture and blunted its transformative potential. In the case of Danish agriculture, Michelsen (2001) found that when organic agriculture moves into the legal framework of public policy, the focus is on administration of rules and

guidelines and not the coherence of values reflected in the movement and the standards. Furthermore, in the context of public-regulation, production standards were viewed as ends in themselves, instead of attempts to realize the values of the organic movement. And whereas self-regulation had fostered change when different standards were thought to better realize the values of the social movement, public-regulation created stagnation.

In the U.S., analysis of the federal public policy regarding organic standards began to emerge soon after the passing of the 1990 Organics Food Production Act (OFPA). As the organic market grew and became more mainstream, the push for federal public policy monitoring organic production, processing, and distribution did not surprise many and neither did the nearly decade long debate over the standards behind the organic label. Several scholars wondered aloud how the integration of organics into national-level agricultural policy would impact the organic movement and the industry that was developing. DeLind (2000: 199) debated whether the values and goals of the organic movement could be expressed through a set of production standards and whether “a deeper societal conscience [is] certifiable.”

Similarly Vos (2000) documented the contentious battle over the organic standards as purists, pragmatists, industry representatives, and consumers engaged in an ongoing public debate of organic regulation resulting in the rejection of the first proposed Final Rule (which included GMOs, sewage sludge, and irradiation) and significant modification of the second Final Rule. Vos found that what unfolded during these public debates was the realization by many in the organic movement – purists and pragmatists alike – that the USDA was focused on fitting organic agriculture into a productionist paradigm and thereby reducing organics to a set of technology practices and input-substitutions. Federal regulation was more about making organics ‘legible from above’ (Scott 1998) than it was about representing and

reinforcing the values of the organic movement. However, Vos found no reason to be pessimistic and rallied around the potential for the organic movement to create change, as organic agriculture developed into an industry and organic markets expanded. He found the public discussion around organic standards and regulation to be proof that organics is the nexus of debate regarding the relationships between nature and society and an arena for re-envisioning the role of agriculture in society. He concludes (Vos 2000: 254) by saying that the “public debate over national organic standards gives some indication of what is at stake, and demonstrates the potential on the part of civil society to participate in grassroots environmental social movements in support of alternative agriculture.”

Several other scholars have seen the emergence and development of organic standards as evidence that the social movement is affecting change in the market. Allen and Kovach (2000) argue that, while the contradictions between organic ideals and practices will most likely emerge through the capitalist market and increasingly undermine the social and environmental goals of organic agriculture, an organic market could succeed in furthering some goals of the organic movement and strengthening the civil society of alternative agriculture. One way they argue this is possible is through the potential of organic markets to weaken commodity fetishism in the agro-food system by encouraging consumers to think about the social and environmental relations behind the production of food. In addition, they claim that organic agriculture and products are different and the institutionalization of that claim, through regulation, demands a level of transparency about the nature-human relationships of both conventional and organic agriculture. According to Allen and Kovach (2000:227) this provides an inherent critique of conventional production – “the argument that organic food is better than non-organic food implicitly and explicitly entails a critique of the scientific institutions that tell us otherwise.”

Barham (2002) and Raynolds (2000) view the sustainable agriculture labeling and certification programs – what Barham calls “value-labels” • as the interface between social movements and the market. They argue that the demand in the international market for value-labeled products is evidence that the attempts of the alternative agriculture and organic movements to create change through labels and certification programs have been fairly successful. Raynolds (2000: 381) claims that in the case of the organic (and fair trade) label this is true because they reveal “global relations of exchange and challenge market competitiveness based solely on price.” Barham argues that we must view value-labeling – and the standards and regulations behind them - as a social movement to understand alternative agriculture’s transformative potential.

One of the biggest criticisms launched against the development and redevelopment of national organic standards is that they cannot completely capture the ideal (values) that they are meant to represent. However, as I will argue later in the chapter, this is the nature of standards and standard-making. There are concepts, processes, and ideal outcomes that are outside the realm of standards-making, precisely because standards are the standardization of things, practices, and ultimately people. Through the process of standards-making, the values that standards endeavor to represent can be disconnected from the practices that actually take place. Buck et al.(1997) and later Guthman’s own work (2000, 2004, 2004 [July]) show the reductionism inherent in standard-making and institutional regulation of organic agriculture – a component of industrial agriculture that the organic movement initially sought to resist. However Buck et al. and Guthman present a linear understanding of organic standards and regulation in which they develop in tandem with the shift from movement to industry and alternative agriculture to conventional. In addition, a limitation of their analysis is that by focusing only on those aspects of regulation that

affect practices and protect the price premium, they tend to favor a structural analysis of the standards and regulation and thereby neglect the more normative aspects of standards-making. A structural analysis of standards cannot adequately address how the process of standard-making behind the label shapes organic agriculture both as a *symbol* and as a set of practices, nor how the process appears to lead to their disconnect.

Campbell and Liepins (2001) however, attempt to address this linear and somewhat static view of organic standards and encourage an understanding of organic standards-making as a process that is contested, constructed, ongoing, and geographically specific. Utilizing Foucault's account of discourse analysis to understand how meanings are structured and negotiated in a discursive field, they examine organic standards in New Zealand. They argue (2001:26) that the widely accepted meaning of 'organic' is constructed and reconstructed from multiple definitions, texts, and institutions that "mirror and reshape the contexts in which the production and consumption of organic produce occurs." Their analysis allows for a more nuanced understanding of the continuing development of organic standards that accounts for the multiple and often conflicting actors that participate in standards-making. This enables an understanding of organic regulation and standards that have both the transformative potential described by Allen and Kovach (2000), Barham (2002), and Reynolds (2000), as well as the ability to shape organic production practices that enable agro-food capital to penetrate and gain a greater share of the organic market. While organic regulation may not necessarily reconcile these two forces, Campbell and Liepins provide a framework to understand how they can co-exist.

The above examination of the current scholarship on organic agriculture reveals, as Goodman (2000:215) says, "the various ways in which the discursive and

material content of ‘organic agriculture’ is being contested and re-configured.”

However, most of the current literature has only commented on the NOP and federal regulation under the USDA in passing since the NOP did not come into practice till late 2002. While we can assume that many of the effects of the NOP will not be felt for many years, an examination of emerging trends surrounding the NOP is timely. This is especially true since the NOP is an example of public regulation in a time of and increasing move towards private regulation in the global food system (Friedmann 2005; McMichael 2005).

Most of the current research places organic agriculture outside of the modern food system, seeing organics simply as a challenge to the modern food system that has been appropriated (or not). Although organic agriculture emerged as a challenge to the industrial production of food, based on its partial success it has also played a more central role in the development of the modern food system than most of the research presented above takes into account. Therefore to understand the current changes in the regulation of organic agriculture, the organic movement needs to be placed more centrally in the context of the current global agro-food system.

As the distance grows between consumers and the food they eat in our global food system, consumers are increasingly motivated by the values embodied in food products and communicated through labels – such as quality, lifestyle, and environmental values. Barham’s (2002) analysis of the value-labeling movements reveals the salience of value-labeling among consumers, without which the organic and alternative movements would have limited interaction with the global capitalist market. The organic label and other value-labels would not have quite the transformative *or* profit potential if consumers were not becoming increasingly value-oriented – a result of the growing social movements around food in the current global agro-food system. Therefore, while value-labels such as organic have been a force of

the growing agro-food movements, the flip-side of this coin is that agro-food capital has mobilized itself around capturing the value-oriented consumer dollar. This situation is a historical product of the current agro-food system in the Global North that is market-directed, retail-driven, and food/consumer-centered. In this context the organic label has meaning because it communicates specific values (real or not) behind the production of the products that carry those labels – making those food products *good to think* and therefore *good to eat* (Falk 1991 cited in Dixon 2002). The standards behind the labels then play an important role in determining who can participate in communicating value to consumers and who cannot – and therefore who is a *good producer*.

In addition to placing organic agriculture more centrally in the emerging trends of the global food system, organic standards also need to be analyzed in a normative framework, by which it can be seen that standards are not simply an outcome of the organic structure, but a space in which multiple actors interact to define and codify organic practices and ideals. By analyzing organic standards in this way, we can understand the NOP as part of an *agricultural moral economy* (Busch, 2000), in which the normative conceptions that define and redefine ‘good’ farmers, ‘good’ practices, and ‘good’ products are codified and institutionalized. Understanding the moral economy is critical in the current food system where value-labeling and “value standards” (Friedmann, 2005) are becoming more central to agribusiness organization of the food system as well as a focus of food-centered social movements. Therefore, we can situate the organic agriculture and the current regulatory regime under the NOP in the specific historical context of the relations of agricultural production in the agro-food system of the 21st century and in the role that food-based social movements have played in its development. A historical analysis can reveal that organic

agriculture has moved from the sidelines to the center of modern food politics and in this process has created significant changes for all producers in organic agriculture.

In the rest of this chapter I will lay out a theoretical framework that draws on several literatures from agrarian political economy and economic sociology to understand the role of the NOP in the trajectory of organic agriculture. I will begin by situating the organic agriculture movement and regulation within the larger historical context of the modern food system through ‘food regime’ analysis first introduced by Friedmann and McMichael (1989). Along with Karl Polanyi’s (1957) analysis of market societies, food regime analysis enables an understanding of the larger role of regulation and agro-food social movements in structuring agrarian relationships of the larger agro-food system. I will then turn to the current economic sociology literature on ‘moral economy’ to analyze the NOP in a *normative framework* that enables an understanding of organic standards as space where different ideological actors compete. I will argue that it is through this normative space that the countermobilization of agro-food capital in the modern food system precedes. I will conclude with an examination of the ‘conventionalization debate’ in the literature on organic agriculture and the long standing debates on the persistence of small- scale producers in agriculture. I argue that a highly polarized bifurcation of the organic sector will take place through the changing relations in the agro-food system, of which the standards for value-labels and certification play a major role.

The Moral Economy of Organic Agriculture in the Modern Agro-food System

The organic critique of modern agriculture emerged in the early 20th century, but the organic movement did not take hold until the early 1970’s during a period of significant change and restructuring in the modern food system. Organics and other food-centered movements played a critical role in the changing relationships of the

modern food system as the environmental and social consequences of agro-industrialization were becoming more apparent. To understand why the organic movement arose when it did and to understand it as fundamental in shaping the agro-food system, as opposed to simply a reaction to the status quo, I bring together Polanyi's concept of the double-movement (Polanyi, 1957) and 'food regime' analysis (Friedmann and McMichael 1989).

According to Polanyi, market societies are based on the balance of a double-movement. On the one hand society is subject to the self regulating market, and on the other hand, a protective movement that responds by resisting the environmental and social consequences of the self-regulation market. Understanding the organic movement as a protective counter-movement allows one to place it in historical context and understand why it took the form that it did. To apply this concept to the agricultural sector I look to the food regime analysis introduced by Friedmann and McMichael (1989). According to food regime analysis different historical food regimes are identified as relatively stable periods linking production and consumption through regimes of regulation – rule-governed structures • that support a system of capital accumulation. These stable periods are based on concessions of competing and divergent interests in society, represented by governments, commercial interest, and social movements. Threats to the stability of food regimes emerge when key relationships and practices on which the stability of the food system is based can't continue to function as before, and the system is thrown into crisis by political contests that attempt to reshape social relations. The political contests won and lost over the future direction of the food system (and society) fashion the emergence of a new food regime and the social relations and practices that form its basis. Each food regime therefore is an outcome of the intersection of social movements, government policies, and the profit-seeking strategies of corporations.

The Double-Movement: The Expansion of Agro-Industrialization and Agro-food Movements

According to Polanyi (1957) with the rise of market capitalism in the 19th century we saw the emergence of economic theory supporting self-regulating markets, in which the economy is seen as a system of interlocking markets that automatically adjust supply and demand in society through the price mechanism. Polanyi argued that since self-regulating markets require subordination of society to the logic of the market or a disembedding of society from the market, this goal can't be fully achieved, because a real disembedding of society would ultimately lead to its destruction. According to Polanyi, this is because the self-regulating market requires that human beings (labor) and nature (land) be treated as pure commodities, which is destructive to both society and the natural environment (Block, 2001). The attempt to commoditize land and labor is destructive because people and nature are treated as real commodities when they are actually fictitious commodities. A commodity is something that is produced to be sold on a market, and neither land, which is subdivided nature, nor labor, which is the activity of humans, are produced for the market (Block, 2001). However, as the market society is organized around the principles of a self-regulating market, land and labor are treated as commodities and this produces destructive outcomes.

Polanyi argued that the economy is not autonomous (as it is thought to be in economic theory) but subordinated to social relations, and, traditionally, the economic system was embedded in religious and political relationships. "Ultimately this why the control of the economic system by the market is of overwhelming consequence to the whole organization of society: it means no less than the running of society as an adjunct to the market. Instead of the economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system." (Polanyi, 1957: 57). As Block

(2001) notes, this often leads to a misreading of Polanyi's argument as saying that a complete disembedding is possible. Although politicians were encouraged by economists to construct policies that attempt to disembed, that goal cannot be achieved.

Nowhere is the inability to fully disembed, and the resulting destructive outcomes, more evident than in agriculture. While agro-food capital attempts to deepen commodity relations in agriculture, the biological and physiological particularities of food production and consumption make social and environmental disembedding both a partial and incomplete process. As Goodman and Watts (1991) have argued, factories can more fully standardize the production process, but farms are limited in their ability to standardize the conditions under which they produce food. Although industrialization of agricultural production has taken place both downstream (manufacturing and processing) and upstream (industrial inputs, such as fertilizers, pesticides, machines, and GM technology), disembedding at the point of production has remained impossible due to the natural constraints that can't be overcome by the industrial process.

As the effects of disembedding become apparent, Polanyi argues that people resist the unrestrained market and the subordination of nature and society to the logic of the market. According to Polanyi, this resistance creates a double-movement: the movement to disembed society and expand the scope of the market and a protective counter-movement that resists and challenges disembedding. This double-movement today can be seen as the tensions between *meaning* and *profit* as corporations attempt to articulate social relations around the profit motive, and social movements respond with attempts to reembed economic relationships in social meaning. Food regime analysis presents the balance between efforts to expand the market and protective counter-movements in the analytical construct of a 'food regime.' According to

Friedmann and McMichael (1989), two different food regimes over the last centuries can be identified, and scholars (Burch and Lawrence 2005; Friedmann 2005; McMichael 2005) are debating the emergence of a third food regime. Food regime analysis reveals the role of social movements in challenging the status quo in food regimes, and leading to transitions, as well as shaping the relations of wealth and power in emerging food regimes.

The first food regime was a British-centered effort of extensive accumulation (1850's to 1914) based on frontier and colonial agriculture that allowed colonial powers to move around the globe to negate the effects of seasonality on agricultural production and insure cheap foods to support a growing labor force in the era of rapidly developing industrialization (Goodman and Redclift 1991; Kenney et al. 1991; Friedman 1991; Friedmann and Michael 1989). The first food regime exposed agricultural production to a higher reliance on market self-regulation, but the agricultural sector was largely buffered against experiencing negative consequences due to the ability to expand geographically into new colonial territories. However, in the 1930's, U.S. agriculture suffered both economic¹³ and ecological¹⁴ crisis as agro-industrialization progressed, managed largely by policies supporting a self-regulating market. As the consequences of the first food regime were made obvious during the

¹³ National and international market forces during WWI caused farmers to push the agricultural frontier beyond its natural limits and as agricultural prices fell commercial family farms concentrated in export-dependent regions responded by producing more, resulting in economic depression in agricultural markets.

¹⁴ Ecologically unsustainable models of agro-industrialization and European crops inappropriate for the export-oriented regions left the land stripped of its natural vegetation and the buffalo that once fertilized the soil were gone. The ecological balance of the plains was destroyed, leaving nothing to hold the soil when drought hit and the winds came in the 1930s. The 'Dust Bowl' lasted from 1934 to 1939 and caused an exodus from Texas and Arkansas, the Oklahoma Panhandle region, and the surrounding Great Plains. In the end over 500,000 Americans were homeless and topsoil across millions of acres was blown away toward the Atlantic Ocean and lost forever.

Great Depression, a counter-movement arose to provide state support of farm incomes and keep producers on the land.

A shift in U.S. agricultural policy in the 1930s set up a framework for recovery that included the integration of the agricultural sector into newly industrializing sectors of economy. These policies encouraged an agro-food system in the U.S. that further linked agriculture and industry, rapidly expanding the industrialization of agricultural production, and ultimately leading to large scale over production (which needed to be managed by the state) supporting the emergence and dominance of agro-food corporations. According to Goodman and Redclift (1991), since industrial capitals exist outside of the immediate production process in agriculture, the ‘rationalization’ of excessive productive capacity must be managed by state policies if the downward pressure on agricultural prices and farm incomes is to be managed. The second food regime emerged out of a protective countermovement around particular struggles and class compromises that emerged from the Great Depression. Several analysts argue that state policy intervention in the 1930’s was principally motivated by the potential social mobilization of agrarian populist movements around the issue of declining farm incomes (Goodman and Redclift 1991; Kenney et al. 1989).

According to Friedmann (2005: 240), the second U.S.-centered food regime “unfolded as the expression of complimentary goals of states, firms, social classes and consumers, dramatically chang[ing] patterns of international production and trade.” State policies played a key role in regulating and protecting the national context of agricultural organization and the second food regime is marked by a “re-nationalization” of domestic agriculture in Western countries (Friedmann and McMichael 1989). The late 1940s to the mid 1970s was the “golden age” of the agro-industrial model of production (Kenney et al. 1991; Goodman and Redclift 1991). Capital-intensive agricultural technologies insured the mass-production of foodstuffs

as well as inputs for production. After WWII the production of food was transformed and agriculture came to resemble other industries as it consumed industrial inputs and produced raw outputs for processing. As industrialization developed, food was no longer something simply produced by farmers but a profitable product that was sourced, produced, and marketed by the capitalist enterprise (Friedmann 1991).

Several key structural changes in the agro-food system emerged and were solidified during this period. State policies and technological advances made possible the transformation from rural farming to industrial farming as farmers were doubly integrated into circuits of capital, both as consumers and producers. Farmers became consumers of industrial inputs in the form of integrated ‘packages’ of management practices that included mechanical, chemical and biological innovations (Goodman and Redclift 1991). Rural products became inputs for industry, and a national framework of state-managed regulation insured cheap agricultural inputs for industry by supporting both a specific model of agricultural production and farm incomes (Friedmann 1991; Goodman and Redclift 1991; Kenney et al. 1989; Kenney et al. 1991). This model of production encouraged farmer relationships with corporations as the farmers’ role shifted from producers of final products to producers of raw materials for industrial input as well as consumers of industrial inputs like chemical fertilizers. Regional specialization and mono-cropping emerged along with vertical and horizontal integration in the agricultural sector. Consumption patterns changed significantly as diets were standardized, there was an increase in meat consumption, and local commodities were displaced by a range of durable goods (Friedmann 1991; Kenney et al. 1991, Kenney et al. 1993).

The intensive integration of agriculture and industry is a result primarily of political solutions to the over-production crisis of the 1920s and 1930s and the Great Depression. The state-subsidized model of farm competition, with regulated

commodity markets, policies to stabilize farm incomes, and credit programs reduced risks for farmers and created incentives for farm level accumulation. Technological innovation became the basis of social reproduction of the farm enterprise and a treadmill of competitive innovation intensified the concentration of ownership and out-migration of the farm population (Goodman and Redclift 1991) as the diffusion of agricultural technologies in the form of industrial inputs enabled farmers to achieve economies of scale and absorb weaker farms. There was a gradual increase in farm size and tenants and sharecroppers were pushed off the land (Kenney et al. 1989). The trend toward specialization in agriculture and the decline in pre-war diversity and flexibility, according to Kenney et al. (1989), was greatly diminished as farms became specialized internally and only produced a few crops encouraged by lenders and government-support programs that only focused on a few specific crops.

State-supported, industrialized agricultures that guaranteed cheap agro-industrial inputs, an expanding consumer market, and increasing industrial organization of agricultural production, along with the expanding networks of processing and distribution by corporations, resulted in the development of two agro-food complexes that characterize the second food regime: the durable foods complex and the grains-livestock complex. The grains-livestock complex emerged out of a scientific, technology intensive model of specialized production and domestic subsidy strategies that produced cheap, standardized rural products (Goodman and Redclift 1989). A reorganization of livestock production was stimulated, and activities shifted from open range, grass-fed operations to intensive grain-fed operations based on cattle feedlots and mechanized confinement of poultry and pigs. As meat production became more industrialized, so too did the producers specializing in the production of crops for feedstuffs. As investment in the livestock sector increased, transnational agro-food corporations started to link heavily protected national agricultures – Europe

focusing on wheat and dairy, and the U.S. focusing on corn and soy • with global inputs.

The durable foods complex arose as industrial processes allowed for technical substitutions. Industrial substitutes, coupled with subsidy supported overproduction of corn and soya, brought about industrial foodstuffs in the form of durable goods. According to Friedmann (1993) raw material substitution led to import substitution, displacing a large percent of Third World exports (primarily tropical oils and sugar). High fructose syrup became a substitute for sugar and soya oil (a byproduct of processing animal feed) a substitute for imported tropical oils. Substitution strategies encouraged standardization of rural products as agro-food capital sought low cost inputs.

It is within the organization of these complexes that we can best see the principles of industrial agro-productive organization as they were organized around capital-intensive management systems that involve the substitution of capital and agro-intensive inputs for labor and on-farm (recycled) inputs. Industrial principles are strongly applied in downstream food manufacturing, which has created mass-produced and standardized products, made from interchangeable inputs, that have a long shelf life (Goodman and Redclift 1991; Goodman and Watts 1994). However upstream activity in the livestock sector organized around the ‘factory farms’ of cattle feedlots and CAFOs,¹⁵ have a strong articulation with industrial principles which are so appealing to agro-industrial capitals. As these two agro-food complexes matured, the locality of patterns of food consumption and production was significantly altered with the technical tendency towards distance and durability (Friedmann 1991).

¹⁵ According to the EPA a CAFO is defined as: animals fed or maintained for 45 or more days/year within a place of confinement that was marked by an absence of vegetation during a normal growing season. The minimum number of animals is: 1,000 head or more of beef cattle; 2,500 swine; or 750 dairy cattle. (USDA website)

The reorganization of agricultural production around these two agro-food complexes during the second food regime helped to solidify the role of agribusiness capital in organizing the modern food system at the end of the second food regime. The demand for cheap and interchangeable agricultural inputs by agro-food industries helped shape agricultural trade as these industries looked for cheaper sources and substitutes (Friedmann 1991, 2005; Goodman and Redclift 1991; McMichael 2005). Both production and consumption became highly integrated into the industrial food system as farmers' specialized production, based on agro-industrial models and consumers diets, were reshaped around manufactured foods.

Perhaps the most singular characteristic of the second food regime is the expanding *indirect* consumption of food through durable goods and meat. For example, the typical American diet was progressively been reoriented towards processed foods (and today Americans get 60% of their energy from two nutrients – fat and sugar), but as intermediate ingredients in manufactured foods rather than directly consumed¹⁶(Sobal 1999). The agro-industrialization moved along a transformation of daily life, and a new mass diet emerged in which pre-packaged foods, frozen foods, supermarkets, restaurants, fast food chains, and kitchen appliances became commonplace for most people (Friedmann 1991, 1993; Goodman and Redclift 1991). As more people began to depend upon commercialized agriculture, a revolution occurred in food delivery to the consumer with the emergence of the supermarket and fast food chain. Agro-food capital reorganized food distribution processes as the food industry continuously expanded, integrated, and concentrated its operations (Kim and Curry 1993). As the preparation of meals moved

¹⁶ In 1960, 68% of household food was processed, while today almost all food is processed, except eggs, meat, and fresh fruits and vegetables

from the kitchen to the factory and more food was produced by farmers for industrial input, agro-food industries became intermediaries between producers and consumers.

During the second food regime transnational agri-business began to grow and emerge as the drivers and organizers of the global agro-food system through a process of linking production, processing, and distribution. A trend of consolidation and concentration of corporate control grew steadily in the agro-food sector during the second half of the 20th century as large firms sought to reduce competition. The consolidation and concentration started to put pressure on the social organization of food production around family farms as corporations tightly controlled production and the market for agricultural products. Through the process of agro-industrialization farmers became increasingly separated from consumers as farmers sold products to firms that would process and distribute rural products to consumers. Agri-business firms emerged as the essential link between producers and consumers, as the industrial model of agro-food production became more specialized and more stages were involved linking the field to the plate. According to Heffernan (2000), in the later stages of industrialization the horizontal and vertical integration of agri-business firms would result in an increased concentration of control in the food system and significant pressure on agriculture production organized around the family farm.

The current transition from the second food regime to a third food regime is marked by two factors: (1) tightening agri-business control of the food-system in which capitalist logic is the organizing principle, and; (2) the emergence of protective counter-movements focused around food. The stability of the second food regime was thrown into crisis as the goals of government, commercial interests, food producers and consumers lost coherence. The second food regime laid the groundwork for the corporate takeover of food production and the increasing agri-business organization of the global food system. With capital as the main organizing force, agricultural

production shifted toward the principles of the self regulating market, as national borders were opened to the free movement of capital and transnational corporations (McMichael 2005; Friedmann 2005) and attempts were made to reduce the domestic agricultural policies of the past, that were seen as barriers, as corporations expanded globally to access the cheapest inputs into production. According to Friedmann and McMichael (1989) the reorganization of the global food system by agro-food capitals has subdivided and restructured agriculture. Specialization in the agro-food system increased with the global expansion of niche markets for fresh and processed foods, reemergence of contract farming on a global scale, and flexible employment strategies that arose first in intensive meat production (Kim and Curry 1993). New corporate strategies are geared toward global and regional markets focusing on specialty products that fit into niche markets. According to McMichael (1994) these developments exert pressure on states to pursue national competitiveness instead of national coherence in agricultural sectors, creating significant pressure to shift state policies back toward market self-regulation and to support greater capital accumulation. Friedmann (1993, 2005) argues, that at the same time this is happening, new social actors and social movements are emerging centered around food issues.

Polanyi (1957) argued that when the state moves toward disembedding by placing a higher reliance on market self-regulation, ordinary people are forced to bear higher costs. The policies of the second food regime intensified the organization of agriculture around social and environmental disembedding through the global expansion of agro-industrialism. As the food system globalized and articulated around capital, international and domestic social movements began to form around food and agriculture issues and facilitated the emergence of a strong protective counter-

movement centered around changing consumer food consumption practices in the Global North and farmer and indigenous rights in the Global South¹⁷.

In the Global North, the social and environmental consequences of an industrial model of agro-food production was becoming more apparent to consumers, and the public concern that emerged in the 1960's, with the publishing of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1964), grew into consumer movements. As more consumers were supplied by the industrial food system in the 1990's, the public became concerned and discontented by the use of pesticides, growth hormones and antibiotics, genetically modified foods, and the practices of intensive animal farming. Different social movements arose with a focus on food and agriculture as consumers became concerned with issues such as water pollution related to pesticide use, food safety and quality issues related to outbreaks of E. coli and BSE, and the challenge of industrial practices in intensive meat production by animal rights activists. Consumers also began to respond to the delocalization of food (Lyson 2004; McMichael 2005; Friedmann 2005) with a globalization of the food system and a world agriculture that produces 'food from nowhere.' These diverse social movements, in both the Global North and the South, found common ground in the issues surrounding food and the deepening commodity relations in agriculture, bringing in a diverse set of issues such as "cultural and biological diversity, gender inequality, dietary effects on health, ecological effects of farming systems, appropriate technologies, farmers' knowledge, farmers' rights, land reform, agricultural labor, hunger and social justice issues" (Friedmann 2005). In the Global North, organic agriculture was the most salient social movement for consumers who wanted to resist the destructive practices of modern

¹⁷ In the Global South, farmer movements formed as peasants were displaced due to subsidized Northern imports and domestic agricultures were reoriented toward export for the global market. These farm movements are pressuring states to challenge the trade rules of the WTO, redistribute land, resist intellectual property claims on seeds, and challenge the restructuring of agriculture for export, and reorient domestic production for domestic consumption.

food production and to promote environmentally and socially sustainable practices that seek to reembed agriculture in nature and society.

The intersection of economic and political restructuring in the last quarter of the 20th century, and the social movements linking larger social justice and ecological issues to food and agriculture, are shaping the drive towards a third food regime.

While it is difficult to foretell exactly what shape the emerging food regime will take (several trajectories are possible), the trends appear to be moving towards a food system that is market-directed, retail-driven, and food/consumer-centered. According to Friedmann and McMichael, the emerging third food regime is likely to be based on the corporate organization of a retail-driven global food system, a deepening of commodity relations around agriculture, and rearticulation of social relations around capital. McMichael (2005) predicts the rise of a “world agriculture” organized around agro-food capital and corporate global sourcing strategies that deepen global agro-industrialization through vertical integration made possible by the transnational mobility of agro-industrial capital. Friedmann labels it the “corporate-environmental” food regime (2005), signaling the critical role that the environmental/food social movements play in the unfolding crisis as well as defining the emerging relations of wealth and power in the third food regime. Friedmann (2005: 231) predicts that the emerging food regime will be based on a “new round of accumulation as a specific outcome of the standoff between ‘conventional’ and ‘alternative’ food systems.” The regulation of organic agriculture and the NOP are an important element in the emerging food regime, as a key space in the standoff between competing elements in the food system in the attempt to solidify and codify relationships.

The emerging food regime is likely to be market-driven with a centrally organized agriculture-from-above (Scott 1998) coordinated by transnational agro-food capital. The organization of domestic agricultures resembles less a foundational

institution for the society and more a component of TNC sourcing, with a domestic focus on comparative advantage and specialization in the global marketplace (McMichael 2004). Horizontal and vertical integration is becoming increasingly global, as transnational agro-food corporations and capital move easily across borders. Corporations also concentrate control, as agricultural production is increasingly organized around the life sciences and biotechnology (Lang and Heasman 2004), and intellectual property assets have surpassed physical assets such as land, machinery, or labor. Friedmann (2005: 227) says that the emerging third food regime “promises to shift the historical balance between public and private regulation.” States continue to play a role, as corporate supply chains increasingly rely on standards and certification, but they are not in the driver’s seat as extra-state institutions, such as the WTO, play a larger role in the market-driven global food system. Regulation has begun to focus on the new areas of control in the food system: mobility of capital and securing intellectual property assets. The mobility of capital encourages global agro-industrialization, as agribusiness operations have the ability to rapidly concentrate, coordinate, and centralize production (McMichael 2005). International intellectual property rights law allow corporations to further integrate the biological processes of production into corporate production strategies and gain greater control from the seed to the plate.

Due to the increasing consolidation of the retail market, the emerging food regime is also likely to be retail-driven. Since 1990 we have seen the emergence of five key players in the U.S. retail sector: Kroger, Wal-Mart, Albertson’s, Safeway and Ahold. In the 1990s these five accounted for 20% of sales, and now they account for over 40% of sales¹⁸ (Lyson 2004). The result is a handful of large food retailers

¹⁸ Effect for consumers is primarily local market consolidation with the average market concentration for the top four retailers in individual metropolitan areas is around 75% and in some areas 90% of retail sales.

linking up a small number of global food processors that work with a foundation of a few very large farms. The power of these large retailers rose at the same time that consumer concerns over food quality emerged. In addition to questioning the health aspects of foods offered by the industrial food system, Kim and Curry (1993) say that consumers are also beginning to become bored with industrial foods and demand more variety and quality, and Marsden (1992) argues that there is also a movement towards more individualized and privatized consumption. In response to consumers' increasing discretion, branding and product differentiation have become more important in the expansion of markets, and supermarkets are introducing private-labels or "own-brands" that could quickly respond to changing consumer tastes (Burch and Lawrence 2005).

Private-label products are based on flexible manufacturing, and a new manufacturing sector began to emerge to supply private-labels. These private-label manufacturers were well positioned to take advantage of globally sourced cheap, standardized inputs from commodity producers organized by transnational agribusiness.¹⁹ Private label products began to dominate traditional brands as the flexibility and innovation of generic manufacturing enabled retailers to experiment with niche products and respond to consumer demands and desires such as convenience, novelty, and functionality. Through consolidation and the rise of private labels retailers don't just act as distributors of products anymore, but increasingly mediate the producer-consumer relationship. The point of profit realization in the modern food system is shifting from the relationship between producers and

¹⁹ Previously retailers only sold goods whose style and price were decided by manufacturers. Now, with private labels, retailers are in control of these factors. Competition among retailers with private labels has become intense, resulting in the further integration of retail into the global food system as they expand globally to find the inputs that can be sourced most cheaply.

processors/retailers to those relationships between processors/retailers and the consumer. In this sense, we see a food-centered food system emerging, with both retailers and consumers focusing on the ‘values’ represented in food products. Retailers were keen to take advantage of one of the central aspects of commodity exchange - the process of communicating the value of a commodity to people.

According to Friedmann (2005), the issue of value construction and communication became central to a new set of emerging capital relations – ‘green capitalism.’ As the social movements around food began to draw attention to food corporations and challenge the practices and products of corporately controlled agro-industrialization, ‘green capitalism’ emerged as a response to the demands of consumers. Friedmann argues that the new form of capitalism is a selective response that appropriates the demands of social movements that best fit with expanding market opportunities and profit generation. In this way ‘green capitalism’ is not a total restructuring of the agro-food system around social and environmental sustainability – much as welfare capitalism that emerged during the second food regime was not socialism – but simply a ‘greening’ of embedded capitalist processes.

This greening is an appropriation of both meaning and value as well as markets. To begin with, manufacturing multinationals are hurrying to buy companies of the “value-industry” and expanding their portfolios into increasingly profitable product lines that appeal to consumers’ values. For example, recently Unilever bought Ben and Jerry’s, Danone bought Stonyfield, Coca-cola bought Odwalla, which acquired Fresh Samantha, and more recently Tom’s of Maine was bought by Colgate. These large corporate firms must rely on products and labels that are well established on the market and generally emerged out of grassroots movements and niche markets that are salient to alternative consumers. For example, you generally will not find any mention of parent companies like Colgate on the packaging for Tom’s of Maine, since

the large multinationals are nervous about losing the trust and connections with consumers that small companies have.

However, we can also see appropriation through labeling and certification programs such as the USDA's NOP. As the distance between consumers and the food they eat grows, labeling, certification, and production and processing standards play a central role in the "value-industry." Agro-food capital can appropriate these labels by participating in the construction of the standards and regulations of the labels and orienting them toward agro-industrial production. This allows for both the participation of agro-industrial capital in these 'alternative' markets, as well as, an opportunity to stifle the critique levied against agro-food corporation by these social movements. For example, Wal-Mart's pledge to stock more organic products on its shelves provides the company with both access to a lucrative market and an opportunity to improve its image.

I see the practice of appropriation in 'green capitalism' as the *countermobilization of agro-food capital* as it responds to the demands of protective counter-movements. This countermobilization brings the values and meaning embodied in these social movements into commodity circuits and enables their articulation around agro-food capital. In the following section I turn to the work of Karl Polanyi and the literature on moral economy to frame an analysis of the countermobilization of agro-food capital through certification programs like the USDA's National Organic Program.

The Moral Economy and Standards-Making

Polanyi (1957) showed us that all market societies are composed of agreements among competing interests and institutions and are therefore embedded in a moral economy. To fully understand both the role of the NOP in the transformation of

organic agriculture and organic agriculture as critical to the shape of the modern food system, we must see the NOP standards for organic certification as embedded in a moral economy in which a plurality of economic and ideological actors compete to define and codify ‘good’ organic practices, farmers, and food. The concept of a double-movement brings to the foreground the idea of a *moral economy* in which economic activities are embedded. As the market expands and commodity relations deepen, the social groups that bear the highest costs in society challenge and attempt to reconstruct the normative framework that structure economic relationships. Counter-movements are the efforts to reconstruct a moral economy in which some social relationships are privileged over economic relationships.

The concept of a moral economy is generally associated with the work of historian E.P. Thompson and political scientist James C. Scott. Thompson (1963) argued that the food riots that took place in 18th century England were based as much on the violations of moral assumptions that constituted a moral economy of the poor as much as actual deprivation. Scott (1976) explored the moral economies of peasants, in terms of struggles over the access to land, and their definitions of economic justice and exploitation. I shall use the term “moral economy” to refer to the study of the way in which moral sentiments and social norms influence economic behavior and how these are in turn influenced, compromised, or overridden by economic forces, keeping in mind that, in some cases, social norms broadly represent the legitimization of entrenched power relations (Sayer 2004; Jessop 2003). All social and economic relations – including those in the agro-food system – are embedded in an implicit set of moral and ethical implications, and, therefore, all economies are ‘moral economies’. As the modern food system is increasingly articulated around agro-food capital, and economic relationships dominate over social and environmental concerns, it is easy to assume moral and ethical norms do not play a role in structuring

the third food regime. However, according to Sayer (2004: 3), “some forms of power operate via morality, by taking advantage of it.” In this section, I will show that as the distance between consumer and producers is mediated by agro-retail corporations, certification standards and labeling become more central to commodity exchange and central to the moral economy that structures the economic activities of the agro-food system.

Recently, sociologists have begun to discuss the concept of a moral economy (Sayer 2000, 2004; Jessop 2003; Busch, 2000), especially in the framework of Polanyi’s analysis of market societies. Sayer (2000, 2004) builds on a Polanyian analysis to understand how, in market societies, economic activities are embedded in a moral economy that both supports specific material arrangements and is supported by them. The moral economy takes an institutionalized, bureaucratized form rather than an interpersonal form in market societies. According to Sayer, this is because of increasing individualization and declining responsibility for others. While the extension of the market and deepening of commodity relations increases economic interdependence,²⁰ the nature of markets do not encourage individuals to be socially responsible to one another (although individuals may act in socially responsible ways) or to the natural environment. This is because commodification encourages the consumer to privilege the economic and individual considerations (such as price and personal preferences) of consumption over the more normative and value oriented considerations.²¹ The extension of responsibilities for others, and for nature, must then

²⁰ As Sayer points out, an idea that first emerged in *The Communist Manifesto*.

²¹ For example, when we walk down the long refrigerated meat aisle at the supermarket we are met with the pink glistening packages of meat stamped with the price per pound. The social and environmental relationships and costs behind the production of this meat are hidden from us - the very fact that this meat came from an animal is hidden from us. Our choice is structured around the cost of this meat as we bring our hard earned money to the market. We are encouraged to base our consumption decisions around economic-oriented goals and other highly individualistic goals such as taste and preference.

be externally imposed in market societies. However, Sayer (2000, 2004) points out that moral-political regulation is also part of the preconditions that make capitalist economic arrangements possible.

According to Sayer (2004), regularized economic activity necessitates the establishment of moral economic norms:

For any economic process to become regularized such that it can be controlled and conducted efficiently, be it of production, distribution, exchange or consumption, it must be institutionalized so that all the many possible ways of doing things, all the possible distribution of resources, all the many possible claims about entitlements, rights and responsibilities, specific determinant ways of doing things are established.

Things that were once placed under normative contestation and debated – private property and legitimacy of profit for example • become naturalized through institutionalization and codification, and we no longer think of them as norms, but natural facts. The institutionalization of normative arrangements, according to Sayer, are based on the process of “framing,”²² whereby economic activities are made possible on the basis of shared norms and understandings, as well as through enabling the exclusion of certain activities and influences.

A recent paper by Bell and Lowe (2000) extends the discussions of the moral economy (although they do not use that terminology) into an account of the regulatory structures of market societies. Using the case studies of political contests between environmentalists and industrial agricultural advocates they present the concept of a

²² A concept that he borrows from both Goffman and Callon.

social economy in which these actors attempt to shape the regulatory structure of market societies in their favor. Their analysis shows that both groups attempt to codify and institutionalize normative conceptions in regulatory structures as a process of constructing and organizing market relations and defining economic policy. This encourages us to see regulatory structures as ongoing political contests in which a variety of ideological actors participate.

The analysis by Bell and Lowe, and the social economy concept, creates an analytical bridge between the moral economy literature and food regime literature, encouraging us to examine the moral economies that are created in each food regime and encouraging us to see both the potential of regulations – public and private • to undergird a specific structure of material and economic relationships as well as to allow specific practices and actors to utilize labels and language that give them an advantage in these relationships. In addition, by looking at the moral economy, we can see how, in the modern food system, competition is both structural and material as well as ideological.

During the second food regime the growth and maturation of the industrial food system expanded the distance between producers and consumers of food, increasing the need for standards that regulate production, processing, distribution, and ultimately consumption.²³ In a market society, we must rely on (capitalist) market transactions for social reproduction, necessitating regulations and standards that regularize and smooth transactions between individuals and firms by creating uniformity. According to Busch (2000, 2004), we can think of standards as part of the moral economy – what he calls the ‘agricultural moral economy’. Busch says, “that by ignoring standards and the disputes about them, we risk missing one of the most

²³ At the beginning of the 20th Century the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 began the move towards greater standards for production and processing in food production.

important aspects of the transformation of agriculture and contemporary rural life itself for it is through standards that the moral economy is produced and reproduced.” (2004: 274).

Standards are a good example of normative framing that makes both specific relationships possible while excluding others, and enforces prevailing values in society. However, standards are different than other norm making in the moral economy. To begin with, the idea and acceptance of standards must be prefaced by other norms in society. Standards-making both grew out of the industrial process and made industrialization possible. For example, Busch (2000) points out that prior to industrialization (and commodification) all goods produced were ‘singularities’. It is not until a number of goods can be produced and identified as uniform that the idea of standardization, and, therefore, standards are possible. Standards, are, therefore, both dependent on a naturalization of norms in society – specifically those associated with industrialization and commodity relations - and instruments of norm making.

The production of commodities, especially in industrialized agriculture, requires a standardization of all inputs into production and processing. The grains-livestock complex that matured during the second food regime relied on the production of standardized crops for the standardized processing of feed to be fed to genetically standardized animals to be processed according to standardized practices to be sold in standardized weights. All of this standardization requires the development of standards to normalize the production process and ensure it runs smoothly. In addition, standards facilitate the development and lengthening of commodity chains, since they reduce the need for personal negotiation in transactions. Busch (2000) argues that the development of standards requires the simultaneous standardization of things, workers/producers, markets, and even capitalists.

Standards are also different, because they enable specific economic arrangements and activities that characterize the modern food system and normalize our role as consumers of food commodities. In Busch's (2004) look at the historical development of the standards related to food safety in the U.S., he found the standards enabled and were made necessary by several trends in the global food system. To begin with, standards enable a delocalization and, therefore, depersonalization of the food system as personal ties to producers, processors, and retailer are weakened. Production practices have increasingly become more scientific, encouraging an increase in the scale of production and the rationalization of the production process (especially in the protein industry) made possible through standards that regulate practices such as pesticide application and animal health. Our increasingly processed diet is the result of the rapid proliferation of processing technologies and food additives over the last century, made possible through standards for processing practices and inputs. All of these changes in the food system require both standardization and standards-making.

Busch argues that the creation of standards, disciplines, reorganizes, and transforms not only things, but all the people and things they come into contact with. In this way standards are part of the moral economy of society – delineating which processes, practices, people, and things are 'good.' For example, Busch (2004) says the introduction of pasteurization and the bulk milk tank as part of food safety measures invariably drove small dairy farmers out of the business, while favoring large-scale, capital intensive dairy producers. Designing one set of practices as 'good,' or in the case of food safety 'hygienic,' sets other practices aside as not 'good' or 'hygienic' and, therefore, producers that cannot, or do not, conform to those standards are marginalized. Standards, by standardizing specific practices, enable producers who can conform to those practices, to gain greater market access and control, while

marginalizing others. In addition, as Guthman (2004, 2004 [July]) has noted with organic production standards, standards have the tendency to create a ceiling on practices whereby some actors practice the minimum level required to reach the standard. In the case of agro-industrialization, it can be argued that standards played a key role in encouraging the concentration and consolidation of the food system by certain actors.

As Busch points out, this is a social process as standards cannot be separated from the cultural, economic, political and technical aspects by which they are defined. Because standards are also an expression of what is ‘good,’ ‘healthy,’ ‘safe’ or ‘right’ in the society they represent, reconstruct, and reproduce society’s prevailing normative conceptions. According to Busch (2000: 282), “practitioners of the moral economy of standards accept the legitimacy of the contemporary capitalist market.” By accepting and acting according to a set of standards, social actors are reinforcing the values and norms embodied in those standards. For example, standards create uniformity in prices and products, which allows for the personal contact between buyers and sellers on the market to be limited, thereby reinforcing commodification as transactions are further embedded in market relations at the expense of social relations. Standards, therefore work to further integrate and deepen commodity relations in society.

Institutionalizing organic standards will enable certain actors –producers, processors, retailers, and even consumers – to participate in the organic market, while excluding the participation of others. However, organic standards-making presents a space in which a variety of ideological actors participate to define standards, and therefore the values and social norms, behind the organic label. By framing organic standards and the NOP as part of the *organic agricultural moral economy*, we are able to think of the potential of organic agriculture standards to both challenge conventional, industrial agriculture as well as to legitimize the status quo of

conventional agriculture. This apparent contradiction is possible because, in the case of organic and alternative agriculture, standards-making does two things. First, through the codification and institutionalization organic standards certain production, processing, and retailing practices will be enabled and others will be restricted thereby structuring the market in a way that favors some producers over others. However, standards-making is product of industrialization and therefore through the process of turning organic values into production standards the inherent criticisms of agro-industrial are played out. The constant tension created through the process of standardizing organic values and ideals guarantees that the inherent organic critique of the tendencies of agro-food capital remain.

Using Polanyi's (1957) concept of the double-movement we are able to explain the emergence of the organic movement at the end of the 20th century to challenge the reorganization of the food system around agro-food capital and the deepening of commodity relations around food. The emerging third food regime, however, suggests a countermobilization of capital in response to the challenges presented by environmental and food movements. By examining the NOP as part of the agricultural moral economy of the emerging food regime, I argue that the NOP is an ideological and normative space where the tendencies of agro-food capital (*profit*) and the critiques of organic agriculture (*meaning*) compete to define the rules that guide participation in the organic marketplace. However, I argue that these tensions are not resolved through the NOP, but highlighted. This is because, even as agro-food capital is able to counter-mobilize through the NOP, attempts to standardize the meaning and value embodied in organic agriculture results in an ongoing critique of the tendencies of agro-food capital. In the next section I will look at how the NOP provides both a space for the countermobilization of agro-food capital and at the same time continues to support the organic critique and the transformation potential of organic agriculture.

Moral Economy of Organic Agriculture: The Countermobilization of Agro-food Capital and the Exceptionalism of Organic Agriculture

The countermobilization of agro-food capital through food labeling and certification programs is possible (and limited) because of the intersection of three trends in the emerging third food regime, which according to Friedmann (2005) is the convergence of environmental politics and retail-driven organization of the food system. First of all, some new social movements provide a critique of the industrial food system by mobilizing around issues of food quality such as; food safety, animal cruelty, and health. Movements like organic agriculture link the declining quality of food to the production practices of agro-industrialization, encouraging consumers to not only be concerned about the food they are eating, but also where it came from. Second, some consumers are open to these critiques because they are becoming dissatisfied and bored with industrial food products and concerned about the increasing globalization of the food system that delocalizes food production and consumption and brings us ‘food from nowhere’ (McMichael 2004). Consumers became more focused on the quality of food and more concerned about the social and environmental relationships behind the movement of seed to plate. And third, around this time, the retail sector was consolidating, and the food system was becoming increasingly retail-driven. Retailers embraced quality standards, such as organic²⁴, as a way to solidify their role as mediators between consumers and producers.

At the end of the 20th century value-oriented labeling schemes and agricultural certification programs exploded on the market, as consumers - disconnected from the production, processing, and preparation of their food - were looking for new information to guide their consumption practices. Since commodity relations tend to discourage normative and value considerations, labeling and certification of

²⁴ For example, in 2005 Safeway unveiled their own private label for organic products called “O.”

commodities are a way for individuals to gain some knowledge about the relationships that brought commodities to them. As consumers were looking for ways to gain more knowledge about the food offered to them in the industrial food system, grassroots alternative agriculture movements found a perfect medium in labeling and certification programs to both challenge agro-industrialization and orient consumption towards more culturally and ecologically sustainable practices.

Labeling and certification programs in alternative agriculture were seen as a way to challenge the organization of production around abstract principles and reembed commodity circuits in social and ecological relations (Raynolds 2000; Barham 2002). The standards behind these labeling and certification programs could be constructed around the values of these social movements to define ‘good’ production and processing practices, ‘good’ producers and manufacturers, and ultimately ‘good’ consumption.²⁵ Through the labeling and certification programs, the agro-food countermovements brought the values and normative conceptions behind agricultural production to the surface, making them more transparent and facilitating the central role of quality standards in the emerging food regime.

The early labeling and certification programs were mostly regional, private certification programs or state-monitored programs. For the most part, agri-business, farm lobbies, and conventional farmers, saw these programs as little more than a nuisance, in that they criticized the industrial food system and conventional practices. However, as the organic sector grew in response to consumer demand, those that originally rejected the claims made by the early certification and labeling programs began to take notice, and certification became a complex political issue (Guthman

²⁵ While the debates around the morality of consumption have, in the second half of the 20th century, been centered on animal welfare issues (Singer, 2001), the current food politics around obesity and health have revived issues of morality brought to public attention by books such as *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair (1906), which led to the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906.

1998, 2004, 2004 [July]; Vos 2000; Allen and Kovach 2000; DeLind 2000). Agri-business, corporate processors, and retailers became alert to market trends that showed consumers were increasingly motivated by the values represented in products²⁶. Friedmann (2005) argues that early on, corporate brands simply played a game of ‘naming,’ appropriating the words like *healthy* and *natural*, which were not regulated or overseen by any agency. But as consumers began to get weary of these abstract labels, they looked to private certification labels, like *organic*, that guaranteed certain production and processing practices.

While value labeling and certification programs arose from the grassroots efforts of alternative agriculture social movements, they brought the codification of these social movements’ values into a framework – state regulation and industry standards – that speaks the language of conventional, industrial agriculture and is often deaf to that of alternative agriculture. As such, Guthman (2004 [July]) has argued that the development of certification standards for organic production was the tipping point that turned a social movement into an industry. In organic agriculture, the drive for universal national standards found most of its momentum from food manufacturers and processors. According to Friedmann (2005: 253), “regulation has historically helped food manufacturers by creating trust among consumers and clear rules for producers.” In order to participate in the rapidly growing organic market, agri-business had a strong interest in insuring that the national organic standards would facilitate trust in corporate organic products and create production and processing standards that would fit within a conventional model. This is especially true as corporate supply chains are much more dependent on the institutionalization of standards and the development of certification than those supply chains outside of conventional agriculture are (Raynolds 2000).

²⁶ These values ranged from abstract notions of convenience to health and environmental sustainability.

While early certification of organics was the outcome of a protective countermovement challenging agro-industrialization and attempting to reembed agricultural production in social and environmental values, I argue that the NOP can be examined as a space for the countermobilization of agro-food capital. This countermobilization of agro-food capital is acted out in the moral economy of organic standards. Early on in the moral economy of organic agriculture, corporate agriculture and agri-business participation was limited to being little more than the model being critiqued, but with the passing of the 1990 Organic Food Production Act and the development of the NOP, the standards behind organic agriculture entered into a new framework that was much more accessible to agribusiness interests.²⁷ The organic standards have become a battleground of competing interests seeking to mold the standards to best fit their model of production and values. The standards behind certification programs - as part of the agricultural moral economy – both limit and support different economic activities in the agricultural sector, therefore, through the NOP, agro-food capital has the potential to encourage the construction of standards that better articulate with conventional market forces and construct the idea of ‘good’ organic production as practices that are within the scope of agro-industrial model.

In the emerging third food regime it appears likely that, through the countermobilization of capital, organic agriculture will be pushed towards a conventional model. However, organic agriculture presents many obstacles and some of which are sure to be highlighted by the NOP and the process of defining national organic standards. To begin with, the standards-making process is a product of industrialization, and efforts to translate organic values and meaning into production standards will highlight the inherent criticisms of agro-industrialization producing a

²⁷ This is easy to see in the current court and legislative battles being fought over NOP standards that I briefly summarized in the previous chapter.

constant criticism of the codification and institutionalization of organic standards. This may produce a second obstacle by strengthening the civil society around organic agriculture. As Vos (2000) and DeLind (2000) note, the NOP increased the public discussion of organic production standards and has increased the vigilance and activism around protecting the values and meaning embodied in the movement. The strengthening of organic civil society leads to a third obstacle which is the increasing politicization of food production and consumption. As Kovach and Allen (2000) argue, this encourages consumers to think about the social and environmental relations behind the production of food. As more organic foods hit the shelves of conventional retailers like Wal-Mart and Costco, consumers are likely to question the standards behind organic label and to question whether they support producers who are truly an alternative.

While it appears likely that the corporate-environmental food regime that Friedmann predicts is emerging, it is still uncertain if the consolidation of this food regime will unfold. The countermobilization of agro-food capital is likely to result in the 'green capitalism' that Friedmann (2005) predicts will characterize the emerging third food regime, whereby corporate interests have been able to appropriate the demands of these movements that best serve capital accumulation and facilitate a deepening of commodity relations. Through the NOP, agro-food capital will most likely be successful in penetrating sectors of the organic commodity chain and facilitating the agro-industrialization of organic agriculture. However, it is unlikely that the organic critique of industrial agriculture will be diminished and, in all likelihood, it will be strengthened insuring that the conventionalization of organics will not be linear or complete.

Current conflicts over the NOP standards reveal that as the organic movement is responding to the countermobilization of agro-food capital, some consumers are

beginning to lose faith in the organic label, and organic producers are looking for alternative labels and ways to market their products without depending on the USDA organic label. These developing trends may prove to be a formidable challenge to the countermobilization of agro-food capital and the developing 'green capitalism'. They are also likely to significantly alter the structure of organic agriculture. In the next section I will examine the literature on the conventionalization of agricultural production and argue that organic agriculture is headed to an *organic-industrial divide*.

Bifurcation of Organic Agriculture: Globalization vs. Localization

In the previous section, I argued that, through an analysis of the moral economy of organic standards, we can see that on the one hand, through 'green capitalism,' agro-food capital is selectively responding to the demands of food-based movements, but that organic agriculture is exceptional in its inherent critique of agro-industrialization, and, therefore, limits the full penetration of agro-food capital in the organic sector. The struggles over the NOP standards reflect the unresolved tensions between *meaning* and *profit* in organic agriculture and will likely lead to significant changes in the organic sector and a reorientation of the organic movement. The question remains then as to how the NOP is likely to affect the small-scale producers that are considered the ideal social organization of production in the organic movement. In this section, I will review the debates on the conventionalization of organic agriculture and argue that, due to the politicization of organic agriculture, the tensions between *meaning* and *profit* are highlighted in the third food regime and a bifurcation of the sector is likely to proceed.

The Agrarian Question

Two questions that have long occupied the sociology of agriculture literature are: why, and how, do family farmers and small-scale producers²⁸ continue to persist in the face of capitalist agro-industrialization? There have been two different interpretations of the uneven capitalist development in agriculture: those that are macro-oriented and those that are micro-oriented. Macro-oriented scholars focus on those external or structural aspects that deepen commodity relations in agriculture and resist or delay this process. According to this approach, agriculture is different from industry, and to understand the changes in the structure of production we must explore how, and in what ways capital takes hold in agriculture. This is often referred to as the “agrarian question” and was first presented in the 1899 writing *On the Agrarian Question* by Karl Kautsky (1988). On the other hand, micro-oriented scholars focus on the internal logic of small-scale producers and family farmers, such as the values and beliefs of farmers. While the macro-oriented literature has its roots in Marx’s theory of capitalism, the micro-oriented literature has its roots in Weberian theory and Weber’s social action analysis (Mann 1989). I argue, that to analyze the current changes in organic agriculture in the third food regime, an understanding of both structural change and the value-orientation and motivation of producers need to be taken into account.

The agrarian question was heavily debated during the 1980’s, and most of the literature took a macro-oriented or agrarian political economy approach (Friedmann 1978; Mann 1989), with a focus on external factors in agrarian change. This literature has focused on three tendencies: the biological particularities of food production and consumption, the relative productivity of small-scale producers, vis-à-vis agribusiness, and the politicization of agro-food movements. Scholars evaluated these three factors

²⁸ Other scholars referred to small-scale producers as *small commodity producers* (Friedmann 1978)

– sometimes seen in conflict with one another • to argue for the persistence or decline of small-scale producers in different sectors and geographies (Pfeffer 1983; Freidman 1978; Goodman and Redclift 1989). The agrarian question was revisited again in the late 1990's with a focus on organic and alternative agricultures. A revival emerged with the publishing of the Buck et al. (1997) paper and initiated a contentious debate on agrarian political economy that soon became labeled the 'conventionalization debate.' Some scholars argued that organic agriculture would follow a conventional path, and small-scale organic producers would become marginalized; while others argued that organic agriculture had some exceptional qualities that limited the penetration of agro-food capital.

The 'Conventionalization Debate'

The 'conventionalization argument,' presented by Buck et al. (1997) and Guthman (2004, 2004 [July]), argues that organics is not resistant to the same trends that were seen in conventional agriculture over the last 50 years. The argument follows that, just like mainstream agriculture, organic agriculture is being penetrated by agro-food capital and transformed into an agriculture that does not look too different from conventional models. Accordingly, they predict that organic agriculture will follow the same path as conventional agriculture with increasing size and decreasing number of producers, intensification of production with mechanization and other industrial inputs, and a delocalization of production and consumption. Through an analysis of organic vegetable commodity chains in California, they argue that small-scale and locally-oriented organic producers are increasingly becoming marginalized by larger producers in high value, high turnover crops who think and act like conventional farmers. The process of conventionalization in organics includes not only the entry of conventional-minded firms into organics, but also the appropriation

of organics and the dominance of agri-business in the most profitable sectors. However, Buck et al. do argue that certain characteristics of organic production will temporarily resist conventionalization: economies of scale for small organic producers based in highly specialized crops, the ideological and philosophical motivations of organic consumers, and the social movement character of organics that often resists profit maximization. While these characteristics will provide initial resistance, Buck et al. and Guthman argue that ultimately agribusiness involvement (not necessarily deliberate intervention) will alter the conditions under which all organic growers must participate, thereby will accelerating the drive to intensify and pushing growers toward conventionalization.

The initial article by Buck et al. (1997), and the later defense by Guthman (2004 [July]), identified three threats to organic agriculture from agribusiness. These threats are not meant to be seen as acts of subversion on the part of agribusiness, but as trends that will alter the context of organic agriculture and benefit some producers at the expense of others. The first is the political threat of lowering the standards of certification and the organic label. Although there was little evidence of agribusiness lobbying, the standards-making process – codification and institutionalization – forces a rationalization and simplification of the deeper meanings and values behind organic agriculture. This essentially translates to a focus on production practices and allowable inputs making agribusiness compliance with organic standards much easier. Tovey (1997) made a similar argument regarding the organic sector in Ireland, pointing to a disregard and glossing over of the ideological content of the organic social movement through state involvement in certification standards. And Michelson (2001) has argued, that in the case of the Danish organic sector, the change from self-regulation, embedded in a social movement, to public regulation, monitored by the state, threatens the loss of fundamental values behind organic farming.

Appropriation by agribusiness is perceived as the second threat, which has two dimensions. First, referring to Goodman and Redclift (1991), they see the tendency in organic agriculture for agro-food capital to appropriate the aspects of production that lend themselves to industrialization, such as the use of off-farm inputs. The second aspect of appropriation refers the ability for conventionally-minded producers to out-compete existing producers through the adoption of industrial methods facilitated by economies of scale. In the example of appropriation, Buck et al. and Guthman do not see lifestyle growers (with market systems separate from industrial players) as directly threatened with marginalization, but, instead, see an overall marginalization trend in commodity markets where independent growers are competing with industrial producers. This almost guarantees that industrial producers are concentrated in easy to grow crops, and appropriation is therefore commodity specific. However, Guthman (2003, 2004, 2004 [July]) does point out that specialty products that are produced primarily by lifestyle farmers and sold through non-conventional channels, can rapidly become commodities as industrial players enter into the market. This was the case with salad mix (also known as mesclun mix). Simply put, appropriation amounts to “get big or get out” in the most profitable commodity sectors, and appropriation contributes to what they see as a third threat: the conventionalization of organics. As agribusiness and conventionally minded producers practice a “shallower” (Guthman 2004) form of organic farming, the distinctions between organic agriculture and conventional agriculture will cease to be real or meaningful.

The ‘conventionalization argument’ sparked significant interest among scholars, and direct and indirect rebuttals quickly emerged. Scholars debated both the empirical reality and consequences of conventionalization, sparking some new debates in agrarian political economy and reviving some old ones. Coombes and Campbell (1998: 127) were the first to directly challenge the conclusions of Buck et al., by

arguing that even though the tendencies presented by the ‘conventionalization argument’ may be real, their “combined impact will not lead to a widespread marginalization of small-scale organic producers.” First, they criticized Buck et al. for making universalizing claims and seeing the California trajectory as an inevitable outcome for organic agriculture in all locations (see also Campbell and Liepens 2001; Michelson 2001). Instead, they argued that there is regional and spatial diversity in the relationships between agro-food capital and organic agriculture that produces different experiences across and within national and regional contexts. Second, Coombes and Campbell (1998) revived the ‘agrarian question’ debates of the 1980’s and argued that Buck et al. only examined and presented a partial analysis of the relationship between capitalist agriculture and small producers, neglecting the relative productivity of small producers under capitalist agriculture.

Coombes and Campbell looked at the example of organic agriculture in New Zealand to argue for the specific experience of producers placed at different geographic, and, therefore, market positions in the global organic food system and for the exceptional position of small producers’ vis-à-vis agribusiness. They argue that, in the case of New Zealand, large-scale, conventional firms emerged in the organic sector to serve export markets, but due, to their inability to produce all organic crops reproduced a profitable and sizable space for small-scale producers to flourish. A universalizing process of conventionalization in New Zealand was not possible due to three limitations of capitalist agriculture, which are most evident in organics: the politicization of food issues, such as food safety and quality; the biophysical conditions of farming that provide obstacles to capitalist penetration; and the relative productivity of small-scale producers in some crops. They argue, therefore, that instead of conventionalization producing marginalization of small-scale producers, what has emerged in some national and regional contexts, is a bifurcation of the

organic sector. This bifurcated sector is characterized by a conventionalized and commodified export sector and a space for small-scale producers reproduced by the constraints on capitalist agriculture.

Another study, by Hall and Mogyorodý (2001), looking at organic growers in Ontario, Canada found limited signs of conventionalization or polarization of producers. They attribute this to the limited activity of agribusiness capital and a reluctance of both government and agribusiness to embrace the organic model for this region. However, they predict that increasing demand for exports from Europe and the U.S. will exert more pressure to support organic production in the export sectors and they are seeing signs that Canadian government is beginning to shift from a policy of exclusion to one of appropriation. If in fact there is a push toward conventionalization, with pressure from external forces and the government, they predict that a bifurcation similar to that seen in New Zealand will emerge. They anticipate the persistence of small-scale producers in this case due to their ideological motivations to support small-scale production, rural life, and allegiance to organic practices.

These papers have complicated the conventionalization argument first presented by Buck et al. and later developed by Guthman (2004, 2004 [July]), revealing that the broad tendencies in organic agriculture are not linear, universal, or uncontested. These studies reveal that although conventionalization of organic agriculture in some sectors appears inevitable it does not mean that it will be universal or total. The process of conventionalization will be selective based on the ability for agro-food capital to overcome the barriers presented by the particularities of organic farming. Buck et al. and Guthman have much more faith that agro-food capital will be able to overcome these barriers, while Coombes Campbell and Hall and Mogyorodý argue the inability of agro-food capital to fully penetrate the organic will reproduce a sector in which small-scale producers persist and thrive.

Another more recent study of Australia by Lockie and Halpin (2005) suggest that the concept of conventionalization may need to be reconsidered to understand the trends in organic agriculture. They found some signs of conventionalization within the organic sector, but no indication of trends that would signal either marginalization or bifurcation/polarization of the organic sector. Dramatic differences in farm scale were found in the Australian case that appear to mirror the early trends toward bifurcation with the conventionalization of field crop/export sector and the persistence of small-scale domestically oriented producers. However, they argue that this existing level of polarization shows no signs of continuing and that majority of producers plan on expanding production, thereby insuring a continuing mix of small-scale and large-scale producers. They argue that the trend toward expansion does not signal marginalization of small-scale producers or a compromise of sustainable production practices since the majority of the expansion will take place in small niche markets such as humane animal husbandry. In addition, while they found motivational and ideological differences among conventional and organic producers, they found little difference in attitudes among organic producers of different size, scale, or market orientation. Therefore a bifurcation of attitudes toward sustainable practices and motivations for scale of production and market orientation cannot be supported either. They conclude by suggesting that a reconceptualization of the concept of ‘conventionalization’ is needed to better understand the current trends in organic agriculture and to challenge the uncritical adoption of concepts they consider problematic.

Agro-Polarization in the Third Food Regime

While the reconceptualization of ‘conventionalization’ may be timely, I believe a better way to understand the trends in organic agriculture is to explore how

agro-food capital selectively appropriates organic agriculture in different regions and how the mobilization of agro-food capital has changed with the emerging food regime. The emerging third food regime is built on a foundation of tightening control of transnational agro-food corporations in which national and regional agricultures are reorganized as components of input sourcing. Organic agriculture has become integrated in circuits of corporate capital in the third food regime producing different realities for organic producers in different locations. The ability of agro-food capital to overcome the barriers presented by organic production and to deepen commodity relations depends on spatial and temporal characteristics of different agricultures. However, we cannot deny that there are some universal tendencies of agro-food capital.

Initial arguments by Buck et al. and the subsequent development of the thesis by Guthman reveal some of the tendencies of agro-food capital when the context (whether it be organic or conventional food production) favors agribusiness - consolidation, incorporation of industrial inputs, appropriation, globalization, and marginalization of medium and small-scale producers. In this sense, Guthman argues (2004 [July]:302) that the conditions set by agri-business once it penetrates the market lead to more than “a soft path of sustainability – an ‘organic lite’, if you will”, but a deepening of commodity relationships in some sectors of organic agriculture. However, as the research on Canada and New Zealand/Australia has shown, this is not to say that these tendencies are universal in all contexts or independent of specific conditions – both structural and ideological – in the organic food system. Yet, their analysis reveals how agribusiness drives the wider process of agro-industrialization in organic agriculture, much as it has been shown to have done in conventional agriculture when the context is right (Heffernan 2000; Friedmann and McMichael 1989; Goodman and Redclift 1989; Buttel and LaRamee 1991)

Studies of conventional agriculture have shown that not all contexts will be favorable to the penetration of agro-food capital and the variation can usually be partially attributed to spatial and geographic differentiation. A second argument by Guthman (2004) encourages us to consider the importance of geographic variation. She says that both the ability and the consequence of the penetration of agro-food capital will depend on the agrarian footprint on which different regional and national organic agricultures are placed. In the case of California, which never had an agrarian structure based on truly independent family farmers,²⁹ majority of organic farms reflect the more corporate agrarian structure of California, in which family farms and simple commodity producers are the exception. The study by Coombes and Campbell (1989) show that in New Zealand agro-food capital did not take over an existing sector, but developed an organic export sector leaving the domestic organic market to already existing small-scale producers. The New Zealand agrarian footprint has long been divided along export and domestic lines, due the country's historic role in the global food system as a site of expansive frontier agriculture geared for export during the first food regime (Friedmann and McMichael 1998).

Taking into consideration the structural history of regional and national agricultures encourages us to look at a third important dimension – the role of that region in both global, national, and local organic food systems today. For example, Guthman points out that California is the organic 'salad bowl' of the United States with the most certified operations and crop acreage as well as being responsible for producing over half of the country's organic fruit and vegetables. In California organic production has been delocalized from consumption and oriented towards distant markets and retail shelves. This delocalization supports a more conventional model of production. The research of Coombes and Campbell (1998), Hall and Mogyogony

²⁹ For a thorough discussion see: Pfeffer 1983

(1999), and Lockie and Halpin (2005) also point to the relative importance of the different sectors in their national and regional food systems to both the domestic and local organic markets as well as the export markets. While this point seems to imply that small-scale producers thrive in certain areas by ‘corporate neglect,’ I argue that instead what we see is the selective appropriation of the most profitable sectors and regions into global circuits of capital and a parallel growth of small-scale producers in separate market spaces.

The tendencies of agro-food capital should not be regarded as constituting a singular path of transition in organic agriculture, but a pattern of selective appropriation resulting in regionally and historically specific organic production. While the bifurcation of the organic sector between large conventionally-minded producers and small-scale producers has accompanied the rapid growth of the organic market, a more well defined polarization is likely to occur in the future. This polarization is defined by the symbiotic relationship between the greater process of abstraction and concentration associated with globalization and the intimacy and specificity of localization. The organization of the emerging third food regime is likely to produce a polarization of producers in organic agriculture due to two characteristics of the third food regime: retail-driven organization and the increasing politicization of agro-food movements.

On the one hand, as the concentration of control and power in the food system shifts to retailers and processors the barriers embedded in the production process in organic agriculture – agro-ecological principles and relative productivity of small-scale producers • become less significant as downstream processing puts pressure on producers to alter production practices. This will encourage a conventionalization of organics as the biological particularities of organic production become less constraining and regulation encourages a redefinition of organic practices to be more

suitable to agro-industrialization. In addition, Guthman has shown (2003) that products, in which the small-scale advantage is considered essential, can be easily transformed into corporate commodities. For example, salad-mix was once a specialty product produced by small-scale, direct-market growers became the impetus for the development of one of the largest organic industries.

In addition the politicization of the organic movement has increased in the transition to a third food regime and both agro-food capital and social movements have mobilized through organic standards and other value-labels. Organic standards and certification will facilitate the commoditization and conventionalization of organic agriculture, enabling a deepening of commodity relationships and the emergence of a corporate organics. However, as I argued in the previous section, the standards-making process further politicizes organic agriculture as the inherent organic critique of agro-industrialization is amplified through attempts to standardize, and therefore industrialize, the values of the organic movement. The tensions between *meaning* and *profit* in the agro-food system become highlighted as corporate supply chains appropriate social movement supply chains through certification. The barrier of politicization cannot be overcome since the consequences of agro-industrialization have created the need for a distinction between conventional and organic food. Small-scale producers will be able to respond to the ideological and philosophical motivations of consumers who feel isolated by the developing corporatization of organic agriculture. The increasing politicization of organic agriculture will provide a market space for producers who are most in tune with the values and philosophy of the organic movement to thrive.

The increasing polarization of organic agriculture, therefore, will develop from both the external, objective tendencies of agro-food capital to selectively appropriate the most profitable organic sectors and the subjective, value-orientation of producers

and consumers that create a niche that rejects conventional agriculture – organic or otherwise. The bifurcation of the organic sector then will result in one sector oriented toward profit generation and dominated by large agri-business and characterized by the mass production of organic commodities for the mass market – what I call “organic-industrial.” And, a second sector oriented toward community, sustainability, and organic values and dominated by small-scale producers focused on local production, distribution, and consumption – what I call “organic-local.”

A relatively stable division in the structure of organic production is likely to progress that reflects the well developed bifurcation of conventional agriculture – what Buttel and LaRamee (1991) call “agricultural dualism.” In the last quarter of the 20th century the concentration of control in the agro-food sector resulted in a small number of very large producers linked with agri-business and a small number of very small producers engaged in pluriactivity.³⁰ This trend, what Buttel calls the “disappearing middle,” emerged as medium size producers were pushed out of the market or swallowed up by larger farms. While resulting bifurcation will be similar, the process to get there is likely to be different in organic agriculture. For the most part there is currently no “middle” in organic production that parallels that in the conventional sector. The organic market has developed in a highly bifurcated state from the beginning with large-scale firms and small-scale producers existing and growing side by side, but generally not at each others expense. However, competition from large-scale producers and the pressures from down-stream processors have discouraged the development of medium-sized producers in organics, but left small-scale producers largely unaffected.

³⁰ Pluriactivity is part-time farming in which some members of the farm household are engaged in off-farm employment. In addition, the farm household is not dependent on farm returns for the family livelihood.

Ultimately the bifurcation in the organic sector will reflect an overall trend of polarization in the modern agro-food system predicted by several scholars (McMichael 2005; Friedmann 2005). According to Friedmann (2005: 251), the emergent third food regime, “consists of two differentiated ways of organizing food supply chains, roughly corresponding to increasingly transnational classes of poor and rich consumers.” By centering organics in the trends organizing the third food regime, we are able to see how organic agriculture is part of the current politics of globalization/localization that characterizes the structure of the modern agro-food system. The increasing polarization in organics will most likely link small-scale producers that can afford to produce according to their values – and generally engage in pluriactivity • with consumers who can afford to follow theirs with their purchasing power. On the flip side, the industrial organic sector will produce a mainstream, watered-down organics that fits into an agri-business model that can supply retail giants like Wal-Mart and Costco. No place else will the tensions between *meaning* and *profit* be more evident in the modern agro-food system than in the organic sector regulated by the National Organic Program.

Conclusion

I have set up a theoretical framework in this chapter that takes into account both the structural and normative aspects of change in the agro-food system and places organic agriculture in the center of current trends in the emerging third food regime. In the next chapter, I discuss the methodology of this study and explain why I chose to focus on organic production in New York State. In the following chapters, I analyze the current changes in organic regulation accompanying the NOP and how these changes are likely to affect small-scale producers that have formed the structural and moral core of the organic movement.

In Chapter Five I look at how the historical, spatial, and temporal development of agro-industrialization in the U.S. has led to a unique agrarian footprint in New York State whereby a market space is reproduced in which small-scale producers are able to thrive. In Chapter Six I present a normative framework based on the concept of an *organic standards moral economy*, with which I analyze the organic standards under the NOP and argue that it is through this normative framework that the countermobilization of agro-food capital in the modern food system precedes, but the tensions between *meaning* and *profit* also become amplified. In Chapter Seven I present my argument for an increasing bifurcation of organic agriculture through the NOP organic standards whereby a market space for small-scale organic producers who are most closely aligned with the ideological and philosophical goals of alternative organic production is reproduced. To conclude, in Chapter Eight I discuss the implication of the findings in this work and how looking at the changes in organic agriculture help us anticipate the shape of the emerging third food regime.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

“It is now the social scientist's foremost political and intellectual task - for here the two coincide - to make clear the elements of contemporary uneasiness and indifference. It is the central demand made upon him by other cultural workers - by physical scientists and artists, by the intellectual community in general. It is because of this task and these demands, I believe, that the social sciences are becoming the common denominator of our cultural period, and the sociological imagination our most needed quality of mind.”

- C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*

A Personal and Public Sociology

In the above quote, C. Wright Mills challenges sociologists in particular, and social scientists in general, to employ their sociological imagination to contribute to both an intellectual and a public understanding of the social issues of our milieu. As a student of sociology, I believe deeply in what C. Wright Mills calls the ‘promise of sociology’ to open our eyes to the social world and the connections between individual everyday lives and the social structures they move in. Sociological inquiry often challenges our customary ways of seeing the world. We are apt to find familiar things in unfamiliar places, and unfamiliar things in familiar places. Mills said that it is through the sociological imagination that theory, methodology, and research activity can achieve order together (Mills 2000). Employing a sociological imagination demands variability and flexibility in the research process, requiring the researcher to

avoid research tools and methodology that are too rigid. It these basic principles that I have taken into account in the design of my research project.

Since this study seeks be open-ended, exploratory, and flexible, my research does not reflect a hypothesis confirmed, but an inductive research process. This study is not an exercise in which I seek to make my data fit a theory, but instead a process of data collection and analysis guided by the goal of making the theory fit the data. Following Norman Denzin's (1989) view on the relationship between theory and methods, I believe that methods are of great theoretical relevance. I, therefore, chose to work within a grounded theory framework to pursue these research objectives. Although some grounded theorists might consider my work too heavily structured, my methods of data collection and analysis are firmly grounded in the framework.

Grounded theory methods are systematic and inductive guidelines for collecting and analyzing data to build theoretical frameworks that explain the data collected (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990; Dey 1999; Charmaz 2000). Data collection is informed by the continual and ongoing development of analytic interpretations that further focus the research. Grounded theory does not prescribe any specific data collection techniques, but provides a systematic approach that outlines techniques to move each step of the analytic process to the development and refinement of concepts. A grounded theory framework, therefore, provided me with the flexibility to choose methods of data collection and analysis that I felt were most appropriate for my research questions. Because data collection and analysis are simultaneous and on-going, grounded theory allows a researcher to account for variation and to modify the emerging or established analyses as further data is gathered. I will continue my discussion of grounded theory later in the chapter when I outline my data analysis.

I consider myself a public sociologist and I consider this study to be a work of public sociology. The emergence of sociology during the time of rapid social change and social ills in the late 19th century reflects its deep roots in civil society and its commitment to engaging, informing, and being informed by public conversations. As Michael Burawoy (2004) says, “Sociology lives and dies with the existence of civil society.” Sociology and sociological inquiry is *public* by the very nature of its topic – society. Society and the public are directly engaged in the execution of sociological research and often this research is held accountable to the public.

While there is no one definition of public sociology that all sociologists agree upon, the term has become widely associated with Michael Burawoy’s promotion of it in his 2004 American Sociological Association presidential address. According to Burawoy (2004: 5):

As mirror and conscience of society, sociology must define, promote and inform public debate about deepening class and racial inequalities, new gender regimes, environmental degradation, market fundamentalism, state and non-state violence. I believe that the world needs public sociology - a sociology that transcends the academy - more than ever. Our potential publics are multiple, ranging from media audiences to policy makers, from silenced minorities to social movements. They are local, global, and national. As public sociology stimulates debate in all these contexts, it inspires and revitalizes our discipline. In return, theory and research give legitimacy, direction, and substance to public sociology... Finally, the critical imagination, exposing the gap between what is and what could be, infuses values into public sociology to remind us that the world could be different.

While Burawoy has revitalized the debate of the relationships between sociological inquiry and civil society, C. Wright Mills was perhaps the first public sociologist. Mills asked sociologists to explore how *personal troubles* are in fact *social issues* connecting the detailed empiricism of sociological research with the larger goals and values of society. Mills challenged sociologists to make sure that their work reaches beyond the academy by avoiding a tendency toward grand theory and/or abstract empiricism (Burawoy 2004).

Through my research into the changing modern food system and the role that organic agriculture plays in these changes, I strive to bring sociology into public conversations and public conversations into sociology. With this research I hope to contribute to the larger social debates about food, agriculture, and health that have begun to occupy the public imagination (Nestle 2002, 2003; Schlosser 2002; Pollan 2005; Singer and Mason 2005). Although with this research I do not make any prescriptions for the type of society and food system that ought to be, it my goal to make a sociological contribution to the only public debates about the kind of food system we, as a society, want to see.

Social science researchers often hold the subject of their research near and dear to their hearts (this is also true for researchers outside the social sciences, but the connections are more opaque and research motivations are often less transparent) and I am no exception. In the landmark social research guide *Analyzing Social Settings* (1984), John and Lyn Lofland say that we must first learn what we care about, before we decide what to study, otherwise we risk becoming bored and frustrated. The Loflands say that as sociologists we often make problematic in our research matters those things that are problematic in our own lives. Following this line of thought, this study problematizes the development of the modern organic food-system and its effect on small producers, because I care about the fate of small farmers in America and I am

deeply concerned about the direction that our modern food system is headed and the alternatives that are present for the modern food consumer. In addition, I am concerned about where my food comes from and how ‘clean’ it is. I buy and eat organic food, shop at farmers’ markets and cooperative markets, and frequent local restaurants that source local and organically produced foods. I am deeply engaged in the organic food system both as a consumer and researcher – two roles that cannot be easily teased apart.

In this chapter I aim to provide a thorough explanation of my research design, data collection, and analysis. I begin by detailing my research design in terms of the focus on a farmer-centered perspective and my selection of geographic boundaries for the study. Next, I discuss the multi-phase process of data collection, detailing the various methods used and the selection of informants. I end by discussing my epistemological framework for the collection of data and my approach to data analysis.

Research Design

Farmer Centered Perspective

The views, opinions, and perspectives of organic producers are at the heart of this study. This study focuses on how organic producers believe they are being affected by changes brought about by the NOP and how they feel these changes will direct the future course of organic agriculture in the U.S. Organic farming has been developed and supported over the years by a grassroots movement of farmers, consumers, and activists. Yet, while there has been a significant amount of research on consumer preference for organics³¹ and multiple studies on organics as a social movement, there are very few studies evaluating the farmer-level perspective on

³¹ Conner’s (2002) analysis of consumer preference and NOP guidelines is the most recent.

changes in organic agriculture.³² In the case of the NOP, the attitudes and views of producers are significantly important, since the NOP has not only changed the structure of certification in which, or out of which, farmers now find themselves operating, but it has changed the nature and level of participation that the average organic farmer has in defining what the standards are as well as what the ‘organic’ label means.

Historically, organic methods, practices, and guidelines have their roots in the trial and error experiences of small producers. Organic farming’s heritage is deeply rooted in the grassroots efforts of farmers in the field. In the past, farmers played a prominent role in the construction and maintenance of the guidelines for organic certification, helping to keep the standards in line with fundamental values when circumstances change. Before the NOP, organic production standards operated according to a voluntary system of producer regulation where producers followed guidelines that were established by private organizations. These guidelines served not to simply distinguish organic products from other products in the market, but to reflect the continually evolving definitions of what organic production is and should be. Most private certifying agencies began, and continued to operate, from the grassroots with organic farmers (both those certified and those not) working with, and within, certifying organizations to ensure stringent guidelines that reflect the philosophy and goals of the organic movement³³.

Given the long history of participation among farmers in defining certification standards and process, I believe it is critical to understand organic farmers’ perspectives on the NOP and how they feel it will impact them and organic farming in

³² However, Michelsen’s (2001) analysis of Danish organics is an example of one.

³³ To avoid any conflict of interest, farmers who work for certification agencies do not certify their own farms with the same agency. This reflects organic farmers’ continual vigilance to insure that organic regulations for certification are fair and in-line with the philosophy of the organic movement.

general. The organic farming community is experiencing significant transformations with the conventionalization of organic production and the mainstreaming of organic products and, therefore, we can no longer see the community of organic producers as a similar-minded group (if we ever could). The increasing popularity of organic food, and the structural changes that organic agriculture is experiencing, are most likely creating ideological and political divisions in addition to structural divisions.

Although there is no denying there has always been an environment of healthy debate within the organic movement, the initiation of NOP may highlight fissures among the organic community regarding the future of organic agriculture and the role of regulation in that future. There may exist significant differences of opinion and experience among producers that are situated differently within organic agriculture and will be differentially impacted. For example, with the advent of the NOP, producers who use organic methods but chose not to certify (most often for many different reasons, but generally because of cost), have been disenfranchised and are no longer considered 'organic'. In addition, the structural and regulatory changes are most likely creating quite different production and marketing environments for those who directly market their products, such as fruits and vegetables, and those who produce products oriented toward commodity markets, such as dairy and field crops. By capturing the farmer-level perspective, this study will shed light on how farmers are affected by changes brought to organic agriculture by the NOP.

Defining My Geographical Reach

As every researcher soon learns, one's study must be geographically bound if one hopes to come to research conclusions in a timely manner. The task at hand for the researcher is to find a research location that is not too big, not too small, but just right. Although my study examines organic agriculture in the U.S., I knew that I would not

be able to get the in-depth, first-person accounts I was looking for though a survey of all organic producers in the U.S. Therefore, early on I decided to limit my data collection to one region of the U.S. that had a large number of organic producers, a large number of venues for organic products (farmers' markets, etc.), and an active and vibrant alternative agriculture movement. In addition, as a public sociologist I strongly believe that researchers should work within, and for, the communities in which they live and work in.³⁴ Given all of these criteria, I chose New York State as the site of my research in the NOP.

New York State (NYS) presents itself as a good geographical location for which to study the response of organic farmers to the NOP for several reasons. To begin with, NYS is among the top ten states with the highest number of organic operations (USDA, 2002). Second, the majority of producers, who are certified organic in NYS, have had to follow some of the most rigorous guidelines for certification. The primary certification agency in New York State, NOFA-NY (Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York), before being accredited by the NOP, was considered to follow some of the most stringent and reputable set of guidelines for organic certification. NOFA-NY has historically certified the most organic producers in New York (in my sample, majority of producers were certified by NOFA-NY). The organic farms in NYS are mostly small and medium-size farms, and there is a limited presence of industrial size farms in NYS. The small character of the organic farming community in NYS means that these farms could be extremely vulnerable if large organic farms (mostly on the West Coast) start to crowd smaller operations out of the market. In addition, my affiliation with the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at Cornell University gave me access to scholars,

³⁴ This view has guided my academic career through several land grant universities that have a relationship with local communities through extension work.

extension agents, and research groups that work with organic producers in the NYS, providing me with avenues to locate, and connect with, organic producers³⁵.

Data Collection

The research aims of this study called for a varied and flexible approach. Living and studying in New York State allowed me to collect data over a longer period of time and in multiple stages. The data collection for the study can be broken down into three phases: phase-one and phase-two were focused on interviews with organic farmers, while phase-three focused on collection and analysis of the origins and changes in organic regulation and the politics surrounding organic production, certification, and regulation. Phase-three of the study was generally on-going to accommodate the highly politicized environment of the NOP with new regulatory changes, recommendations, and lawsuits popping up every month or so. Farmer interviews were done in two phases to facilitate a grounded theory methodology of emerging concepts, with phase-two being informed by and building off of phase-one.

Interviews

The core of my data set comes from two phases of telephone interviews. In the first phase 177 semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with organic farmers, and in the second phase 135 semi-structured telephone interviews were completed. Forty percent of producers that were interviewed in phase-one were also interviewed in phase-two. The purpose of these interviews was to survey the current state of organic production in New York State, to document organic farmers view on

³⁵ This affiliation proved to be both a blessing and a curse since Cornell University does not have a stellar reputation for working organic producers in the NYS. Several farmers interviewed expressed their deep dissatisfaction with the lack of research and extension programs in organic agriculture at Cornell University.

organic production in general, and the NOP in particular, to understand farmers present and future plans for certification, and to document their views on the future of organic farming in the U.S. under the NOP. In addition to farmers, I interviewed key informants such as researchers working with organic farmers, activists in the movement, and academics.

A call-list of New York State organic farmers' names, addresses, and telephone numbers was compiled using a variety of public sources: major certification bodies in New York State, organic farm support organizations, the NOFA-NY Food Guide (2002, 2003, 2004), and a website called Farm to Table (2002, 2004) where farms can list themselves and describe their method of growing. I believe that I was able to locate and list most of the organic farms in the state. According to the USDA, in 2001 there were 264 certified organic operations in New York State (USDA, 2001) which, given the predictable increase in organic operations, is close to the numbers of producers on my list for phase-one (n=291) and phase-two (n=310). In both phase-one and two, all types of organic farmers were interviewed: direct-market and commodity producers, and producers of vegetable, fruit, ornamental, maple-syrup, grain, field crop, livestock and dairy. In general, the primary operator of the farm was interviewed from between 10 to 90 minutes, with the average interview taking around 25 minutes.

In both phase-one and phase-two, I used a basic interview guide template to conduct semi-structured interviews. For each interview phase an interview guide was carefully designed in which the exact wording and sequence of questions was determined, all informants were asked the same basic questions, and the majority of questions were open-ended. Denzin (1970) calls this type of interview a "scheduled standardized interview", while Patton (1990) calls it the "standardized open-ended interview." Whatever one might call it, this type of semi-structured interview has many advantages, especially for the studies with a large number of informants. This

type of interview structure makes data collection and analysis easier and more organized, while still allowing the researcher to capture detailed and in-depth information from informants. With this method, respondents answer the same questions, which increase the comparability of responses, and data is also complete for each person on topics addressed in the interview.

No research method is perfect, and this method does present several drawbacks. The most notable drawbacks are a limitation on interviewer flexibility in terms of relating the interview to particular circumstances and that the use of standardized questions can constrain the respondent and limit the relevance of questions and answers. Given these drawbacks, the semi-structured interview presents the most advantages for collecting a large and rich set of interviews administered by several interviewers. The interview questionnaires in phase-one and two were designed around open-ended questions that were worded in such a way as to minimize these drawbacks and provide some level of flexibility and relevance.

In this study the use of a semi-structured interview guide was also necessitated by the use of research assistants in the interview process. I employed one undergraduate researcher during phase-one and two undergraduate researchers during phase-two, to aid me in conducting interviews. These research assistants conducted approximately one third of all the interviews in both phases. All three research assistants were thoroughly trained by me regarding interview methods and techniques, confidentiality and ethical behavior, and tutored on the history of the NOP and organic farming. Variation among interviewers was controlled by the use of a semi-structured interview guide with carefully worded questions, and by training the interviewers not to deviate from the interview guide.

Another advantage to using a semi-structured interview guide was that it allowed me to do away with recording the interviews. From past research experience

interviewing small-scale producers in New York State, I found that recording informants made them uneasy and less likely to agree to be interviewed. Therefore, all of the telephone interviews were carefully annotated and recorded. The hand written annotation was then transcribed into a word processing template that could be easily imported into qualitative and quantitative software programs for analysis.

Prior to beginning this study I applied to the Cornell University Committee on Human Subjects for project approval. All research instruments and phases of the study were approved by the committee. In addition, each of the following years I applied for a renewal of approval from the committee. During each interview phase of the study, farmers on my list were sent a letter that notified them that I would be calling them to request an interview. The letter provided them with an outline of the study and gave them some background information on me, my research, and my research assistants. The letter also informed them of their right to refuse to participate in the study and the parameters of confidentiality. Following Human Subjects protocol, each respondent was asked for verbal consent to participate in the study prior to the beginning of the interview and they were informed of their right to terminate the interview at any time or refuse to answer specific questions. Respondents were guaranteed confidentiality and throughout the research process careful steps were taken to insure confidentiality.

Phase-One Interviews

The first round of interviews was conducted during the months of February and March in 2003. This was an optimal period of time to contact farmers for several reasons: (1) most farmers would not be busy in fields because of the harsh winters in New York State, (2) farmers views and opinions on certification and the NOP would be fresh because they would be applying for certification for the first time under NOP guidelines and regulation. Although all farmers in the U.S. were required to be

certified organic under a USDA accredited certification program by October 21st, 2002 if they wanted to sell anything as organic, given the climatic uniqueness of New York State, the majority of farmers would not be producing anything for sale until March of 2003 and did not need to begin certification or recertification until that time. I knew that around this time farmers would be looking over their certification paperwork and deciding whether or not to become certified or recertify.

During phase-one, 177 interviews (65% of the total) were completed with a fairly small refusal rate of four percent. Twenty farmers (7%) on my initial list were either no longer farming, no longer at the same address or phone number, or they did not consider themselves to be farming organically, bringing the total number on the call-list to 271. All of the farmers I was able to contact were included in the survey under the criteria that they were growing and selling organic products, whether labeling them organic or not. I did not want to leave out non-certified farmers that produce organically but recently had stopped labeling or calling their products organic. At this point in time, labeling and calling products “organic” was an issue fraught with tension for non-certified farmers (not to mention certified farmers). Leaving out farmers who have been producing organically, but now find themselves without the opportunity to label or call their product or farm organic, would be leaving out an important part of the organic farming community in NYS that is being impacted by the NOP. Given this explanation of inclusion, I still found a small number of farmers who said that while they still used the same methods of production that they have been using before the NOP, they did not now consider themselves organic and did not feel that they qualified for participation in the survey.

The interview questionnaire utilized during phase-one focused on several large themes: demographics, ideological and philosophical views, and organic certification. They were asked specific questions about production and marketing practices,

motivations for farming, plans for certification, and alternative or additional label use, as well as their feelings and opinions about the impact of the NOP on their operations and organic farming in general. The goals of this first round of interviews was to gain an understanding of the current state of organic production in New York State and the views and feelings of farmers about the changes in organic regulation and certification. Following grounded theory methodology, the data gathered from this initial collection was designed to provide a background of information with which to design a second, more fine-tuned and detailed interview instrument and then conduct a second round of interviews.

Phase- Two Interviews

The second round of telephone interviews was conducted in the months of February, March, and April of 2004. While the first round of interviews was timed to catch farmers as they were making decisions about being certified organic under the NOP regulations for the first time, the second round was timed to catch them when they had just finished their first growing season under NOP regulations. For this reason, I chose to narrow the list of farmers to only those who were certified in the last year or longer.³⁶ I updated my call-list of farmers, relying on the same sources as phase-one, to include farmers who had recently become certified and to remove any farmers that had dropped certification. The roster of certified farmers had grown in the last year, with my call-list topping off at 310 certified organic farmers in New York State. Yet, even though there was a larger pool of possible respondents in this phase, I was only able to secure 135 interviews with certified organic farmers in New York State. The lower response rate is not due to a decreased enthusiasm on the part of

³⁶ In, phase-two I also chose to focus on only those farmers who had been certified organic in at least the last year because I had a difficult time getting non-certified “organic” producers to participate in phase-one.

farmers to participate in the study,³⁷ but rather to time constraints placed on me and my research assistants that were unrelated to the study.

The interview questionnaire for phase-two was designed to build-off the questions asked in phase-one, without isolating possible respondents who did not also participate in the first round of interviews. In order to track any changes in farm characteristics, the interview questionnaire for this phase repeated some of the same demographic questions (such as what they produce, farm size, etc.) as the questionnaire used in phase-one, but the majority of the questions were different. Most questions invited respondents to discuss their reasons for choosing to certify organic, the choices regarding alternative labels, how they felt about the regulations for organic production under the NOP and the ongoing changes in regulation, how they believe the NOP has affected their operation, and the organic farming community in general, and how they think the presence and continued entrance of large, conventionally-minded organic operations has and will affect their own operations.

Phase-Three: Collection of Regularity and Legislative Materials

The third phase focused on the on-going collection of materials related to organic certification and regulation under the NOP, as well as on tracking changes in regulation and certification. Since the NOP was newly instituted at the start of this study, the political climate surrounding organic regulation and certification remained highly volatile. Research into the shifting politics and the changes in, and reaction to, regulation remained an on-going process through the writing of this manuscript.

³⁷ In fact, farmers appeared to be more enthusiastic to participate in the second round of interviews. I think this is due to two reasons: (1) they were familiar with me and the study from the first round of interviews, and (2) I sent them a fact sheet outlining the results from first round of interviews and, seeing their participation come to fruition, they felt invested in the study.

Research during this phase focused on analysis of legislative and regulatory history, certifier documents, and handbooks. I also interviewed several key informants who worked for certification agencies in New York State as well as activists who had been involved in the constructing and defining the NOP regulations. In addition, I attended meetings, conferences, and other events focusing on organic production in New York State between 2002 and 2005. On several occasions I attended certifier workshops on applying for and complying with organic certification. I also subscribed to several e-mail listserves that focus on sustainable and alternative agriculture, such as COMFOOD, NEFOOD, SANET, and other smaller listserves that focused on organic certification. Through participation in the email listserves, I tracked the ongoing public discussions regarding organic certification, the organic label, the NOP, and more general conversations regarding the future of organic agriculture in the U.S..

Data Analysis

Grounded Theory

This work has been informed by grounded theory methodology from the beginning of data collection and through the on-going analysis. At its essence, grounded theory is an inductive approach that focuses on the discovery and development of concepts and theory, rather than deductive theory testing. Grounded theory was first proposed in 1967 by Glaser and Strauss in the revolutionary book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. With this book, Glaser and Strauss aimed to prove that qualitative methods were as rigorous and systematic in their inquiry as quantitative methods (Piantanida et al. 2002). Although Glaser and Strauss originally claimed that grounded theory can only be applied by professionally trained sociologists, it has been used by social scientists from a variety of disciplinary perspectives over the years.

Grounded theory does not prescribe methods of data collection, but offers researchers a set of guidelines with which they can develop and specify relationships among concepts by building explanatory frameworks. The techniques and strategies employed by grounded theorists generally include: (1) simultaneous collection and analysis of data; (2) comparative methods that utilize memo writing to facilitate comparative analysis; (3) theoretical sampling to refine the researcher's emerging theoretical ideas and concept development; and, (4) integration of a theoretical framework (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990; Dey 1999; Charmaz 2000). Grounded theorists do not try to squeeze their data into existing theoretical frameworks, but any existing concept must emerge from the data through analysis. In other words, the theory and concepts must fit the data and not the other way around. This method of inquiry directs researchers toward analytic explanations of actual problems and basic processes in the research setting.

Utilizing a grounded theory framework means that data collection and analysis happen simultaneously and inform each other. My multi-phase research schedule allowed me to analyze my data as I was collecting it and do initial coding to develop a preliminary set of codes and concepts to explore my data and inform the next stages of data collection. This multi-phase process of concept development and refinement is central to grounded theory methodology. According to Charmaz (2004: 519):

The necessity of engaging in theoretical sampling means that we researchers cannot produce a solid grounded theory through one-shot interviewing in a single data collection phase. Instead, theoretical sampling demands that we have completed the work of comparing data with data and have developed a provisional set of relevant categories for explaining our data. In turn, our

categories take us back to the field to gain more insight about when, how, and to what extent they are pertinent and useful.

The growing season cycle in New York State allowed me an adequate amount of time to work with the data collected during my first phase of interviews before I designed and embarked on the second phase of interviews. The flexibility of grounded theory methods allowed me to modify my emerging and established analysis as further data was collected. My analysis, therefore, is embedded and engaged in the data, giving voice to the respondents and representing them as accurately as possible.

Grounded theory techniques are based on a constant comparative network and can be considered a cycle of data analysis that is repeated as many times as the researcher finds necessary. The stages of the cycle are: data collection • initial coding • data collection • comparison to new data • focused coding. Applying codes to the data early on helps to order the data, summarize it, and provide the researcher with ideas for the next stage of data collection. Coding is a two step process in grounded theory techniques: initial coding and focused coding. Initial codes make data collection a dynamic process, by revealing emerging concepts and categories that can be addressed and explored in more detail. Initial coding focuses on each line of data, the defining action or events in that data, and it keeps the researcher focused on the data. The next step of coding is called focused coding, where coding is more directed and conceptual than the initial coding. Focused coding reveals concepts and categories that often subsume several initial codes and allow for synthesizing and explaining the data as a whole. During the coding process, and before the first draft of completed analysis, memoing is used to look at the codes and their relationships in new ways, spark our thinking, and expand upon the processes the codes identify or suggest.

Although grounded theory methodology encourages the researcher to avoid forcing data into predetermined concepts and theories, all researchers depend upon initial ideas and concepts that are grounded in their discipline. All research projects are framed by orienting concepts, and grounded theory is no exception. The background ideas that form and shape the overall research problem in grounded theory methodology are called *sensitizing concepts* (Charmaz 2000). Sensitizing concepts are embedded in our disciplinary perspectives and offer the researcher a way to see, organize, and understand experience. In this research project my sensitizing concepts emerged from the literature that informed my theoretical and conceptual framework outlined in Chapter Two. These concepts provided starting points for building data collection and analysis, not end points for bounding data.

Computer Assisted Analysis Tools

In order to conduct analysis and keep track of all the interview transcripts and field notes, I used the Atlas-ti 5.0 software package. Atlas-ti is a powerful qualitative analysis tool for large volumes of textual data and is well suited to grounded theory. Using Atlas-ti allows me a high flexibility in coding and memoing, gave me the ability to change codes and create coding hierarchies, and enabled me to apply multiple codes to single data units. I was able to perform in-depth and complex searches of coded elements to assist in analysis and to search for a single occurrence of codes of the intersection of codes. At the conceptual level, Atlas-ti allows for visual model building activities and the networking feature allows you to visually "connect" selected passages, memos, and codes into diagrams that graphically outline complex relations. New text can be added at any time and data can be exported to another software program, such as SPSS. Although Atlas-ti was difficult to learn at first, the multiple

data management functions made analysis and write-up easier and more manageable for such a large and rich data set.

In addition to qualitative analysis with Atlas-ti, I developed separate codes for the interview data from phase-one to create variables with which I could do simple descriptive statistics with the software program SPSS 10.0. SPSS is a user-friendly statistical analysis program, with which I have had extensive experience using in other research projects. Doing a simple quantitative analysis allowed me to get a snapshot of the demographics and structure of organic agriculture in New York State. I planned to do similar quantitative analysis on the interview data from the second phase, but upon examining the data I realized that not much had changed in a year and additional descriptive analysis would not contribute anything new.

Conclusion

While this methodology and geographically specific sample cannot claim to provide exhaustive coverage of all perspectives and experiences of small-scale organic farmers in the U.S., these interviews provide a glimpse into the essential trends and developments affecting small-scale producers in the current organic market. The study aims to shed some light on how the national institutionalization and codification of organic regulations will impact the future of organic agriculture in the U.S. and to unravel and examine some of the complex relationships behind the production of organic food in the U.S. As our food system becomes more complex, more opaque, and more removed from our daily lives, it becomes harder for individuals to know and understand the complex politics that stand behind an apple in the produce department or the package of steaks in the cooler. In the following chapters I attempt to clarify at least some of the relationships and changes in our modern food system – those in the organic marketplace.

CHAPTER 5

THE AGRARIAN FOOTPRINT IN NEW YORK STATE: A PLACE FOR SMALL-SCALE PRODUCERS

“Agricultural development is not a unilinear process. Variability in farm structure is explained by differences in the economic, social, and political factors present at a particular time and place.”

Max Pfeffer, *Social Origins of Three Systems of Farm Production in the United States*

Introduction

Recently a very public argument developed between journalist Michael Pollan, author of the bestselling book *The Omnivores Dilemma* (2006), and John Mackey, the CEO of Whole Foods Market Inc, on both men’s blogs.³⁸ Pollan, both in his blog and *The Omnivores Dilemma*, singled out Whole Foods Market, the fastest growing grocery chain (Sligh and Christman 2003), as a major player in the industrialization of organics. In a letter to Mackey, Pollan wrote, "After visiting a great many large organic farms to research my book, many of them your suppliers, it seems to me undeniable that organic agriculture has industrialized over the past few years, and that Whole Foods has played a part in that process • for good and for ill." Mackey responded by pledging \$10 million of the chain’s annual budget to support small and local producers. This online war of words reveals that as the organic industry grows

³⁸ Michael Pollan’s blog “On the Table” is at the New York Times website: <http://pollan.blogs.nytimes.com> and John Mackey’s blog “The CEO’s Blog” is at the Whole Foods Market website: <http://www.wholefoods.com/blogs/jm>.

there is an increasing fear that small-scale producers will be, or have been, marginalized. In addition, the response of Whole Foods Market is very revealing in that it shows a notion in the developing organic sector that small farms must be *accommodated* as the organic industry grows. This compels us to ask the question: can small organic producers co-exist and possibly grow with the growth of the organic industry?

In this chapter I argue that small-scale organic producers can and will co-exist with the growth in industrial organics, but that their persistence is not a universal experience and will differ regionally. How organic agriculture develops, and the social organization it takes on will, be affected by the same process of structural and regional variation that affects conventional agriculture, but also by the structure on which organics emerges. I call this structure the *agrarian footprint*. A region's agrarian footprint is based on its agro-infrastructure, which provides the underlying framework of agricultural development as determined by geography, topography, social, and political characteristics, as well as, the historical position of this region in the national and global food system.

As Guthman (2004, 2004 [July]) points out, the agro-infrastructure on which organic agriculture is placed has a significant impact on the characteristics that define the development of organic agriculture in that region. In the case of California, agriculture was capitalist from the beginning, lacking a transition from peasant or family farming that has been present in other regions of the U.S., and, therefore, Californian organics inherited an agrarian footprint shaped by the capitalist logic. While the Californian agrarian footprint fostered an organic agriculture organized around corporate and industrial principles, I argue in this chapter that the agrarian footprint in New York State created a structure that enables small-scale, locally

oriented organic producers to thrive, based on both economic and non-economic factors.

To ground my argument in history, this chapter begins with a discussion of agro-industrialization in capitalist agriculture to reveal the regional variations and the trends that have led to a structural and regional polarization of agriculture in the United States. As Pfeffer (1983) has shown, the organization of agricultural production will develop differently in U.S. regions marked by various geographic and climactic characteristics as well as political, economic, and social relationships. An examination of agro-industrialization will reveal that conventional agriculture is driven by principles of capital concentration, but how and where agro-industrialization takes hold is historically and regionally specific. Understanding the structural roots of the modern agro-food system in the U.S. provides insight into the process of agro-industrialization in New York State – the agrarian footprint upon which New York State organic agriculture has emerged.

Next, I will examine the unique ‘agrarian footprint’ that has developed in New York State, supported by both economic and non-economic factors that nurture ‘new agricultures’ (Lyson and Green 1999; Lyson 1999), characterized by small-scale, specialized production and direct-marketing venues. I will then turn to survey and interview data from early 2003 to examine the characteristics of organic agriculture in New York State at the time of the implementation of the NOP. The survey reveals that the small-scale organic producers in New York persist due to a complex pattern of economic and non-economic factors. I will conclude by arguing that it is this complex pattern of economic and non-economic characteristics of organic agriculture in New York State that will foster the stability and growth of an organic sector organized around small-scale, locally oriented producers in the state. Regions, like New York

State, provide an agricultural sector in which small farms need not be *accommodated*, but instead, a sector where ‘new agriculture’ can grow.

Trends of Agro-industrialization and Polarization in the U.S.

The question of small-scale producers’ persistence has long occupied sociological thought on social change. Both Marx (1933) and Durkheim (1964) presented theories of social change that point to a unilinear process of growth towards more complex and sophisticated forms of society. In these evolutionary frameworks the persistence of a societal unit, such as small-scale producers, was seen as leftover from a previous stage and ultimately destined to disappear. Yet, theories of social change in the 20th century did not imagine a better fate for small-producers. Modernization Theory predicted the inevitable marginalization of small producers as more efficient modern forms of farming emerged and Dependency Theory saw the penetration of agro-food capital as a universalizing process leading to the demise of small producers.

However, the trend over the last century has also been toward a bifurcated structure of production and a polarization in farm size (Bonanno 1987; Buttel and LaRamee 1991; Heffernan and Hendrickson 2002). At the turn of the 19th century in *The Agrarian Question* Kautsky (1988) queried over an observation of the same phenomenon in European agriculture. Investigating this trend, Kautsky countered the prediction of European sociologists that capital penetration would produce the disappearance of small producers and argued that small producers are reproduced by capitalist forces and are a part of capitalism. Weber (1975) also argued against the demise of the small farmer, pointing to the internal logic of small producers and the quest for personal freedom. According to Weber, the subjective value-orientation of producers would facilitate self-exploitation in order to maintain independence. Both

Kautsky and Weber theorized that large and small farms would be a constant characteristic of capitalist societies.

In the last quarter of the 20th century as significant structural change was taking place in agriculture, several scholars returned to the questions surrounding the persistence of small producers in the face of the consolidation and concentration of capital during the second half of the century and the increasing globalization of the agro-food system. These scholars (Bonanno, 1987; Buttel and LaRamee, 1991; Pugliese, 1991) point to trends of both structural and geographical “dualism” in U.S. agriculture, characterized by a ‘disappearing middle’ in farm size and a geographic segregation of a very large farm sector and a very small farm sector. In the industrial societies of the Global North there has been a historical trend toward the decrease in the number of farms and an increase in farm size (Lyson 2004). This trend has been the product of several tendencies of agro-food capital concentration, such as consolidation, horizontal and vertical integration, specialization, delocalization, and marginalization of medium and small-scale producers. Due to capital-intensive agricultural technologies, production has become concentrated on a very small number of highly integrated and specialized large-scale farms that account for most of the food produced in the United States today. No place is this more evident than in the intensive production practices of the protein industry: according to the Federal Bank of Chicago, “The standards set by the four largest hog producers could account for all the hogs needed in the U.S.” (Johnsen 2003: 18).

As agro-industrialization progressed during the second half of the 20th century, there was a shift from agriculture to agri-business. The concentration of agro-food capital has meant that large-scale, capital-intensive, technologically innovative farms have become well integrated into a concentrated network of processors, distributors and retailers. A trend of consolidation and concentration of corporate control grew

steadily in the agro-food sector as large firms sought to reduce competition (Heffernan, 2000). This consolidation and concentration started to put pressure on the social organization of food production around family-farms, as corporations tightly controlled production and the market for agricultural products. Through the process of agro-industrialization, farmers became increasingly separated from consumers as direct-marketing to consumers declined and farmers increasingly sold products to firms that would process and distribute rural products to consumers. Agri-business firms emerged as the essential link between producers and consumers as the industrial model of agro-food production became highly specialized and more stages were involved linking the field to the plate.

According to Heffernan (2000), in the later stages of agro-industrialization the horizontal and vertical integration of agri-business firms would result in an increased concentration of control in the food system and would put significant pressure on agricultural production organized around the small, family-farm. Horizontal integration - expansion of a firm within the same stage of agro-food system - took place primarily among processors and firms that provide inputs into the durable foods and grains-meat complexes. Over the last half of the 20th century horizontal integration occurred in most stages of the agro-food system, from the increasing size and decreasing number of farms to the dominance of a few processing firms in the protein industry. Although various sectors of the food system have experienced horizontal integration differently, there has been a similar pattern of fewer and larger firms within each stage.

Horizontal integration has progressed most rapidly in the sectors that dominate the grains-livestock and durable foods complex that characterize the second food regime. According to Heffernan and Hendrickson (2002), four firms control over 50%

of the market in both the meat and grain processing sectors.³⁹ Perhaps most startling is that some firms dominate across both the meat and grain sectors. The two agribusiness firms, Cargill and ConAgra, are among the top firms leading in dominance of both animals and crops. For example, ConAgra ranks among the top four firms in beef, pork, sheep, turkey, flour milling, soybean crushing, and dry corn milling (Heffernan, 2000). Concentration also began to take place among the agribusiness firms that provide inputs for production. Seed firms that did not have a corner on the biotech market began to merge with big biotech firms, and soon after chemical companies started to move into biotech. In the 1990's Monsanto (4th largest agro-chemical company) spent over \$8 billion to acquire several seed and biotech firms and in 1999 DuPont bought Pioneer Hi-Bred Seed, the world's largest seed company. As the third food regime begins to emerge we see that intellectual property assets, such as biotechnology, have surpassed physical assets such as land, machinery, or labor.

Along with horizontal integration, vertical integration also developed during the second food regime, with a few large firms gaining control over production from the seed to the plate. Vertical integration occurs when a firm increases ownership and control of a number of stages in a commodity system – inputs, production, processing, and marketing. Vertical integration radically transformed the protein industry starting in the 1950-60's, and more recently in fresh vegetable production. Vertical integration brought with it a new type of agricultural production known as contract farming, which linked producers in so tightly with agribusiness that at least one analyst has

³⁹ The four largest beef processors slaughter 81% of the cattle, up from 72% a decade before; 59% of Pork is processed by the top four firms, up from 37% in 1987; four firms today own and process 50% of broilers, up from 15% in 1987; for grain, the largest 4 processors of wheat have 61% of the market compared with 40% in 1982; and in soy processing the largest four firms have 80% of market share compared with 61% in 1982 (Heffernan and Hendrickson 2002).

predicted the ‘proletarianization’ of farmers (Lewontin 2000). Contract farming⁴⁰ means that farmers own the means of production – the land and buildings – but are essentially hired hands under contract since they have limited independent decision making authority and do not own what is produced. According to Heffernan (2000; 70) “Contract production is an industrial model in which the integrating firm outsources a needed ingredient – the agricultural raw product.” Contract production is becoming the norm in several agricultural industries, which has paralleled the increase in size and decrease in number of farms and accelerated the process of farm concentration as small producers are less likely to enter into contracts.

Several other notable trends in concentration and consolidation of the food system have taken hold more recently and are expanding in the emerging third food regime. Along with consolidation in both production and processing, we are also seeing a consolidation in the retail sector, which is exerting greater control over the production process (Burch and Lawrence 2005). And, we are seeing vertical and horizontal integration on a global scale, as transnational agro-food corporations organize production across borders and develop export markets around the world. At the same time new forms of consolidation are taking hold where control is not directly linked to ownership, but based on agreements and relationships among transnational corporations, that range from highly formalized to informal agreements and alliances that are immune to anti-trust laws⁴¹.

⁴⁰ There are generally two types of contracts: marketing contracts in which producers get a set price and production contracts in which producers and firms practice cost sharing. With these contracts most of the farm sales are realized by the contractor, with the producer usually getting a fixed fee

⁴¹ Heffernan (2000) calls these *food system clusters*. One of these clusters involves Cargill and Monsanto. The two firms have a joint venture that links Monsanto’s seed stage with Cargill’s processing of grain/oil crops and their global movement of grain and oil seed. This vertical integration proceeds through Cargill’s production of feed cattle and hogs, produced under contract to their processing plants. And more recently, to finish off the chain, they have entered into an agreement with Kroger’s for the retail distribution.

The trends of agro-industrialization have dramatically transformed the structure of agriculture from a system in which many farms produced a wide variety of products on small-plots of land, serving mostly local and regional markets, to a system of production based on the foundation of very large farms that work with a small number of global food processors, who link with a small number of large (increasingly global) food retailers. With the support of capital-intensive technologies and innovations emerging out of Land Grant Universities, production became increasingly specialized and consumption was increasingly delocalized. According to Lyson (2004), at the beginning of the 20th century, almost three quarters of farms raised livestock and poultry, almost 80% grew vegetables, and over half grew potatoes and fruit. As late as 1950 most farms still grew a diversity of farm products, but by 1997 the Census of Agriculture revealed that production had become highly specialized. For example, fewer than 3% of farmers were commercial vegetable growers, but the largest growers (5.7% of that total) accounted for over 75% of sales in the U.S.

The increasing concentration and consolidation of agriculture in the U.S. has facilitated the polarization of production in the agricultural structure, in which we have very few large-scale producers and very few small-scale producers. The average farm size in the U.S. has grown from 138 acres in 1910 to almost 500 acres today (Lyson, 2004). However, the farms producing most of our food are much bigger. Nationally, small farms (defined here as those having annual gross sales less than \$50,000) made up nearly three-quarters of the nation's farms in 1995, but they produced only about 8% of sales, while the top two percent of farms (those with sales of over a half million dollars annually) accounted for 44% of all sales (Sommer et al. 1998). And while the farming population continues to decline, on average, farms are getting bigger and food production is becoming concentrated among a small number of large-scale farms. Between 1974 and 1997 the numbers of farmers dipped from 2.3 to 1.9 billion, but

farms with sales of \$500,000 or greater grew 600%. In 1997 farms generating over \$500,000 a year comprised less than 3.6% of all farms in the country, but they held 20% of the farmland and accounted for 56% of all farm sales. And, in the same year, multi-million dollar farms comprised just 1.4% of all farms, but accounted for 42% of all farm products sold. (Sommer et al. 1998).

It is useful to take a moment and describe how small farms are generally classified in the social science literature. In classifying farms as ‘large’ or ‘small,’ social scientists distinguish between the construct (an ideal-type concept) and its actual measurement (variables used to define the concept in practice). ‘Small’ farms and ‘large’ farms are constructs at opposite ends of the farm continuum. To sociologists, the construct “small farm” is where the farm household owns and controls the majority of farm production factors: land, labor, capital, technology, and management. At the other end of the farm continuum, the construct “large farm” refers to a non-household based production unit, with absentee ownership and control over production factors. These are *constructs* whose specific definition and measurement must depend upon the time period and historical context (for different classifications between Europe and the U.S. refer to Bonanno 1987).

In practice, large-scale (or industrial) and small-scale (or family farms) are often distinguished by scale, ownership and organization (all three are often associated with each other). Large-scale farms are more dependent on hired labor and managers and more likely to have absentee owners, to be incorporated, and to be vertically integrated with agri-business firms. For example, in 1995, mean gross sales of corporate farms were \$576,925 as compared to \$54,287 for sole proprietorship farms and \$218,795 for farms organized as partnerships (Sommer et al. 1998:15). Farms with production or marketing contracts also tend to be larger. In 1995, farms with marketing contracts (about 11% of all farms) had mean gross sales of \$242,888; while

farms with production contracts (2.3% of all farms) had mean gross sales of \$617,858 (Sommer et al. 1998).

The delocalization of production and consumption has contributed, along with other tendencies of agro-food capital, to regionally specific production. Until the development of extensive ground transportation and durable food technology in the United States during the first half of the 20th century, most farm products that could not be easily transported (such as grains and live animals) were regionally and locally distributed (Goodman and Redclift 1991; Lyson 2004). With the development of transportation networks, widespread irrigation, and technological innovations coming out of Land Grant Universities, the structure of agriculture shifted from diversity to specialization in geography, commodity, and farm scale. According to Bonanno (1987) with increasing agro-industrialization two “faces” of modern agriculture emerge that are divided not only structurally, but regionally. One “face” is the large farm sector, which controls most of the production, receives the largest amount of government aid, and is concentrated in the most fertile regions. The second “face,” is composed of small farms, whose contributions remains small, receive limited government aid, and are concentrated in the least hospitable growing regions.

In Chapter Three, I discussed agricultural change through the framework of food regime analysis (Friedmann and McMichael 1989) in which production and consumption are linked through periods of relatively stable regimes of regulation and capital accumulation. During the first food regime (pre WWII), which was characterized by extensive accumulation and expansion, eight of the top ten agricultural states were in the Midwest where production was focused on the grain export markets that characterized the first food regime. In addition, New York State occupied the top ten with production oriented toward feeding the growing East Coast cities along with Texas, which led the nation in production of beef cattle (Lyson

2004). During the second food regime, as the grains-livestock and durable foods complex - both of which were dependent on cheap agro-inputs - began to expand, Texas and the Midwestern states remained, but New York fell out of the top ten. California emerged as one of the top states during this period of corporate concentration due to its favorable climatic conditions, the massive land grab during the settling of the West that had concentrated large tracks of land in the hands of a few, and the extensive subsidized water system that made irrigation water virtually free (Resner 1993). According to Lyson (2004:38), the emergence of California in the middle of the twentieth century signaled a new era of geographic concentration:

The importance of California's agriculture to the nation's food supply should not be underestimated. Eight of the ten leading agricultural counties in the United States, in terms of sales, are located in California. The largest of these counties, Fresno County, had over \$2.7 billion in sales in 1997. There are twenty-two states in which gross agricultural sales are less than Fresno's 2.7 billion.

As an emerging third food regime begins to take hold, California emerges as the top state for agricultural production. The top ten is still occupied by the Midwestern states that produce the bulk commodities that fuel agribusiness, but states focusing on the mass production of high value crops, such as fresh produce and meat, began to fill the top ten – California, North Carolina, and Florida. However, as the third food regime begins to expand, organized by transnational agro-food corporations, production of specific high-value commodities are increasingly produced around the world in New Agriculture Countries like Mexico (McMichael 2005).

The structural and regional dualism present in the modern U.S. agro-food system produced different realities for producers in different regions – both conventional and organic. While organic agriculture emerged as a response to the practices of conventional agriculture, and as it has grown in the last twenty years, organic producers have inherited the agrarian footprint of the region in which they produce. As previous researchers (Coombes and Campbell 1998; Hall and Moggyorody 2001; Guthman 2004, 2004 [July]) have shown, the conventional structure of a region leaves its mark on the organic production that emerges there. In some regions, such as New Zealand (Coombes and Campbell 1998), the characteristics of conventional agricultural development and export-oriented organic agriculture have led to the parallel growth of a ‘new agriculture’ sector for small-scale, locally-oriented, organic producers. In other regions, such as California, it has led to the development of an industrial organic sector which leaves little space for small-scale organic producers to emerge and thrive. In the following section, I will look at how the agrarian footprint in New York State has facilitated a growing sector for ‘new agriculture,’ where small-scale, locally-oriented organic producers have been able to grow.

The New York State Agrarian Footprint: Supporting Small-scale Production

The specialization and delocalization of production and consumption over the second half of the twentieth century has favored states and regions of the United States with long growing seasons and near year-round production. New York State (NYS) does not have the favorable climatic conditions as those states leading the top ten producers in the last quarter of the 20th century – California, Texas, and Florida. The growing season in NYS varies from 100-200 frost-free days between April and October, depending on the region. The state is characterized by harsh winters with mean winter temperatures ranging from 5 to 14 degrees F. During the winter months

snow cover is common across all regions of the state, and agricultural soils regularly freeze up to 20 inches in depth, producing wet soil conditions in the early spring that frequently delay plantings (Fick and Cox 1995). Precipitation is fairly uniform throughout the growing season and there is limited irrigation with less than 9% of farm land irrigated in 2002 (compared to an average of 14% nationwide, 70% in California, and 30% in Florida).

With harsh winters, rocky soils, and a landscape dominated by rolling hills, dairy and livestock production is one of the few agricultural industries that can be supported year round in the state. Like many states in the Great Lakes region, New York State is characterized by a dominant cropping system that supports a dairy industry though the production of corn for silage and hay and haycrop silage. Dairy farming is the largest agricultural industry in New York State, providing over 50% of the states agricultural income (Fick and Cox 1995) and making New York State the third largest dairy state. However, in the first half of the 20th century, New York State was a national leader in agricultural production, supplying the booming cities of the Northeast with a large variety of agricultural commodities. Today the state holds a more peripheral position nationally and globally.

According to Lyson (1999), there are several major trends that have shaped New York State's agricultural production during the 20th century. To begin with, there has been a decline in the number of farms and the amount of farmland since 1910. Lyson reports that in 1910 there were 215, 597 farms and over 22 million acres of farmland, but by 1992 those numbers were down to only 32, 306 farms and 7.5 million acres of farmland. In addition, while the gross sales of farm products increased nationally by 66% over the last century, New York farms sales decreased 5% in the same period. One of the most significant trends has been the decoupling of production and consumption in the state. Large amounts of agricultural products are now

imported into the state from other regions of the U.S. and the local food processing sector (aside from fluid milk) has almost vanished. These trends have been accompanied by a transition from diversification to specialization of production on farms and the clustering of industrial farms in “agricultural pockets” throughout the state (Lyson 1999:2). As regional specialization across the United States intensified after WWII during the second food regime, New York farmers found a niche in dairy production that continues to characterize the region.

Data from the 2002 Census of Agriculture reveals that the structure of New York agriculture has changed significantly over the last century from a state characterized by small-scale, diversified family-farms serving local and regional markets to an increasing number of large-scale, capital intensive farms producing for distant markets and processors. There has been a significant change in just the last 25 years, with a decrease in the number of farms and farmland devoted to production: Between 1978 and 2002, New York lost 5,820 farms and almost 2 million acres of farmland. The changing agricultural structure reflects many of the characteristics of polarization, in scale and size of farms, as well as organization of farm production, that have been seen in the U.S. over the last half of the 20th century.

Table 3 reflects the trend toward polarization in farm size in the state. Between 1978 and 2002 small acreage farms increased, medium acreage farms decreased, and the largest acreage farms increased. By 2002, farms between 10 and 49 acres comprised the largest category of farms in the state with 8,359 farms. The largest and smallest farms in terms of size saw the greatest increase between 1978 and 2002: small acreage farms (10-49 acres) increased from 13% of farms to 22%, and the largest acreage farms (2000+ acres) tripled, but still remained under 1% of all farms in the state. In 2002 farms with over 2000 acres had an average of 2,322,586 dollars in sales and accounted for 16% of sales; while farms between 10-49 acres accounted for

5% of sales and averaged 170,583 dollars in sales. The greatest decrease in farms was seen in medium-size farms ranging from 180-499 acres, which decreased from 36% of all farms in 1978 to 24% in 2002.

Table 3.
Farm Size in New York State: 1978 -2002

	1978	1987	1997	2002
Average Size	220	223	204	206
Less than 50 acres				
...number	7,960	8,631	10,825	11,318
...percent	18	23	28	30
50-500 acres				
...number	31,248	25,235	23,982	22,451
...percent	73	67	63	60
500 + acres				
...number	3,867	3,877	3,457	3,486
...percent	9	10	9	9
Total Number of Farms	43,075	37,743	38,264	37, 255
Source: 2002 Census of Agriculture, USDA				

A look at farm scale also reflects growth among the largest and smallest farms, with stagnation or decline among medium-scale farms. As reflected in Table 4, the smallest-scale farms grew significantly from 1978 to 2002. Farms with less than \$2,500 in sales grew from 23% of all farms to 38% of all farms, while farms with less than \$5,000 in sales grew from 35% of farms to almost half of the farms in New York State. While farms bringing in less than \$50,000 and those bringing in more than \$50,000 in sales remained relatively stable between 1978 and 2002, medium-scale

farms between \$25,000 and \$50,000 in sales decreased from 14% of farms to 7%, and large-scale farms, with over \$500,000 in sales, grew from 0.5% to 3% of all farms.

Table 4.
Annual farm sales in New York State 1978-2002

	1978	1987	1997	2002
Less than \$2,500				
...number	9,863	9168	11,542	14,243
...percent	23	24	30	38
Less than \$5,000				
...number	14,947	13,229	15,638	17,607
...percent	35	35	40	47
\$ 5,000 – 24,999				
...number	10,005	8,318	9,116	7,399
...percent	23	22	24	20
\$25,000 – 99,999				
...number	13,625	8,897	6,437	5,798
...percent	32	24	17	16
\$100,000 +				
...number	4,457	7,299	7,073	6,451
...percent	10	19	18	17
\$500,000 +				
...number	209	483	996	1082
Total Number of Farms	43,075	37,743	38,264	37,255

Source: 2002 Census of Agriculture, USDA

In addition to farm size and scale, farm organization over the last 25 years has also seen significant change in the state. Table 5 reflects some of these organizational changes. The percentage of farms owned by individuals or families has remained

relatively the same, yet corporate-owned farms have increased slightly from less than 3% of farms to 4%. While the average value of sales for all farms in 2002 was \$86,648, individual or family owned farms had an average value of sales of \$49,004 and corporate-owned farms had an average of \$490,270. Corporate-owned farms also tend to be bigger with an average size of 397 acres as compared to 171 acres for individual and family owned farms.

Table 5.

Ownership and pluriactivity in New York State 1978-2002

	1978	1987	1997	2002
Ownership:				
Family/Individual				
...number	37,537	32,149	32,813	32,654
...percent	87	85	86	87
Corporate				
...number	1,233	1,545	1,771	1,581
...percent	3	4	5	4
Pluriactivity:				
Farming primary occupation				
...percent	61	61	54	61
200 + days working off the farm				
...percent	30	30	34	34

Source: 2002 Census of Agriculture, USDA

While individual and family owned farms appear to remain strong in NYS, there are signs of increasing pluriactivity among New York State farmers. Farming as the primary occupation of farm operators has hovered around 60% for the last 25 years, but farm operators working off farm for a significant portion of the year (200+ days) have increased slightly from 30% in 1978 to 34% in 2002. The majority of that

increase is attributed to operators on farms with fewer than 50 acres and farms with less than \$10,000 in sales. This signals a trend toward a small-scale farm sector supported by part-time farming and pluriactivity, as a large portion of those producers are supplementing their income from agricultural production with work off the farm.

The above discussion reveals that the trend toward structural polarization is taking hold in NYS with an increasing number of small-scale and large-scale producers. While the number of small, family-farms appears to be increasing, the evidence also points to a greater market share for large-scale, integrated producers. However, the position of NYS agriculture is becoming more peripheral in the national and global agro-food system, and a smaller number of producers are being integrated into the circuits of capital in the modern agro-food system. During the second food regime, which was characterized by agro-industrialization and specialization in commodity and regional production, NYS found a niche with dairy production. As New York State's leading agricultural product, dairy has traditionally supported small-scale producers, but this support is slowly being eroded as the third food regime emerges. This erosion is taking place through state policies that support large-scale producers (Lyson 2004) and the increasing pressure from multi-national processors and retailers who are driving down raw milk prices, thereby encouraging the expansion of large-scale milk production.⁴²

As I mentioned in Chapter Three, with the increase in specialization and scale of farms in the U.S. during the second food regime, more farmers became vertically integrated with processors and entered into production contracts. In 2002 over 2% of farms in the U.S. were engaged in production contracts, mostly in high-value products

⁴² According to Lyson (2004) farms with under 200 cows are projected to decline from 7,300 to 1,100 by 2020 and by that time two-thirds of milk production in the State will come from 213 farms with over 1,400 cows each. This has encouraged many conventional producers to transition to organic, and New York State has emerged as one the top organic dairy producers in the country.

like poultry and hog production (64%) and vegetable and fruit production. In the same year, less than 1% of farmers in NYS were engaged in production contracts for custom fed cattle (62%) and a small amount of vegetable contracts. And as large multi-national processors have become more dominant in the emerging third food regime (Friedmann 2005; McMichael 2005), a smaller number of processors are linking with a smaller number of large-scale fruit and vegetable producers who are generally concentrated in states like California. Historically, NYS had fruit and vegetable processing, whereby plants were typically linked with local small-scale producers and scattered throughout the state. However, between 1947 and 1994, the State lost a majority of its fruit and vegetable processing plants (Lyson 1999).

The history of New York agriculture reveals a transition from a structure supported by small-scale, diversified and locally oriented producers, toward a polarized structure in which a small number of large-scale producers are well integrated in the global food system. Yet, as the numbers presented above reveal, small-scale producers have maintained a strong presence in the state and have increased in the last quarter of the 20th century. It appears that as a smaller number of producers are becoming integrated in the concentrated circuits of agro-food capital in the third food regime, new niches and markets are opening for smaller-scale, more locally oriented production. According to Lyson and Green (1999) a 'new agriculture' is emerging in the state, characterized by new organizational forms such as farmers' markets and community supported agriculture (CSA) and other direct-marketing outlets that bring production and consumption closer together. NYS is a leader in the country in terms of direct-marketing of agricultural products. In 2002, over 12% of NYS farms marketed goods to individuals for direct human consumption at roadside stands, farmers' markets, pick-your-own sites and other venues. Nationwide only 5% of farms participated in direct-markets and in California, often considered a leader in

direct-marketing venues, only 8% of farmers sold their products through outlets like farmers' markets. In New York, smaller-scale producers appear to pursue direct-marketing venues more than larger producers. In 2002 farms with less than \$50,000 in sales accounted for 80% of direct-marketing, and farms with less than \$10,000 accounted for 67% of direct-marketing, while farms with greater than \$250,000 accounted for less than 5% of direct-marketing.

New York State is experiencing the global trend toward polarization, however its agrarian footprint, which has historically supported and encouraged the persistence and growth of small-scale producers, continues to do so at both the macro and micro-level. At the macro-level, small-scale producers who are oriented toward direct, local, and regional marketing and diversified production, have found a niche in the emergence of 'new agriculture' in the state, whereby they are able to persist and grow in the face of intensifying agro-industrialization and globalization. As capitalist agriculture expands, small-scale, flexible producers are able to fill the social, geographic, and market spaces that capitalist firms cannot, or will not, penetrate (Lyson 1999; Coombes and Campbell 1998). At the micro level, there is evidence to suggest that small-scale farms persist partly due to non-economic factors such as value-orientation, lifestyle, and rural culture. The increase in pluriactivity among farmers in the state shows that over a third of farmers are willing to farm part-time or supplement their farming activities with off-farm employment, revealing motivations to farm that go beyond economic incentives. In addition, a large percentage of those farmers working off-farm are supporting farms oriented more toward agrarian ideals: small acreage and small-scale. At the same time, smaller-scale farms that engage in direct-marketing may find greater social legitimization among consumers, due to a long history of small-scale production in New York State and strong agrarian ideals among consumers of 'new agriculture' (Lyson 1999; Conner 2002).

Economic and Non-economic Dimensions of Organic Farming in New York State

The NYS agrarian footprint and the changing agricultural structure in the state has far reaching effects for the type of organic production that has and will continue to emerge in New York State. In the previous section I showed that a combination of economic (macro-level and structural) and non-economic (micro-level and ideological) characteristics are fundamental to explaining the historical persistence of small-scale producers in the region, as agro-industrialization has progressed in the state, country, and around the world. My research shows that the organic sector in New York State is based on the same dual and overlapping features of economic and non-economic factors, which, far from being mutually exclusive, form a complex pattern showing that both are sides of the same coin.

The current scholarship on organic agriculture has focused on how the logic of capitalist agriculture will lead to the persistence or loss of small-scale producers in the organic sector (Buck et al. 1997; Coombes and Campbell 1998; Hall and Moggyorody 2001; Guthman, 2004 and 2004 [July]) However, only focusing on structural characteristics provides us with just part of the picture. Organics, in setting itself apart from conventional agriculture, makes the subjective value orientations of producers (and consumers) a vital component of the structure of organic production (DeLind 2000; Kovach and Allen 2000; Vos 2000; Raynolds 2000; Campbell and Liepens 2001). Therefore, the non-economic, micro-level characteristics, that also support the persistence of small-scale organic producers need, to be accounted for.

In this section, I will look at both the macro and micro level characteristics of organic agriculture in New York State at the implementation of the NOP. The complex pattern of economic and non-economic features of small-scale organic producers in New York reveals the spatial and temporal specificity of the New York agrarian footprint. While the agro-industrial and corporate agrarian footprint in

California creates a regional corporate-organic industry at the expense of small-scale producers (Guthman 2004 [July]), the agrarian footprint of New York has nurtured a ‘new agriculture’ in which small-scale producers are able to grow, even as the organic industry as a whole expands and takes on more conventional characteristics.

My analysis is based on phone interviews with 177 certified and non-certified organic farmers in New York State, conducted in February and March 2003. Following Weber’s (1949) concept of *verstehen*,⁴³ in which the researcher seeks to understand the motives of actors from their point of view, I designed the questionnaire with the goal of capturing the farmer-level perspective on organic production in New York State. What emerged out of these interviews was a rich understanding of farmers’ reasons for choosing organic production and how they navigated the agrarian structure of New York State agriculture. My conversations with these farmers revealed both economic and non-economic characteristics that support small-scale organic producers. Although these characteristics are not mutually exclusive, I will begin this section by looking at macro-level economic characteristics, such as production and marketing practices, and then examine micro-level, non-economic characteristics such as the ideological and value-based motivations for farming organically.

NYS Organic Farm Structure: Production and Marketing Characteristics

According to Lyson and Green (1999) and Lyson (1999), ‘new agriculture’ is characterized by direct-marketing to the consumer with a focus on diversity instead of specialization in production. A recent study of the New Zealand organic sector (Coombes and Campbell 1998) echoed these patterns, revealing that in that country small-scale organic producers dominated the market space characterized by direct-

⁴³ Verstehen (German): to understand. Weber used the term to refer to the social scientist’s attempt to understand both the intention and the context of human action.

marketing and diverse, locally-oriented production, while large-scale organic operations were oriented toward the export market and commodity specialization. A similar pattern is seen in the data presented in Table 6, showing the general farm characteristics of organic producers in New York.

Table 6.

General organic farm characteristics in New York State (n=177)

	# of Farmers	% of Farmers
Certified organic in 2002	159	90
<i>Not certified organic in 2002</i>	18	10
Produce horticultural product	95	54
Produce commodity product	93	53
Direct market	114	64
<i>Wholesale</i>	128	72
Less than \$ 20,000 in sales annually	59	33
\$20,000 or more in sales annually	115	65
<i>Less than half of household income from Farming</i>	74	42
<i>More than half of household income from farming</i>	98	55

According to the USDA (Dimitri and Greene 2002), New York State is one of the leaders in direct-marketing outlets, with 269 farmers' markets (second only to California) and 80 Community Supported Agriculture farms in 2001. In my sample two-thirds of farmers sold their products through direct-marketing, such as CSAs, farmers' markets, through their own farm-stands, and through newsletters, festivals, and websites. A little over a third of farmers sold only in direct-marketing venues. Almost three-fourths of farmers sell in wholesale markets, such as through processors and wholesalers, to stores and restaurants, and to other farmers as an input; and around a third of farmers sell only through wholesale markets. Those selling only through

wholesale markets were generally dairy producers selling raw milk to processors. A large number of farmers were taking advantage of both retail and wholesale markets in their marketing strategies, with a little over a third of farmers selling their products in both retail and wholesale markets. The marketing strategies of organic producers in New York State revealed a significant amount of flexibility as producers forged direct linkages with consumers, but also sought to market products through more traditional channels. In addition, the data reveal that with over half of organic producers engaged in direct-markets, as opposed to only 12% of all producers in the state, indicating that organic producers are more oriented toward local markets and have found an advantage in local, direct-marketing.

In addition to pursuing (and most likely in relation to) various marketing strategies, NYS organic farmers produced a large variety of crops. About half of the farmers grew and sold products that could be classified as horticultural products, such as fruits, vegetables, ornamentals, transplants, and maple syrup, with a little over a third producing only horticultural products. These farmers generally produced a large variety of products, with some producing over a hundred different varieties of fruits, vegetables and herbs each growing season. These farmers were generally oriented toward direct-marketing outlets like farmers' markets and CSA's, whereby they claimed that having a large variety of produce to offer was a market advantage in these venues.

Most of the other half of the farmers produced commodities, such as dairy, grain and field crops, with almost half producing only commodities and no horticultural products. Seventeen farmers (around one tenth) produced both a commodity and a horticultural product, while a very small amount produced meat products. Most commodity producers were oriented toward the traditional cropping system – corn for silage, field crops, etc. - in New York State, that supports a dairy

industry, but in this case an *organic* dairy industry. As I mentioned earlier the chapter, due to climate conditions and the agrarian history of NYS, dairy production has long characterized the agrarian footprint of NYS. Organic dairy has been able to flourish in this environment, and New York State has been one of the top organic dairy producers.⁴⁴ Many of the dairy farmers I spoke with reported transitioning to organic production as a means to hold onto their farms when they felt the squeeze from agro-industrialization and the pressure to ‘get big or get out’.

While most of the farmers interviewed felt good about farming as a financial enterprise and were able to make a living from organic farming, there were signs of pluriactivity among a significant number of producers. About half of organic producers said that they got less than half of their annual household income from farming and a little over a third reported less than \$20,000 a year in organic sales. Most of these farmers reported working off the farm for most of the year or having a spouse or domestic partner who worked off the farm and provided a significant amount of financial support for the farming household. The high level of off-farm income on organic farms parallels the trend in the conventional sector towards pluriactivity in the state that accompanies the bifurcation of the agricultural sector. However, what this also reveals, is that producers’ motivations extend beyond the economic to motivations guided by value-orientation, lifestyle, and rural culture. Organic producers in New York State therefore appear to be guided not only by the market incentives presented by the structure of ‘new agriculture’ in the state, but also by their own value orientations (met at the marketplace by consumer value orientations) that lead them to some level of self-exploitation in which they support their agrarian pursuits with off-farm employment.

⁴⁴ In 2003, NYS ranked third among organic dairy producing states, behind California and Wisconsin.

The farm and marketing characteristics of the producers outlined above reveal that most organic producers in New York State have been able to find a niche and take advantage of the growing market for ‘new agriculture’ in venues such as farmers’ markets and CSAs. In turn, these producers are encouraging the growth of the sector by rebuilding linkages between production and consumption, and building an agricultural sector that is based on agrarian and organic values as opposed to the singular goal of profit maximization. While this new market space has been formed through structural advantages such as the growth of organic dairy consumption (Du Puis 2000) and expanding direct-marketing outlets, these structural advantages have been supported through the linkage of consumers and producers who subscribe to the same non-economic value-orientations when it comes to food production (Conner 2002). In the next section I will look at producer motivations in more detail, outlining both economic and non-economic motivations for organic production.

Ideologies and Values: Non-economic Motivations for Farming

Over the last two decades most scholarship examining small-scale producers has focused on structural and economic characteristics of persistence, neglecting an examination of farmer motivations. Yet, several studies were conducted in the late 1970’s through the 1980’s, that strongly supported the explanation by Weber that actions within the farming population were at least partially motivated by value orientations. Many of these studies (Coughenour 1977; Arkleton 1983; Crecink 1979; Kliebenstine et al. 1981) reported that full-time and part-time small-scale farmer attitudes favored the continuation of farming for non-economic reasons, such as the emotional, social, and cultural rewards. Most of these motivations were reported to revolve around the agrarian ideals of supporting rural culture and a farming lifestyle. While we can safely assume that most organic producers are motivated at least

partially by the non-economic values of the organic movement, the data from the 2003 survey revealed that they were also motivated by agrarian ideals, even while sometimes being couched in economic terms, such as was seen among dairy producers who transitioned to organic so they could profitably stay small-scale.

When farmers were asked what their main reasons for farming organically were, they often cited both non-economic and economic motivations. Table 7 shows that most farmers reported philosophical and ideological reasons for farming, such as the desire to produce healthy food, taking better care of the land, people and animals, and farming in an ethically, environmentally, and socially superior way. Less than half of the farmers cited financial motivations, such as getting a better price for their product, costs less to farm organically, to have access to the organic market, and the financial stability of the farm. While a third of farmers cited both philosophical and financial motivations, most farmers appear to be motivated more by purely philosophical reasons (around 60%) than by purely financial reasons (a little over 10%).

Table 7.

Motivations for farming organically (n=177)

	# of Farmers	% of Farmers
<i>Philosophical motivation for farming organically</i>	155	88
<i>Financial motivation for farming organically</i>	72	41

Among organic producers, those who mentioned recently transitioning from conventional to organic, generally cited financial reasons over philosophical reasons. However, while the motivation to transition to organics is couched in economic terms, it often revealed that the producers were at least partially motivated by the agrarian

ideals such as staying small and independent. For example, organic dairy producers often mentioned that they transitioned from conventional to organic over the last few years in order to continue farming in a now hostile conventional dairy market. They revealed a strong aversion to the trend among conventional dairy producers to get larger and to integrate more costly industrial production methods requiring them to take on more debt. Instead they expressed a desire to stay small, reporting that organics allowed them to continue to do so and still stay profitable. In addition, more than one dairy farmer mentioned being a “convert” after transitioning to organic and through organic practices, became a “true believer” in the values and philosophy behind organic methods.

Examining both the financial and philosophical motivations of farmers reveals that it is difficult to tease the two apart, revealing the complex pattern of economic and non-economic features of organic farming in New York. Those who cited financial reasons, such as price premium and access to organic markets, show that the growth of alternative and ‘new agriculture’ is providing a market space for small-scale, organic producers to thrive profitably and farm in socially and environmentally sustainable ways. At the same time, this sector is fueled by value-orientations of producers and consumers that are instrumental in reproducing and growing these market spaces.

Conclusion

While political debate rages on in the blogosphere about the loss or persistence of small-scale organic producers in the face of an expanding organic industry, current popular sentiment has called for the *accommodation* of small organic producers, as both organic production and organic consumption grows. In this chapter I have presented evidence that small-scale producers do not need to be *accommodated*, because they are thriving in ‘new agriculture’ markets in regions such as New York

State. Whole Foods Market Inc.'s pledge of 10 million dollars to support small-scale producers may be a welcome necessity in regions like California, with a corporate agricultural history, but in areas such as New York State, the 'agrarian footprint' has laid down an agro-infrastructure of small-scale, locally-oriented production and consumption where small-scale organic producers can thrive.

As I demonstrated in this chapter, the New York State organic sector supports producers who are more specialized, diversified, and locally oriented due to both the development and expansion of 'new agricultural' markets, as well as the value orientation of producers (and also consumers) that draws them toward alternative means of organizing production. Small-scale producers who are guided by a strong ideological commitment to organic production have been able to capitalize on the growing value-guided practices of consumers and have historically claimed greater legitimacy in the organic marketplace than large-scale, conventionally-minded producers (DeLind 2000; Vos 2000). However, as consumption in the emerging third food regime is increasingly driven by *values*, agro-food capital has mobilized in the most profitable value-based agro-food sectors, such as organics. As I discussed in Chapter Two, multinational agribusiness firms are quickly entering the organic marketplace demonstrating that agro-food capital is no longer attempting to stifle the criticisms of the industrial food system presented by organics, but instead trying fit "organic" food production into an industrial, profit-driven model. The questions that emerge are how agribusiness firms and conventionally-minded producers are able to access the organic marketplace and how this will affect small-scale producers in 'new agriculture' markets.' I explore these questions in Chapters Six and Seven.

In the next chapter, I argue that the NOP standards are instrumental to agribusiness firms' organic market access and therefore have become a focal point of the countermobilization of agro-industrial capital. In fact, with the NOP, the very act

of standardization and institutionalization within the USDA provides a platform for the interests of profit to displace the meaning embodied in organic practices, abstract organic practices from place, and further discipline organic producers and consumers to the interests of the market. While I believe that the NOP organic standards and the national organic label have been put to work for the organic industry, the cooptation of the organic label by the organic industry does not necessarily mean the displacement of small-scale, locally-oriented producers. In Chapter Seven I will present my discussions with New York State organic farmers about their plans for certification under the NOP guidelines to argue that the conventionalization of the certified organic marketplace will only strengthen the ‘new agricultural’ market spaces in which small-scale, diversified, and locally-oriented producers thrive.

CHAPTER 6

THE MORAL ECONOMY OF ORGANIC STANDARDS: DISCIPLINING THE ORGANIC MARKETPLACE

“The Master’s tools will never dismantle the Master’s house”

-- Audrey Lorde

Introduction

Audrey Lorde wrote the words above in her credo in *Sister Outsider* (1984), which has stood as a guiding principle of much subaltern studies. While she warned against the trap of using Eurocentric scholarship to try and understand the oppressions within a Eurocentric society, all attempts to challenge dominant ideologies and the systems built upon them can heed her warning. Can organic agriculture challenge the house of modern, industrial agriculture with the same tools that have made agro-industrialization possible? In this chapter, I look at the NOP standards for organic production and argue that these standards will not help to dismantle the modern, agro-industrial food-system, but will help to make it stronger in the emerging corporate-environmental food regime. While industrial agriculture seeks to control, simplify, and standardize complicated natural systems, organics seeks to incorporate these systems and reembed agriculture in communities and nature through non-market values. However, I argue that the very process of standardization of organic agriculture subverts non-market values to market values. The process of deciding which standard shall become *the standard* is not about the ‘meaning’ or intrinsic qualities of the product, but about profit, market share, price premium, and consumer loyalty.

Looking at the NOP as a *disciplinary institution* (Foucault 1977, 1990), I examine the national organic standards and how they make organics “legible from above” (Scott 1998), facilitating the development and expansion of a ‘certified’ organic market and reorganizing how power is distributed in this market. My suggestion is that the NOP standards have become an arena for the countermobilization of agro-industrial capital, which takes place through the production and reproduction of the moral economy of organic standards, in which ‘good’ organic practices, farmers, and food are reconstructed and shape a specific market in which some actors are better positioned than others. I argue that standardization, codification, and institutionalization provides a platform for the interests of profit to displace the meaning embodied in organic practices and to further discipline actors in the organic market (producers, organizations, and consumers) to the interests of the market.

I begin this chapter by exploring how standards are central to agro-industrialization, and, therefore, cannot be seen as *neutral* products of the development of an organic industry, but rather as tools upon which the organic industry becomes organized around market principles. Having established the subjective nature of standards in the modern food system, I will begin with an analysis of the moral economy of NOP standards, focusing on three areas: discourse, normalization/uniformity, and discipline. By examining the discursive field of organic standards we are able to see how power is linked to the (re)construction of organic standards through the way we think about organics, talk about organics, and how we define what *good* organic food, practices, and producers are. I will then show how bringing organics into the scientific discourse of standardization allows for the social reordering of the organic food system, whereby normalization and uniformity are created to facilitate expansion of the organic market and deepen commodity

relationships within. Through the NOP's organic certification process, producers, organizations, and consumers are disciplined to the interests of the market. In other words, in this chapter I will examine how the NOP standards and certification facilitate uniformity and discipline in the marketplace to organize the relations of organic production in such a way as to facilitate the expansion of a 'certified' organic market in which corporate actors are able to dominate.

Standardization, Rationalization and Agro-industrialization

Standards are everywhere in our daily lives, and as such they seem innocuous and even *natural* to us. However, as Foucault (1977, 1990) argues, standards are the formalized, codified social norms through which people, actions, and things are measured. As such, standards are social constructions of what is 'good' and 'right' in society and, therefore, subject to revision. Standards "discipline both human and nonhuman actors, such that they perform in ways deemed acceptable (or correct or good) by whatever agency is in authority at that given point" (Busch 2004:172). Therefore, the standards-making process defines what is 'good' or 'normal,' while the application and measurement of standards creates a degree of uniformity among the objects, actions, or people the standard is applied to.

Standards, by their very nature, work to simplify things, actions, and processes to make social interaction more efficient, calculable, predictable, and easier to control – in other words to *rationalize* human action. Max Weber (1996) argued that once unleashed upon the world, the process of rationalization would transform social life forever. According to Weber, systems of rationalization operate through the application of universal standards and regulations. In these systems, traditional values rooted in community and the environment, are replaced with the rational values of rules, regulations, and standards as the distance between actors in society grows. The

expansion of markets and the development of industrial capitalism are made possible as value-rational thought guides behavior (Weber 2007), and as individuals put their faith in the rules and regulations of the market. As the modern world becomes organized around the principles of rationality, the power of tradition gives way to the power of the standard.

However as Weber points out, rationalization has a very specific history, as value-rational thought had to first take hold in the countryside with the production of basic human needs. Only then could industrial, capitalism flourish. The imperatives of capitalism – competition, accumulation, and profit-maximization – required the transition from a moral economy, rooted in tradition, community, and environment, to one rooted in value-rational thought and standardization. According to Wood (2000: 24), capitalism “required not a simple extension or expansion of barter and exchange, but a complete transformation in the most basic human relations and practices, a rupture in age-old patterns of human interaction with nature in the production of life’s most basic necessities.” The transformation of agrarian production and social relations provided the basis for the origins of capitalism and industrial production. And, agro-industrialization provided the roots for the two most significant changes in society, social and environmental disembedding, which accompanied the movement from a pre-modern to a modern organization of social life.

Modernizing agriculture required the decontextualization of the farm itself from the community, household, and nature. The organization of pre-capitalist production was based on customary practices that tightly bound community, household, and economy in the rural context. Agro-industrialization requires the displacement of the “traditional” and customary organization of production and reorganization around rationalized production. Social disembedding individualized farm production and decontextualized agrarian knowledge, facilitating the shift from

craft-production to de-skilled production with a focus on monoculture and off-farm mass produced inputs (chemicals, hybrid seeds). Environmental disembedding progressed with attempts to scientifically manage and standardize the conditions under which food is produced, through mechanisms and practices that attempt to 'free' agriculture from the biological restraints of production thru appropriation and substitution (Goodman and Redclift 1989). However, due to the biological and physiological particularities of food, environmental disembedding is only partial, resulting in environmental disruptions. It is this incomplete industrial transformation of agriculture that results in the environmental destruction and social disruptions that generate counter-movements that attempt to reembed the food-system in society and nature (McMichael 2000; Barham 1999).

However, as agro-industrialization progresses in the modern food system, agro-food capital attempts to deepen commodity relations through standardization and regulation, which results in a highly rationalized agriculture that requires the suppression and appropriation of the cultural and natural foundations of agriculture. The methods through which agro-industrialization attempts to disembed social and environmental relationships from production is necessary for the process of commodification that is central to capitalist markets. The physical and psychological distance between producers and consumers, created by markets, necessitates standards that regulate production and consumption and smooth transactions between social actors with limited information about each other. Standards are essential tools in market economies where we must rely on (capitalist) market transactions for social reproduction. It is this standardization that makes modern, industrial capitalism possible, as standards emerge from that specific social order and by their very nature reinforce that social order. Therefore, the very process of making and developing standards molds the subject of those standards to this social order.

James Scott (1998:4) argues that standardization disciplines society and nature to market principles, but this is only made possible by how we think about and understand the society-nature relationship, what he calls *high-modernist ideology*:

It is best conceived as a strong, one might say muscle-bound, version of the self-confidence about scientific and technical progress, the expansion of production, the growing satisfaction of human needs, the mastery of nature (including human nature), and, above all, the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws.

Under high-modernist thought the legitimacy of scientific understanding shapes the organization of the system by setting standards (norms) for human actors in the system, as well as the products of those human actions. A food-system is created that is organized around increasing production and efficiency through universal methods that transcend spatial limitations based on the simplification, essentialization, and isolation of variables for increasing output. In this way nature is seen as the end result not the beginning - it is produced, disciplined and controlled.

Although, Scott is quick to point out that the high-modernist ideology is faith and not practice, it sets the context for the process of norm making, which disciplines people and evaluates practices. According to Foucault (1977, 1990), what we are talking about (the food system) is created through how we talk about it (scientific knowledge), who talks about it (scientists and experts), and what context it is discussed in (Land grant universities, USDA). In other words, discourse is not the result of the subject, but the subject is socially constructed through the discourse. Therefore, it is through the high-modernist discourse (Scott 1998) that both society and nature are made the *subject* of standardization. The very idea that social and

environmental processes can be standardized is only made possible through an ideology that sees nature and society as the subject of scientific knowledge. The practices that result from the modern, rational discourse create a food system that is centrally organized and universal across localities, geographies, and households, making it “legible from above” (Scott 1998:4) – easily observed, organized, and evaluated through standards. Standards, therefore, cannot be seen as *neutral*, but as a product of modern, rational thought and a key instrument of the development and expansion of industrial, capitalist markets. All processes that are related to the rational principles – predictability, calculability, efficiency, and control - are emphasized through standards, while those aspects that are unrelated to rational principles are ignored.

The NOP and the New Moral Economy of Organic Standards

Standards are a part of the moral economy of the modern world - setting norms that guide human behavior and constructing social order. While standards are the means through which objectivity is created in the market, the process of standards-making takes place in the subjective realm of the moral economy whereby standards define who and what is good (or bad), and discipline those who do not conform. Scott (1998:305) says that the very process of standardization is an exercise of power: “Every act of measurement [i]s an act marked by the play of power relations.” The power implicit in the moral economy of organic standards means that these standards draw a line in the sand for who can and cannot participate in the organic marketplace. The process of standards-making, and enforcement based on scientific, value-rational thought and management, allows for the notion of the *norm* to be developed, observed, and enforced. Power is then distributed to actors through the regulatory institution that

develops, observes, and judges standards. In the case of the organic industry today this regulatory institution is the USDA.

According to Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), social order in the modern era is created through discipline - a form of power that manages human action by standardizing it, organizing it, regulating it, and monitoring it. In his study of prisons he traces the origins of discipline back to monasteries and armies, but argues that in the eighteenth century, with the development of nation-states and market capitalism, discipline became a technique widely applied throughout society. However, Foucault argues that discipline is made possible only through discourse and normalization. Discourses determine what is true or false in a particular field, determining what is possible to know and what is considered knowledge. It is through discourses that norms are created and standardization is made possible. According to Foucault, norms are an average standard created by the human sciences against which people and things are measured: the sane man, the law-abiding citizen, or good food. Norms are concepts that are constantly used to evaluate and control us, and by their very nature, they also exclude those who cannot conform to "normal" categories.

In the rest of this chapter I will make the case that the NOP is a *disciplinary institution* (Foucault 1977), through which meanings are structured and constructed and, out of this, the standards for organic production are employed to organize and control. I will begin by examining how the moral economy of organic standards is (re)constructed through the NOP by focusing on the discourse surrounding the development of national organic standards. I will then look at how the standards for organic production under the NOP work to organize the organic marketplace by creating uniformity that allows for the normalization of practices that are easily integrated into industrial models, while excluding practices that challenge this model. And finally I will look at how these standards discipline producers, consumers, and

organizations to the logic of the marketplace. As a *disciplinary institution*, the NOP makes organic agriculture “legible from above,” enabling the certified organic marketplace to become a space in which conventionally-minded organic producers are favored.

Discourse and Social Order: A “How To” Manual for Organics

According to Foucault (1977; Rainbow 1994), discourse is both language and the systems of knowledge that provide a way to talk about a subject in a particular historical moment. Discourse defines and produces the objects of our knowledge by governing the way that a topic can be meaningfully discussed and reasoned about. As capitalist markets began to expand, industrialization took hold, and rationalization became the new focus of social order, agriculture and nature became subjects of scientific, rational thought. Agricultural production was organized around the productionist paradigm with a focus on mass production for mass consumption which required a focus on the narrow goal of increasing output through the application of technology. As a counter-movement (McMichael 2000), organics rose in opposition to some of the practices and outcomes of the industrial food-system and, as such, challenged many aspects of the productionist paradigm. This required a new way of thinking about the nature-society relationship that challenged the understandings afforded by the productionist paradigm.

During the first and second food regimes, when the focus was on increasing production and the quantity of food available, the scientific model of agricultural production was generally unchallenged. However, as the focus shifted in the late 1960’s to a focus on the quality of production, in terms of both health and environmental concerns, the high-modernist scientific model came under increasing criticism, and new ideological positions of the organic movement emerged that called

for a reorganization of food production. The organic movement early on sought to reshape the moral economy surrounding food by redefining “good” food production (and therefore good food, producers, and consumers) and by challenging how we think and talk about the production and consumption of food. In Table 8 I present the contrasting principles of the productionist and ecological paradigms to illustrate how they are contrasting ideological positions and concomitant knowledge systems (Beus and Dunlap 1990; Scott 1998; Lang and Heasman 2004).

Table 8.
Contrasting principles of the Productionist and Ecological paradigms

Productionist Paradigm	Ecological Paradigm
Reductionist	Holistic
Science	Culture
Product	Process
Inputs	Outcomes
Universal	Local
Profit	Meaning
End in nature	Start in nature

The NOP standards emerge out of the uneasy tensions between these two systems of thought. The standards-making process rearticulates organic production in four critical ways, thereby subverting organic-values to market-values: (1) privileging scientific knowledge over practical knowledge; (2) transforming organic practices from a focus on processes to a focus on allowable inputs; (3) redefining production as inactive, with no discernable effects from production that focuses on active management; and (4) focusing on production practices as a set of rules to follow versus desirable outcomes. These changes have transformed organic production from a process-based set of practices, that attempt to reembed agriculture in nature and society, to a product-based set of practices that facilitate the corporate organization of the organic food-system and expansion of organic industry. To illustrate these changes

I will focus on two case studies of the NOP standards: (1) changes in the organic certification structure, and (2) the National List, which is a list of allowable production inputs under organic certification.

Knowledge Systems and Organic Certification

As a social movement organics sought to challenge the productionist paradigm and reorganize the food system, yet it did not pose a major threat until the second food regime began to falter, and the meaning of organics in the marketplace began to articulate with growth in the organic market. As the term organic gained increasing salience with consumers, more producers in the marketplace were using the term ‘organic’ to describe their products and production practices even as their practices varied widely. Both organic producers and activists were concerned that the label ‘organic’ would go the way of the label ‘natural’ and lose meaning in the marketplace. Therefore, as the organic market grew, the most market-oriented actors in the social movement began the process of institutionalization in the 1970’s, as disparate groups of organic growers began to develop certifying agencies and trade organizations. The codification and institutionalization of “organically grown” first emerged in the production standards of grassroots organizations such as the Rodale Institute and California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF), but, as markets grew, the drive toward institutionalization turned the organic movement into an organic industry.

The process of combining organic ideals with the practices of the industrial food systems meant one side had to give. And, as organics sought to gain greater salience among consumers through increasing market presence, the process of institutionalization required that the most transformative goals of the organic movement had to be sacrificed to mold organic production into the legislative and institutional framework of market trade and standardization. Arguably then, the

process of translating organic meaning into industrial standards was initiated by the grassroots efforts of the first producers that pushed for certification standards to maintain market saliency. However, the grassroots certification agencies, such as California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) and Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA), differ in critical ways from the USDA's NOP. To begin with, these organizations operated under a very different organizational model. They were locally based, focused on regional production, and rooted in the work and knowledge of the producers they certified. And secondly, as I point out in Chapter Two, and as Vos (2000) has thoroughly detailed in his examination of the 10 year battle for NOP standards, these grassroots agencies, and producers that supported them, worked to insure that organic standards reflected the ideals of the organic philosophy as closely as possible. The small certification agencies that grew with the organic market knew the sacrifices that were being made and the incongruencies of turning organic practices into organic standards, but they worked hard to remain true to the roots of the organic movement.

Early organic certification agencies grew around the principles and the knowledge systems of ecological sustainability, and attempted (although imperfectly) to force the standards to fit holistic practices. However, in general, we see a different process with the USDA's organic program. Here organic principles are forced to conform to the agro-industrial standards of the modern food system. Within the USDA, which has historically been hostile to organic agriculture, the focus is on uniform standards for production that articulate with the goals, practices, and outcomes of industrial, capitalist agriculture. This is easily seen with the release of the first proposed rule presented by the USDA in December of 1997. This rule included what has become known as the "Big Three": food irradiation, genetically engineered organisms, and sewage sludge. These practices, which fit neatly under the rubric of

industrial agriculture, were completely outside the discourse of organics. While the first rule created a large public response and mobilized organic interests, it reveals how the bureaucracy of the USDA, and model under which it operates, made it nearly impossible to recognize the disconnect between the inclusion of the Big Three and organic principles, not to mention consumer expectations (Vos 2000).

The organic movement has long maintained that knowledge about farming systems is embedded in culture. In this way agricultural practices are seen as inventive, adaptive responses to highly variable environments. With this knowledge system, the practices of farmers are constantly being adapted to the environment and the practices that evolve from this knowledge are ongoing and constantly changing. Working with the environment in this way necessitates a smaller scale of production, a close relationship between the farmer and the field, and the value of the farmers' practical knowledge above more universal principles of production. The knowledge system of scientific agriculture, by contrast, is one of adapting the environment to centralizing goals and standardizing formulas. In this system, knowledge originates within the labs and test fields of land grant universities, facilitating large-scale production by seeing the farmer as the applicator of knowledge, and valuing scientific, universal knowledge above practical, context specific knowledge.

Based on a close relationship between farmer knowledge and practice, early standards for organic production were built upon many years of practical work in the fields of dedicated farmers. This led to certification standards based upon farmer innovation and feedback, linking certification agencies closely to farmers and geographies that they served. Most of the reputable certification agencies today – NOFA, Oregon Tilth, CCOF – are regionally-based, grassroots organizations. The close relationship between certifying agencies and the farmers they served created a highly democratic organizational structure. It also provided a tighter link between

organic principles, the standards for certification, and actual practices in the field. Early certification agencies were built organizationally around the close relationship between farmer knowledge, certification, and the organic standards.

Prior to the NOP most certification agencies were both certifying agencies and educational institutions. However, the new certification structure under the NOP significantly changed the exchange and flow of knowledge within the organic community. Both farmer-to-farmer exchange of knowledge during the certification process, and the tight linking of education and certification within certifying agencies, are prohibited under the NOP guidelines. The NOP requires that certification agencies act independently of organic education organizations under the *Conflict of Interest Policy* (§205.501(a)(11)(i-vi)), which states that the certifying agent “shall prevent conflicts of interest by: Not giving advice or providing consultancy services, to certification applicants or certified operations, for overcoming identified barriers to certification.” Farming can be a very isolating enterprise and many organic farmers relied on contact with certification officials through farm visits to gain valuable information about compliance with organic production standards. Yet, this separation of certifiers from educators translates all the way to the organizational structure of certifications agencies. With the advent of the NOP, established certifiers ,such as CCOF and NOFA-NY, had to reorganize into separate educational and certifying agencies. NOFA-NY, for example, split into Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York, Inc., which is a nonprofit educational organization, and NOFA-NY Certified Organic, LLC.

As organic certification has become more centralized, rationalized, and bureaucratized under the USDA, the privileging of scientific knowledge over practical knowledge became institutionalized with the system. The NOP creates a hierarchy of knowledge, which compromises the role and authority of independent certifiers and

complicates the bureaucratic process. In addition, through this process knowledge about organic practices become standardized, universal, and sterilized of practical, in-field knowledge. The NOP creates a break in the flow and exchange of knowledge between farmers, by breaking down avenues of communication among farmers, and between farmers and those who make the standards. Organizationally, therefore, the NOP privileges scientific knowledge in a top-down form, over the more bottom-up knowledge of farmers and nature.

However, as the organizational structure of the NOP was being negotiated, many certifiers and producers feared that the USDA would lose all contact with the knowledge of those who are implementing and practicing the standards. The National Organic Standards Board emerged as a result. The NOSB, as I mentioned in Chapter Two, is comprised of 15 members who advise the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture and USDA on implementation of the National Organic Program. They are responsible for review of new materials petitions, interpretation of organic standards, and recommendations on development of new organic standards. However, recommendations by the NOSB are not official policy until they are approved by the USDA. The NOSB has become the only avenue through which producer, processors, and certifiers can make suggestions for how the standards should be defined, interpreted and altered. Yet, this bottle-necking of knowledge creates a further distance between the realities and practices of farmers in the field and the enforcement and implementation of standards. In addition, the USDA has on several occasions overruled and disregarded the recommendations of the NOSB (an illegal maneuver according to the 1990 Organic Food Production Act), adding synthetics to the allowable section of “The List,” and neglecting to enforce production standards (Vos 2000; Sullivan 2004).

An ongoing issue throughout the evolution of the NOP Final Rule has been the NOP's refusal to fully implement the recommendations of the NOSB. In 2000, prior to the implementation of the NOP, Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) published a side-by-side evaluation of the NOSB recommendations and NOP standards (OMRI, 2000). According to this list, 30 of the 123 NOP final standards regarding the use synthetic and natural materials in crop production, livestock production, and organic processing are not functionally equivalent to the recommendations of the NOSB. This top-down organizational structure in which knowledge flows from the USDA to the field, makes bureaucratic negligence a reality. Therefore, what becomes codified as legitimate knowledge about organic production in the final NOP standards is, in practice, a far distance from the practical knowledge of farmers in the field and the principles of ecological production.

The National List

The *National List* (section §205 of the Final Rule) is perhaps the best illustration of what is considered legitimate knowledge according to the USDA's organic standards. The NOP's National List delineates allowed and prohibited substances to be used in organic production. According to section §205.601, compliance of a material hinges on whether it is natural or synthetic. The National List does not list all substances allowed and all that are prohibited, instead it shows the synthetic substances that are allowed in organic crop and livestock production, and the natural, non-synthetic substances which are prohibited. All other natural, non-synthetic substances may be used in crop and livestock production without appearing on the National List. The National List also shows the synthetic and non-synthetic substances which are allowed in or on processed foods.

The focus on what is allowed and what is prohibited on the list is based on the idea of ‘no measurable impact’, which contradicts traditional organic prohibitions of synthetic substances. As one farmer put it, “The proposed rule attempts to shift organics from a process-based standard to a product-based standard” (John Haapala as quoted in Vos 2000). While organic practices have traditionally focused on processes, active production practices, and holistic identifiable outcomes such as soil fertility, the National List narrows organic production to a list of allowable products focused narrowly on *not* producing specific outcomes such as toxicity. This is easily seen in the criteria for allowing synthetic material and banning natural materials. According to section §6518(m) and §6517(c)(2) of the Final Rule:

In evaluating [synthetic] substances considered for inclusion in the proposed National List or proposed amendment to the National List, the Board shall consider:

- (1) the potential of such substances for detrimental chemical interactions with other materials used in organic farming systems;*
- (2) the toxicity and mode of action of the substance and of its breakdown products or any contaminants, and their persistence and areas of concentration in the environment;*
- (3) the probability of environmental contamination during manufacture, use, misuse or disposal of such substance;*
- (4) the effect of the substance on human health;*

(5) the effects of the substance on biological and chemical interactions in the agroecosystem, including the physiological effects of the substance on soil organisms (including the salt index and solubility of the soil), crops and livestock;

(6) the alternatives to using the substance in terms of practices or other available materials; and

(7) its compatibility with a system of sustainable agriculture.

The National List may prohibit the use of specific natural substances in an organic farming or handling operation that are otherwise allowed under this chapter only if

(A) the Secretary determines, in consultation with the Secretary of Health and Human Services and the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, that the use of such substances

(i) would be harmful to human health or the environment; and

(ii) is inconsistent with organic farming or handling, and the purposes of this chapter;

The above criteria grounds the inclusion or exclusion of a substance within the realm of scientific knowledge and testable effects, while paying little attention to whether

such substances would be part of the principles of organic farming with language such as “compatibility with a system of sustainable agriculture.”

However the National List also takes the locus of knowledge out of the farmers’ hands and firmly places it within the USDA. Looking at the criteria for inclusion and exclusion and considering that the National List does not include ALL allowable or excluded substances, one might wonder whether organic farmers also have to be chemists to determine whether or not they can use a material on their organic farms. For the most part it appears so. Although certification agencies, independent review organizations, and companies that sell organic inputs keep a list of allowable *known* substances, it is almost impossible for a farmer to look at a product and know if it is allowed. In general, farmers are told to call their certifying agent to make sure that any substances used are in compliance. The certifiers in turn generally rely on independent organizations that have historically played a key role in the organic sector like OMRI, which evaluate products for compliance with the NOP according to the ingredients and manufacturing process used, and also provide lists. However, these lists are not entirely comprehensive, and inclusion on the list is based on the manufacturer subscribing to the OMRI Product List. If they are compliant with the NOP, the brand-name product is included on the list. This chain of command for compliance has the effect of bringing to the market (and ultimately to our food and environment) products and companies that focus narrowly on compliance with allowable substances, instead of focusing on the process and outcomes of ecological and sustainable production.

The narrow focus and criteria of the National List creates a knowledge gap and forces farmers and certifiers to defer to organizations like OMRI for a list of allowable inputs. However, since these lists are not comprehensive, farmers often rely on the description on the packages of agricultural inputs, which can create a great deal of

confusion. For example, fertilizer labeling is currently regulated by state officials, and most use the term ‘organic’ in reference to its meaning in organic chemistry – a compound that contains carbon. Therefore, fertilizer products labeled ‘organic’ may contain synthetic urea, other synthetic plant nutrients, or sewage sludge, all of which are prohibited for use in organic production. Another problem that organic producers face is that some ingredients in fertilizers and other agricultural inputs may not be listed on the ingredient label, such as binding agents and pelleting materials which may be synthetic. This gap in knowledge forces the farmer to refer to organizations like OMRI, which include primarily brand name products that have been reviewed against NOP standards. This centralization of knowledge, based on scientific criteria, reduces organic production to a set rules for production as opposed to a focus on discernable outcomes. In addition it forces the farmer to privilege inputs into production, especially off-farm inputs, over an emphasis on holistic processes of production.

A closer look at the particular battle over an allowable synthetic substance in chicken feed reveals the NOP’s privileging of input, product-based production model that allows for large-scale production focused on the narrow goals of efficiency, economies of scale, and profit. A synthesized version of methionine, a sulfur-based essential amino acid, was added to the NOP’s National List of synthetic substances allowed for use in organic livestock production in 2001, only after organic poultry producers learned the synthetic had been part of the organic feed mixes they were using. The NOP approved a temporary allowance of the synthetic until a suitable natural alternative could be found. This essential amino acid is vital to proper cell growth but is not produced by the body and must be obtained through diet. Methionine deficiency can lead to curled toes, bare spots and improper feathering. Without the synthetic supplement, the poultry ration (a simple corn-soybean blend) does not

provide enough methionine. The late revelation, coupled with a lack of alternatives and the NOSB's desire not to kill the developing organic market, gave chicken producers a three-year grace period during which time they promised to seek an alternative. However, as the sun set on the exception in October 2005, several major organic poultry producers – Tyson and Organic Valley – lobbied the USDA to provide another three-year grace period, and the exemption was extended to October 21, 2008.

Some have argued (Hungerford, 2004) that the major producers have not spent the last several years searching for viable alternatives to the use of the synthetic nutrient, primarily because it would require significantly changing the way the majority of organic poultry is produced today, even though eliminating the synthetic additive could be met by adopting poultry production methods that are more in synch with organic principles. For example, the synthetic can be eliminated by shifting the balance of amino acids, easily achieved by shifting the balance of the ration. The standard poultry feed ration is currently 90 % corn meal and 10 % soy meal. At this ratio chickens achieve maximum feed efficiency, meaning they eat no more than is necessary for optimal health and they create no excess waste. But the ration is low in methionine. If the ration was rebalanced at 70/30 corn to soybean, methionine requirements could be met without needing a synthetic. However, this solution has been met with resistance because it creates an inefficiency in feed uptake, which results in additional feed, longer growth time, and more manure—which all add up to higher production costs. The additional manure presents a big problem for large-scale producers who often do not have fields on which to spread the waste and have to pay to have it hauled off-farm.

Another option to feed additives is pasture access. Birds that have access to pasture do not need additional methionine during the growth and finishing phases, according to Joe Moritz, assistant professor of poultry production at West Virginia

University (Hungerford, 2005). Moritz conducted a two-year experiment looking at the need for methionine supplements during the growing phase. Raising 300 birds at a time, fifteen per 20-foot by 30-foot outdoor paddock, the researchers found they could grow healthy chickens without using synthetic methionine—as long as the birds had adequate access to pasture. Currently there is no pasture requirement outlined in the organic rule, only vague requirements for outdoor access which must be made available for large operations, and the pasture requirement currently being discussed by the NOSB is for ruminants only and will not apply to poultry producers. Therefore, pasture access would mark a major change for some producers and favors small-scale production over larger commercial operations.

A third option is to switch from fast growing breeds to slow-growing and medium-growing birds as an alternative to synthetic methionine. According to Anne Fanatico, a graduate student at the University of Arkansas, these breeds have a less-muscled physique and, therefore, they require less methionine—especially during the critical starter phase. While these breeds were once popular in poultry production, U.S. American poultry producers, both conventional and organic, grow almost exclusively the fast-growing Cornish-cross, a breed that can reach market weight in less than five weeks. Slow-growing breeds cost more to raise, the yield is not as high, and the food efficiency is not as good as it is with fast-growing birds. In a fast-growing breed, feed is converted at a 2-to-1 ratio, or 2 pounds of feed for every pound of gain. For a slow-growing bird, that ratio is 3 to 1. The lack of commercially available breeds also presents a problem, as heritage breeds often do not produce the meaty bird popular in the U.S.

What is obvious is that solutions are out there. Chickens can be raised organically without synthetic methionine, but it can't be done without sacrificing production levels and/or increasing costs; and it can't be done without fundamentally

changing the system and how we think about food production. What the example of methionine shows is that the political process of deciding what is allowed on the National List often favors the practices of large-scale, commercial producers over those that are more in tune with organic principles. Requiring producers to turn to alternative methods of poultry production, such as slower growing birds, pasture access, and more expensive feed alternatives, would require poultry producers in the organic market to fit into a system based on organic principles as opposed to squeezing (or eliminating) organic principles to fit the mold of a conventional marketplace. At the same time, large-scale producers such as Tyson and Organic Valley have proven that they can successfully lobby the USDA for allowable inputs. While the evaluation criteria of the Final Rule claims to be in synch with the principles of organic production, when the alternatives to using the synthetic substances are antithetical to modern, agricultural practices, the substances are allowed, and, in the end, the definition of organic shifts a little more towards the conventional. As Eric Sideman, a farmer who has produced organic chickens for the last 5 years without synthetic methionine worries: “Organic is a definition that is man-made, someone could easily define organic to include synthetic methionine.” (Hungerford, 2005)

When the organic movement first took hold in the U.S., organic farming represented a shift away from the rationalization and positivistic reductionism of modern agricultural sciences and a movement toward a different worldview in which the food production is embedded in social and ecological relationships. Organic farming, therefore, necessitated a localized and practical knowledge with strong normative and cultural conceptions attached to what could be considered good practices. In this way standardization itself is antithetical to organic knowledge systems, not so much because norms cannot be established to determine criteria for good practices, but because these norms must then be universalized, codified, and

made static through text-based rules. The result then is that the dynamic relationship between nature, culture, and practice is lost as the standard becomes the practice, instead of the practice becoming the standard. James Scott (1998:262) captures the very process by which organic principles lose their core meaning when they are filtered through a highly rationalized scientific thought when he said: “[t]he necessary simple abstractions of large bureaucratic institutions, as we have seen, can never adequately represent the actual complexity of natural or social processes. The categories that they employ are too coarse, too static, and too stylized to do justice to the world that they purport to describe.”

Normalizing Organics: Myths and Realities of Uniformity

Under the USDA’S NOP, and by virtue of the 1990 OFA, creating a formalized, universal, and text-based set of guidelines for organic production is a process by which only one definition of organic can emerge as the ‘norm.’ The practices and relationships that are allowed under organic certification, and the products that enter the marketplace with the organic label, are made ‘organic’ and ‘good’ through this association. Therefore the NOP’s organic standards and label represent a set of norms for what *good* organic production is, but they also create *the standard* for organic practices rendered through a scientific and bureaucratic understanding of the society-nature relationship. Busch (2004) points out in his study of food safety standards, that standards-making is a social process that cannot be separated from the cultural, economic, political and technical aspects by which they are defined. Because standards are also an expression of what is ‘good’, ‘healthy’, ‘safe’ or ‘right’ in society they represent, reconstruct, and reproduce society’s prevailing normative conceptions.

Therefore, the organic standards are more than simply textual definitions, but they are also about how this textual definition can be interpreted into practice. In this section I will use the case study of organic livestock standards to examine the *normalization* of industrial production as *good* organic practices under the NOP. It is through the NOPs universal production standards and label uniformity that the organic marketplace is opened to competition based on market values at the expense of non-market values. The uniformity created through the standardization and codification of organic production organizes the organic marketplace to operate in synch with the principles of commercial production, enabling greater market integration between producers, processors, and retailers.

Normalizing Organic Livestock Practices: Dropping the Floor and Ceiling

The growth of the organic milk market, and the growing demand for organic and pasture-raised meats, has made livestock production one of the most lucrative markets in the organic sector (Sligh and Christman 2002; Brady 2006; Kastel 2006).⁴⁵ However, due to the broad and ambiguous wording of the livestock standards and the recent entry of conventional milk processors into organic production, the organic standards for livestock production have been among the most controversial and intensely debated production standards since the implementation of the NOP. The organic livestock production standards are a good example of how the relationships between textual definition and interpretation into practice create a normalization of industrial practices under the NOP, by: (1) creating a low floor for practices based on ambiguous standards, loose interpretations of the rules, and poor enforcement by the

⁴⁵ Historically livestock production has been one of the most industrialized sectors of the food-system, producing some of the initial motivations for consumers to find organic alternatives, such as bovine growth hormones in milk and mad cow disease (DuPuis 2002).

USDA, and (2) setting a low ceiling for practices by which producers and certifiers cannot require standards above those of the NOP.

The livestock standards (§205.236-39) refer to four guidelines for production: origins, feed, health, and living conditions. However, the ambiguity and the highly scientific language of the standards leave them open to interpretation. In practice they have set a very low floor for organic production, increasing the potential enabling production practices and outcomes that go against organic principles. This is most clear in the standards regarding access to pasture and the outdoors for livestock. Four sections in the organic regulations, if considered together, make it quite clear that organic dairy cattle are intended to be pasture based:

Section §205.237 states: “The producer of an organic livestock operation must provide livestock with a total feed ration composed of agricultural products, including pasture and forage.

Section §205.238 states, among other provisions: “The producer must establish and maintain preventative livestock health care practices, including ... establishment of appropriate housing, pasture conditions, and sanitation practices to minimize the occurrence and spread of diseases and parasites, and provision of conditions which allow for exercise, freedom of movement, and reduction of stress appropriate to the species.

Section §205.239 mandates that: “The producer of an organic livestock operation must establish and maintain livestock living conditions which accommodate the health and natural behavior of animals including ... access to the outdoors, and, access to pasture for ruminants.

Section §205.239 (b) also stipulates that any confinement due to “inclement weather, the animal’s stage of production, conditions under which the health, safety or well-being of the animal could be jeopardized, or risks to soil and water quality” could only be utilized in organic management as a temporary measure.

Along with these requirements, the organic regulations provide a very clear definition of “pasture” in Section §205.2: “Land used for livestock grazing that is managed to provide feed value and maintain or improve soil, water and vegetative resources.” However, the language of these standards provides enough wiggle room for different interpretations based on the different models under which production is taking place. Since the NOP does not have any requirements for scale of production, how a 65 cow dairy and a 2000 cow dairy interpret the standards can be quite different.

Most organic certifiers and the majority of all organic livestock producers understand the intent of these passages to mean ongoing access to pasture, which naturally results in the animals securing a significant percentage of their feed intake from pasture. Small-scale, organic dairy farms typically milk their cows twice a day allowing farmers to easily transfer their cows from the milking parlor to the pasture. However, the practice of pasture access is almost impossible to coordinate for large-scale dairies with thousands of cows, because it is logistically impossible to transfer them back and forth from pasture to the milk parlor several times a day. These dairies generally operate under a confinement model, not only because their scale makes pasture access impossible, but because the model is designed to maximize extremely high milk production from dairy cattle. By milking more often and feeding their milk herd a high-energy ration instead of a reliance on pasture, operators are able to

produce more milk at a lower price. Therefore, large-scale producers, such as those that are attempting to fit the organic standards into an industrial model, have used the broad language of the standards to justify confinement operations and economies of scale.

For example, large organic dairy operations refer to section §205.239 (b) and the language “stage of production” to justify confinement. The term was intended to refer to the birthing process, very young animals, and extreme weather conditions whereby dairy cows may be confined to the barn for their health and safety. The general language was intended to allow the farmer some level of flexibility, because as one organic dairy farmer in New York told me, “I know what my cows need better than the USDA does.” However, large-scale dairies have used the term to justify not providing access to pasture for lactating (milking) animals, under the logic that lactation is a “stage of production” (Kastel, 2006), thereby allowing them to confine their dairy cows year round.

While the language of the standards leaves them vulnerable to multiple interpretations and loopholes for industrial production, strong enforcement of the regulations would insure that in practice they reflect organic principles. However, the agency has refused to clarify or enforce its own regulations requiring that organic dairy cows be raised on pasture rather than densely packed in feedlots. This is despite the repeated recommendations of the NOSB, three formal complaints, and the comments of over 40,000 farmers. In addition, two lawsuits have been filed by the Cornucopia Institute, a family-farm research and advocacy group founded in 2004, and several on-line consumer petitions have been circulated. Objections to the USDA’s inaction focuses on three dairies that produce organic milk (owned by Horizon and Aurora Dairy) and supply several private labels, but are similar in scale

and operations to conventional factory dairies, where cows are kept in pens and fed from troughs.

While the USDA has shied away from clarifying the rules, thereby allowing for loopholes that enable industrial production by keeping the floor on organic practices low, they have shown some muscle in requiring certifiers to certify operations that appear to loosely interpret the rules keeping the ceiling on production practices very low also. In October 2002, Massachusetts Independent Certification, Incorporated (MICI), refused to certify a chicken farm, The Country Hen, where the chickens had no outdoor access. MICI concluded, based on an inspection and review of the farm, that the chickens did not have "adequate access to exercise areas, fresh air and direct sunlight," and the "applicant was too restrictive in determining the hours and days the poultry would be allowed outside." (MICI 2004) The Country Hen appealed to the USDA on October 22, 2002 and three days later USDA overruled MICI's decision, directed MICI to grant organic certification, and informed The Country Hen that it could use the MICI label (although MICI has not authorized use of its label to The Country Hen). The NOP administrator told MICI that they were required to certify the farm since it met USDA standards, and if they refused to grant certification, they could lose their accreditation.

The Country Hen issue reveals that the USDA will chose to ignore or maintain the ambiguity of standards that enable producers operating under the industrial model to access the market. The Country Hen houses 67,000 birds at several facilities in Massachusetts, with up to 6000 birds housed in a single barn. According to The Country Hen, it plans to build two three-hundred square foot porches onto each barn, which could accommodate only a small percentage of the flock at a time and does not provide access to pasture. However, at the time of certification the porches did not exist, and currently the chickens have no access to the outdoors at all. Yet, whether the

porches are completed or not, we can assume that small porches are not what consumers have in mind when they are told organic chickens and egg layers have access to the outdoors.

The Country Hen justifies keeping its chickens indoors partly on the grounds that if they went outdoors, they would be subject to inclement weather, and it would be a danger to their health. The Country Hen also cites that lack of outdoor land space and close proximity to a city-watershed makes it impossible to provide on-the-ground outdoor access on their farm, meaning they may never be able to provide proper outdoor access. This rationale, accepted by the USDA, shows its inclination to disregard the organic principles behind the standards when they conflict with the practices of industrial production. Outdoor access is hard to do properly on large-scale farms, and instead of requiring confined, large-scale farms to comply with regulations if they want to use the organic label, the USDA interprets the outdoor access requirement to meet the needs of large scale, confined farms.

The examples of both dairy and poultry production standards reveal that while the floor of organic production is ambiguous and open to interpretation, the ceiling for organic production is strongly enforced. Certifiers are not allowed to require producers adhere to production standards that go above the USDA's interpretation of the standards. However the USDA's guidance in interpretation of the standards is not consistent, and when clarifications are made they appear, as in the case of The Country Hen, to subvert "organic" principles to the logic of industrial production. The universalization of organic standards for production under the NOP, therefore, means that the criteria for production, no matter how narrow or broad, become the standard for practices behind the organic label.

While one of the goals of creating universal standards was to do away with the variability in organic certification, the USDA's lax interpretation and enforcement has

resulted in a high level of variability in how certifiers interpret the standards.

According to Brian McElroy, manager of certification services for California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF), “The way that certifiers are enforcing the standards there is a fair amount of variability in terms of what a certifier will consider a violation, or a minor violation versus a major violation. There’s no guidance currently provided by the National Organic Program to make that determination between a minor and major noncompliance. There are some programs that are much more intense in terms of enforcing the rule and others that are much more loose in terms of their interpretations.” (Sullivan 2004)

What the current growing pains of interpreting the organic standards reveals is an argument between the current guardians of the organic label – the USDA – and the producers, organizations, and consumers that have a different vision of what agriculture is and can be. Within the moral economy of organic standards these actors compete to define what *good* organic practices are and who is a *good* organic producer. While the organic standards in textual form do reflect the core principles of the organic movement, their interpretation and enforcement by the NOP upholds industrial principles and practices. This enables industrial production models to fall under the umbrella of standards that define which practices are considered organic practices. By accepting and acting according to a set of standards, social actors are reinforcing the values and norms embodied in those standards. In the case of the NOP standards, the non-market values inherent in organic principles are being subverted to the market-values of an industrial and corporate food system.

Normalizing Corporate Organics: Private-Label Organic Dairy

According to Busch (2000), one of the primary functions of standards is to further market transactions through the creation of uniformity. Uniformity, which

allows for, and is necessitated by, the lengthening of commodity chains, is made by possible through the standardization of inputs. In the organic marketplace this is significant not simply because of the need for uniform organic inputs and products, but because the *value* of the organic certified label becomes uniform through universal standards. With organics, and other value labels, the uniformity that becomes important is a uniform *meaning* reflected in the label regardless of how well the practices behind that label actually reflect the meaning. Standards and labels allow for the personal contact between consumers and producers on the market to be limited, thereby reinforcing commodification as transactions are further embedded in market relations at the expense of social relations. Our diet today is almost entirely a purchased and packaged diet (Sobal 1999) by which information comes through labeling. Consumers today need to put their faith in the labels on products to gain knowledge about the conditions of production. Labels are supposed to reveal what is hidden to us, however the gap between what meaning consumers see behind the label and the actual social and environmental relationships behind the label, can be huge. Organic standards, therefore, work to further integrate and deepen commodity relations within the organic food-system.

The normalization of organic production standards does not necessarily lead to uniform practices or products, but it does lead to the *idea* of uniform practices. The organic label signifies something about the social relations of production, processing, and distribution behind the product it appears on. The meaning reflected behind the organic label was built by grassroots organizations over the last thirty years to reflect a set of practices and principles, such as local, small-scale, ecological, and healthy, that most consumers see when they look at the organic label today (Conner 2002). However, the practices that qualify under the organic standards and the conditions under which organically labeled products are produced, sourced, processed, and

distributed, may not reflect the meaning that consumers see behind the label. The hard earned confidence built over 35 years between organic producers and consumers has the potential to be shattered as the practices behind the organic label come more and more to reflect those very practices that consumers are attempting to bypass through buying organic products.

Like other issues related to the organic standards, uniformity can be used to strengthen production based on organic principles or move production practices further away from those consumers believe to be reflected in the label. Creating uniformity in labeling and certification has been beneficial to producers that rely heavily on production inputs, such as livestock producers. For example, most of the dairy farmers in New York State that I spoke with said that uniform certification under the NOP had made it much easier for them to find a source of hay and other feed inputs and increased the likelihood that they could source them locally. Due to the long periods of snow cover in New York State, dairy farmers need to supplement the pasture of their dairy cows with hay, and while many do grow their own hay, they usually find themselves purchasing hay from other local producers. Prior to the NOP, certifiers like NOFA-NY, only allowed livestock producers to buy inputs from suppliers that were certified by the same agency. This significantly limited the potential resources for inputs and often forced dairy farmers to go further distances to purchase these inputs. The universalization of certification, however, was a blessing for this aspect of production for these livestock producers, because it increased their access to inputs and allowed them better local and regional sourcing. In this instance, the uniformity provided by the NOP allowed producers to become more organic in their production practices by strengthening local producer to producer networks.

However at the same time, the uniformity created through centralized and universal certification and labeling obscures the practices and processes that link

producers and consumers. While this is true to some degree in any labeling and certification program, centralization of organic certification and labeling under the NOP makes *all* producers and processors appear universal in their practices. This allows for the normalization of corporate practices under the organic label by encouraging increased vertical and horizontal market integration and the lengthening of commodity chains, since producers around the globe can be ‘USDA certified organic,’ whereby the least expensive sources can be sought out globally. In addition, producers are not rewarded for practices that are above and beyond the minimum required to be in compliance with the standards.

The normalization of corporate organic practices made possible by the uniform label is best seen in the emergence of “private-label brands” for organic products. This retailing trend appears antithetical to organic principles, as it requires increasing vertical and horizontal integration in the organic marketplace and a greater distance between producer and consumer mediated simply by the organic label. Yet, private-label brands are one of the fastest growing segments of organic retail (Sligh and Christman 2003; Kastel 2006) and will likely see increased growth with the emergence of private organic labels for some of the largest retailers in the market: Whole Foods, Costco, Safeway, and Trader Joes. With private-labels, grocery chains and distributors are able to lower their prices and expand their profit margins by buying food and other products in a competitive open marketplace and sourcing globally. The chance that the products behind the private organic labels will be from large-scale farms, owned or contracted by corporations, and originating in new agricultural countries like China and Mexico (Brady 2006) is increasingly likely.

By their very nature, private-label products are anonymous. The private-label presents the appearance of uniformity in the product, however consumers buying milk bearing the organic label at the local grocery store do not know whether that milk

came from a local, small-scale dairy or a 3000 cow, confined feed-lot dairy owned and managed by a large corporation. Did the apples in their individually wrapped packages of organic apple slices come from New Zealand or New York State? Did the organic crushed tomatoes come from California or Mexico or China? Consumers of private label organic products have little knowledge of where the food in those products comes from and under what conditions it was produced, since the USDA label is stamped on products from industrial-scale operations in China and Brazil, as well as, the small farm down the road. Private-labels by their very nature extend the distance between producer and consumer, and the organic label obscures other factors that might affect consumer's consumption choices – like country of origin and scale of production - and encourages consumers to focus on traditional consumption values such as cost and personal taste.

The private-label organic dairy market presents one of the most egregious disconnections between actual practices and likely consumer perceptions of practices. Organic dairy is the fastest growing segment of the organic marketplace with over \$15 billion in annual sales and strong commodity prices (Kastel, 2006). As the marketplace for organic dairy expands, it has also become dominated by a few large-scale operations that have sought to dominate the lucrative market (Sligh and Christman 2003). Corporations like Aurora Organic Dairy, based in Colorado, whose primary business is producing private-label products for the retail giants like Costco and Safeway, operate massive corporate farms and are guided not by organic, but market principles. According to Mark Kastel of the Cornucopia Institute (Kastel, 2006), the principal owners of Aurora Dairy, Mark Retzliff and Marc Peperzak, secured an \$18.5 million equity investment from Charles Bank in Boston to help convert their industrial farms in Colorado and Texas to organic production and to build a processing plant to bottle milk in a remote area of Colorado. Their Colorado

operation is one of the largest organic dairies in the country, producing 10 million gallons of milk a year from its herd of 4000 to 5000 cows. Following a conventional factory-farm model, cows in Aurora's facilities have virtually no opportunity to graze on pasture and are simply fed organic grains in feed-lots. In addition, the scale of these operations means that they are producing tons of pollution in the form of manure and methane, carbon dioxide, and nitrous oxide, and they are farming in arid regions that require the need to pump water constantly to grow what little pasture these animals have access to.

The practices of these industrial-scale farms means that they can produce large quantities of milk fairly cheaply, but they are also a far cry from the principles of organic production. Many fear that through their economy of scale and questionable organic practices, Aurora's cheaper factory-produced milk is undercutting reputable and established brands in the market. The trend toward corporate reorganization of organic dairy is likely to continue as the NOP loosely interprets standards for production and consumers are lulled into a false sense of security with the USDA organic label. This is especially significant with organic dairy because it is considered a "gateway" organic product – meaning consumers will often start with familiar organic dairy products like milk and cheese before moving on to other organic products – and how consumers consume organic dairy has the potential to shape their understanding of organics and the practices they will expect behind the organic label. As private-labels expand and enjoy greater consumer legitimacy in the marketplace, companies like Aurora will have increasing success, already indicated by Aurora's report that they are building an additional 3000-plus cow dairy in arid Colorado and intend to convert another current confinement farm in Georgia to organic production (Brady 2006).

The trend of stamping organic value on industrial practices however is not limited just to the private-label brands. Horizon Organic Dairy, which processes and distributes 70% of organic milk in the U.S. and has \$187 million in annual sales, operates an 8,000 cow dairy in the Idaho desert (Sligh and Christman 2003, Brady 2006). In 2003 Dean Foods – the largest fluid milk producer in the U.S. and one of the top five in the world – acquired Horizon, making Dean Foods the largest producer of both organic and conventional dairy in the U.S. While this is likely to affect the shape of the organic dairy market in the same ways the conventional dairy market has been transformed – a drive toward fewer industrial-scale farms supplying most of the market – it also has the effect of subverting organic production principles to the logic of the market by driving out smaller producers and normalizing corporate organics for consumers.

Perhaps one of the strongest normalizing effects is the introduction of organic products into conventional food pathways. For example. Horizon dominates the organic dairy market by aggressively promoting its products to conventional grocery stores like Wal-Mart, natural food giants like Whole Food Market, discounters like Costco, and even Starbucks stores. When consumers see the USDA organic label on bottled milk in their cooperative store and cartons of milk at Wal-Mart they appear the same because the labeling communicates that they are the same. In addition, the social order of organic production is recreated, as established brands, like Stoneyfield Yogurt that morphed from a local brand to a subsidiary of the \$17 billion Danone corporation, must forgo some of the non-market values of the organic philosophy for greater market share - for example, like sourcing strawberries for their yogurt from China (Business Week, 2004).

Normalizing through exclusion: What is left out of the standards?

The organic label normalizes corporate organic practices and market organization through standards that create an organic sector in which practices such as use of synthetic inputs, large-scale conventional production, and the extension of input chains become the *norm*. However, while the discussion until this point has shown the construction of moral economy of organic production to include practices that are easily integrated into an agro-industrial market model, it is also about the exclusion of standards that do not fit within this model or challenge it. According to Foucault (1977) the process of normalization involves establishing which standards will – and, therefore, which standards will not – determine whether a person, practice or process has reached the required standard that places them within the *normal* category. In the case of organic agriculture, the aspects of organic production that are not addressed within the NOP standards become disassociated with organic agriculture and the organic label.

While the history of both private and public organic certification, regulation, and legislation has focused on constructing a definition of organic that would distinguish it on the marketplace, producers and consumers have generally held organic agriculture to a set of standards that are not easily reduced to market values. In the popular discourse, and within the organic community, the justifications for organic production include social, ecological, and economic concerns and the organic community has historically been more concerned with the outcomes of organic production and what it produces, rather than defining a cookbook of practices and allowable inputs. These concerns were voiced repeatedly during the ten-year process in which producers, certifiers, processors, activists and consumers debated the Final Rule (Vos 2000) and sought to have the official, universal, market definition of organic closely match the ideals of the movement.

However, as I have shown in this chapter, the federal standards respond to a narrow set of practices and allowable inputs, carefully excluding those goals of organic agriculture that do not articulate well with agro-industrial practices. The organic standards under the NOP fail to address what many consider to be the core ideals and principles of the organic community. For example, the organic community has emphasized social issues such as supporting agricultural markets and infrastructures that enable small farms to thrive, helping to preserve farmer-based knowledge, paying livable wages to farm labor, acting as an integral component of the local communities economy, and supporting rural culture. The quality of food itself has also been an issue with a focus on maximizing the nutritional value of food through local marketing and post-harvest techniques. And perhaps most central to organic agriculture has been the quest to reduce the ecological footprint of farming and focus on active production with sustainable outcomes. Some of these goals have been to conserve natural resources, provide habitat for wildlife, maintain and build healthy soils, focus on renewal resources, reduce food miles by selling produce locally and regionally, and help to preserve farmland. Yet, we see no reflection of these principles in the federal standards.

While we cannot fool ourselves in thinking that the private certifiers prior to the NOP addressed all or many of these issues in their own standards for production, centralization under the NOP takes us further away from these non-market values being part of our organic definition. To begin with, since the NOP has a monopoly on the term organic, how organic is defined under the NOP becomes the only definition thereby normalizing what is included and disassociating that which is excluded. In addition, as the organic market expands and new producers move into organic production, they are being socialized into a very narrow definition of organic production and encouraged to guide their behavior toward market values at the

expense of non-market values. And lastly, as the standards normalize organic production to market values, competition within the organic marketplace will produce centralization, vertical and horizontal integration, and increasing farm size through economies of scale.

By examining the national organic standards in a normative framework, we are able to see that these standards are not simply neutral outcomes of an a priori organic structure, but tools employed in the reorganization of the growing ‘certified’ organic marketplace to make it “legible from above” (Scott, 1998). That is, to favor production practices that are centrally organized, dependent upon inputs, large-scale, linear, essentializing, and production-oriented monocultures. The NOP, by codifying and institutionalizing organic standards through a narrow scientific framework, normalizing agro-industrial practices, and disciplining certifiers, producers, and consumers to the logic of the market, constructs a new organic moral economy in which ‘good’ organic production articulates with agro-industrial practices. In this way, market values, once challenged by the organic movements, have trumped non-market values to become the organizing principles of a ‘certified organic’ industry.

By organizing organic production according to these standards, the ‘certified organic’ market necessitates an *organic agriculture from nowhere*. The logic of modernist, scientific agriculture focuses on simplifying production to a set of rules in which “agriculture” – whether organic or conventional - can happen anywhere because the focus is on the transformation of nature with technology and centralized control of resources. Through the discourse and normalization the USDA’s NOP organic agriculture becomes delocalized, homogenized, simplified, and uniform. In other words, organic agriculture is stripped of its non-market values in the certified organic marketplace where money talks, not people.

Disciplining Organics

Under the 1990 OFPA, the USDA, an agency that was once hostile to organic agriculture, has become the guardian of organic integrity and is now responsible for conferring legitimacy upon organic production. As the ‘organic authority,’ the USDA constructs the standards for organic certification, determining how these standards will be interpreted and implemented, accrediting organizations to certify producers and processors, and holding a monopoly on the term ‘organic. In Foucault’s (1977) terms, the USDA’s NOP is a ‘value-giving’ institution. Through the organic standards the NOP bestows organic value on certifiers through accreditation, producers and processors with certification, and on products with organic labeling. According to Foucault, the power of ‘value-giving’ is achieved as the “disciplinary institution compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes...in short, it *normalizes*” (Foucault 1977: 195).

The USDA’s NOP is a ‘disciplinary institution’ – a gatekeeper for determining access to the organic marketplace by deciding who and what is “organic.” The institution’s role, according to Foucault (1977: 236), is to “introduce the constraint of conformity that must be achieved.” It thus formalizes a set of knowledge codes, constructs standards/norms for behavior, and monitors that behavior. Understanding the USDA’s NOP as a disciplinary institution, enables us to see how social order is reconstructed by disciplining social actors according to a set of norms defining what is “good”, “normal”, or “organic.” According to Foucault, this discipline is achieved through a series of techniques: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment and examination. As a bureaucratic institution, the NOP combines all of these techniques, thereby distributing power in the organic marketplace, shaping the context of participation, and disciplining producers, organizations, and consumers.

In this section, I will examine how the NOP operates as a disciplinary institution with a look at the mechanisms through which organic certifiers, organic producers, and organic consumers become disciplined to the prevailing organic norms of the NOP, thereby shaping the behavior of these actors to the logic of the certified organic marketplace. While these mechanisms are not necessarily new under the NOP, they operate to discipline actors to the *new* moral economy of organic agriculture.

Disciplining Certifiers

The 1990 Organic Food Production Act (OFPA) mandated the centralization of organic certification under one set of standards monitored by the USDA with consultation from the NOSB. The USDA does not itself provide organic certification but instead accredits state, private, and foreign organizations, groups, or persons to become "certifying agents." Organic certifying agencies can be either State Departments of Agriculture or private certifying agencies. The accreditation process involves an initial application to the NOP for accreditation, that once approved requires both a review of program documents and an on-site visit. However, even though the 1990 OFPA requires on-site audit visits, it has been reported that there is an uneven application of the rules where some certifiers have been audited twice and others haven't even had their first audit yet. This appears to be the case with several certifiers in other countries such as Canada and China (Interview with NOFA-certification agent; Sullivan 2004). After the initial review, agencies can be recommended for certification if they show they are able to comply with enforcing the standards, have defined the scope of services they will offer, and demonstrate that they will be able to sustain the certification program. Once approved accreditation lasts for five years. The USDA reserves the right to suspend or revoke accreditation for "failure

to maintain its system in compliance with referenced standards and approved procedures.” (“Organic certification” n.d.)

The NOP represents a reordering of the organic certification process as a hierarchy of observation is constructed, directing the flow of authority as the USDA monitors the certification agencies, and these agencies in turn monitor producers and processors. The original goal of the 1990 OFPA in reorganizing certification in a hierarchical manner was to make the standards easier to enforce and to comply with, however, it also creates a strong mechanism to enforce normalization. The NOP became a mechanism of “normalizing judgment” (Foucault 1977; 197) determining if certification agencies are in compliance. What was once a disparate group of organic certification agencies has become a centralized system of certification whereby certification agencies enforce a uniform and universal set of organic standards. Through the ongoing process of accreditation, certifiers are disciplined to the underlying logic of the NOP’s organic standards, and the autonomy of these agencies has been lost as they can be threatened with the loss of accreditation if they do not adhere to both the standards and the interpretation of the standards by the USDA, such as has happened with MICI and the case of The Country Hen.

One effect of the centralization of organic certification is a delocalization of the certification agencies. As I described in Chapter Two, prior to the NOP most certification agencies were focused on local and regional organic production as is evident in their names: California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF), Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA), Oregon Tilth. These agencies were able to focus on production practices and standards for certification that best fit producers in their regions. This approach to certification closely follows the organic philosophy in which the production practices, and therefore certification standards, are grounded

with the environmental and social context in which they take place.⁴⁶ However, under the universal standards of the NOP, and the severing of ties between certification and education, the criteria for organic certification becomes increasingly disconnected from the places in which production takes place.

Centralization under the NOP also has the effect of turning certification into a business. Prior to the NOP most certification agencies had a long history working within and for the organic movement. These agencies were deeply embedded in the core values of organic agriculture, focused on regional issues, and plugged into the world of advocacy in support of the organic movement. However, as certification came under the umbrella of the USDA, and was designated as a marketing and labeling program, many organizations and individuals entered the certification market purely as a business opportunity. According to McElroy of California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF): “There are a lot of certifiers that have come into this just because it’s another business line. They can add to their lab work... or people who’ve started shops in their homes running certification programs... A lot of certifiers are just out there, ‘Oh, it’s another business service; here I am,’ and they run it out and it doesn’t help the community as a whole” (Sullivan, 2004).

The entry of a large number of certifiers focused solely on providing a business service reshapes that dynamic and creates an organic certification market where there was not one previously. Certification patterns under the NOP have come to represent market considerations more than ideological convictions. In addition, agencies themselves are becoming specialized as the certification market expands, and individual agencies are focusing on specific areas of production, products, and

⁴⁶ However, as Guthman (2004) points out this does not always mean that certification standards always fit with ideals the organic movement. For example, she argues as the market began to expand in California CCOF became more closely aligned with practices of large-scale organic producers. However this is primarily due to the corporate agrarian footprint of region and differs significantly from other certification agencies that serve smaller-scale producers such as NOFA-NY.

processing. Agencies are also following the global organic supply chain with almost 40% of certification agencies located outside of the U.S. in 2004 (Sullivan 2004). With a set of universal standards, certifiers must now compete with each other on a narrow set of criteria such as price and service. At the same time, the certification agencies that are responding simply to business opportunities in the booming organic market are likely to see organic certification simply as another marketing opportunity, whereby they may have more lenient interpretations of the standards to ensure that their clients are in compliance. This is likely to put pressure on certification agencies that are dedicated to the goals and philosophy of the organic movement, as they compete with more business-minded certifiers.

Through institutionalization and codification of standards under the USDA, organic certification and production standards are brought into a legal, legislative framework. This framework is familiar to agribusiness and one through which it has greater influence. The effect of this change was felt immediately after the NOP was implemented, with the organic feed rider on the 2003 Omnibus Appropriations bill, which allowed organic livestock producers to use conventional grain. Although this bill was quickly repealed with swift action by activists and Sen. Leahy, it revealed a new vulnerability for the organic standards. However, as certifier discretion was eliminated with the federal rule and certification, agencies became the agents of the USDA organic program, and these organizations must operationalize and enforce the standards whether they agree with them or not. For many organic certification agencies with a long history in the organic movement, such as NOFA, this creates conflicts between their philosophy and goals and their practices as certifiers. Yet, if certifying agencies want to remain part of the organic marketplace, they too, like producers, processors, and consumers, must comply with the organic standards. The federal regulatory framework of the NOP brings the organization of organic

production • from farm management to external relationships with suppliers, processors, and consumers – more closely in line with the organization of the global food economy.

Disciplining Producers

Through centralization of organic standards and certification under the NOP, organic certification agencies have been disciplined to comply with the organic standards, and they have also become the mechanisms through which the discipline and therefore normalization of producers and processors takes place. The organic certification process is, as Foucault contends, an *examination*, which combines both hierarchical observation and normalizing judgment. According to Foucault (1977; 1990), the examination is a “normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to quantify, to classify,” and in effect to bestow value on those that are being evaluated. Therefore, the NOP and the certification agencies are part of the apparatus through which various mechanisms, such as farm plans and farm visits by inspectors, discipline producers to the standards for organic production, thereby shaping the social order of the organic marketplace.

The primary mechanism for examination is the organic farm plan. The organic farm plan is a very detailed written record of all farm activity, which allows for the close monitoring of organic producers. This written record and a farm visit by a trained inspector become the method through which producers are evaluated on their “organic-ness.” Applicants for organic certification are required to develop an Organic System Plan (§205.201.a.1-6) which must be detailed enough for the certifying agent to determine if their operation is in compliance with the National Organic Standards. The organic system plan has six components:

- 1) *the organic system plan must describe the practices and procedures used, including the frequency with which they will be used, in the certified operation;*
- 2) *it must list and characterize each substance used as a production or handling input, including the documentation of commercial availability, as applicable;*
- 3) *it must identify the monitoring techniques which will be used to verify that the organic plan is being implemented in a manner which complies with all applicable requirements;*
- 4) *it must explain the record keeping system used to preserve the identity of organic products from the point of certification through delivery to the customer who assumes legal title to the goods;*
- 5) *it must describe the management practices and physical barriers established to prevent commingling of organic and non-organic products on a split operation (an organic and non-organic operation at the same location) and to prevent contact of organic production and handling operations and products with prohibited substances, and;*
- 6) *it must contain the additional information deemed necessary by the certifying agent to evaluate site-specific conditions relevant to compliance with these rules or other applicable State program regulations. The organic plan must also describe monitoring practices that verify that the plan is being implemented.*

After the application has been submitted and reviewed, a qualified inspector will conduct an on-site inspection for a fee, submit a report to the certifying agency, and if complete, the certification agency will grant and issue a certification certificate. The entire initial certification process can take months to complete, depending on the schedule of the certifying agency and the complexity of the application. The transition from conventional to certified organic status usually takes three years to complete, primarily because NOP standards require that no prohibited materials be applied for three years prior to harvest of the first organic crop. However, if organic practices have already been followed and can be documented at the time of the initial certification visit, certification can be completed soon thereafter. Once certified, organic production, harvesting, and handling records must be kept for five years, and annual recertification visits must also be scheduled.

The organic farm plan and the on-site evaluation make producers visible to the disciplinary institution. According to Foucault (1977: 196), “[t]heir visibility assures the hold of power that is exercised over them.” Most certification agencies provide detailed paperwork for farmers use to log information regarding their production practices. This paperwork has the effect of producing conformity to production standards as producers modify and organize production practices to enable completion of the paperwork. Discipline of producers becomes organized through these methods of examination.

In 2004 I attended a day-long certification workshop for the Northeast Organic Farming Association – New York. During the workshop participants were walked through the paperwork for certification, and special workshops were held for dairy and poultry/egg producers. This paperwork was extensive and detailed, requiring as it said, “that records disclose all activities and transactions of the operation” (NOFA-NY 2004). The eleven page farm plan for horticultural and field crops had six sections of

questions, with most requiring additional paperwork and record keeping. For example, section five required twenty-five separate documents (generally multiple pages each) tracking organic products back to the field/location in which they were grown. These records provide a detailed account of all stages of production from seed purchases to spray, harvest, storage, and sales records. For example, the sample harvest record provided by NOFA-NY included: harvest date, crop, amount harvested, amount culled/lost, storage area, date sold, and who the crop was sold to. Many producers I spoke with in New York State welcomed these disciplinary measures, even though they took a significant amount of time, saying that they kept better records on their farms with the certification paperwork. However, these same producers often complained that the detailed record keeping for some standards under the NOP became a significant burden, which began to alter their practices in the field. One of these standards was the seed rule (§205.204).

One of the most (initially) applauded changes that accompanied the NOP Final Rule was the organic seed rule. For years before the NOP organic certification agencies had been struggling with the decision to require producers to use organic and untreated seed in their operations. The organic seed market was (and is) very small, and most producers were hard pressed to let go of tried and true varieties of seed that had worked for their production practices and markets. How certifiers dealt with this dilemma varied considerably, however, with the implementation of the NOP's Final Rule, producers then were required to use certified organic seed, seed stock, and transplants. According to regulation §205.204:

(a) The producer must use organically grown seeds, annual seedlings, and planting stock:

Except, That,

(1) Nonorganically produced, untreated seeds and planting stock may be used to produce an organic crop when an equivalent organically produced variety is not commercially available, Except, That, organically produced seed must be used for the production of edible sprouts;

(2) Nonorganically produced seeds and planting stock that have been treated with a substance included on the National List of synthetic substances allowed for use in organic crop production may be used to produce an organic crop when an equivalent organically produced or untreated variety is not commercially available;

(3) Nonorganically produced annual seedlings may be used to produce an organic crop when a temporary variance has been granted in accordance with § 205.290(a)(2);

(4) Nonorganically produced planting stock to be used to produce a perennial crop may be sold, labeled, or represented as organically produced only after the planting stock has been maintained under a system of organic management for a period of no less than 1 year; and

(5) Seeds, annual seedlings, and planting stock treated with prohibited substances may be used to produce an organic crop when the application of the materials is a requirement of Federal or State phytosanitary regulations.

The organic seed rule requires that all organic producers must use organically grown seeds, annual seedlings, and planting stock (i.e. onion sets, potatoes, sweet potato slips, and strawberry plugs), unless an organically produced variety is not commercially available. Producers are required to seek out commercially available “equivalent varieties” normally used in production. The USDA states that “an equivalent variety means a variety exhibiting the same “type” (such as head lettuce types, leaf lettuce types, etc.) and similar agronomic characteristics, such as insect and disease resistance, when compared to the original varietal choice.” The determination of commercial availability is made by the certifying agent in the course of reviewing the Organic Farm Plan. To insure compliance, certified organic producers need to demonstrate that they are seeking organic seed and planting stock according to appropriate form, quality, or quantity as it relates to their seed and planting stock. Price cannot be one of the criteria.

Since there is not currently enough certified organic seed in the marketplace to satisfy the demand by organic farmers, producers must present ample documentation to support their decision to use non-organic seed, including a record of attempts to locate organic at least three organic seed sources. This could entail records of phone calls, letters, or emails to and from seed suppliers documenting your attempts to find an organic source. If a producer attempts to source, but cannot find, organically grown seeds which fit the needs of the production system, are adapted to the micro climate, and/or meet established consumer preferences in the form, quality, and quantity needed, and the certifying agent agrees that an equivalent variety is not commercially available, then non-organic, untreated seed can be used. Organic producers have hit many roadblocks with their efforts to source organic seeds, since the organic seed market is just developing, and it takes many years to develop, test, and market seeds

and seed stock. While many organic producers and certifiers are eager to see organic seed as a fundamental standard in organic production, many believe that it is far in the future. In the meantime, it has created a significant problem for many producers as they try to search out and utilize organic seed.

To begin with, the seed requirements created an overnight demand for organic seed, but only a few seed companies dedicated to producing high quality seed. This has meant that while there is organic seed available, it is often inferior quality, not appropriate for a variety of growing conditions, and incredibly expensive (especially when the cost of failed crops is factored in). The seed rule again presents a myopic focus on allowable inputs at the expense of sound on-farm processes. Many of the farmers I spoke with were in favor of using organic seed but felt that the rule privileged the knowledge of plant breeders over the farmers themselves, since on-farm seed saving was not permitted under the rule, unless the producer went through the extensive paperwork to become a certified organic seed producer. The seed rule, therefore, has the effect of displacing on-farm producer knowledge and encouraging organic farmers to adopt a more scientific management of the farm.

The organic seed rule (and other standards such as the compost rule - §205.203) disciplines farmers in two ways: (1) privileging monoculture over polyculture, and (2) turning producers into consumers. Seeing seed as simply another organic (purchased) input into production, favors producers that focus on monoculture and wholesale markets over producers focused on polyculture and direct-markets. Farms that produce one or two products that are going to be sold through wholesale markets are generally producing varieties that are very common and easy to grow. Therefore, large-scale commercially oriented farms are more likely to either find an organic seed source or have a minimal amount of paperwork to prove that they tried to track down the few varieties they produce. On the other hand, small-scale producers

who generally rely heavily on direct-markets, will find themselves with more paperwork and less commercially available organic seed. This is because most direct-markets focus on producing a large variety of produce to bring to market. The producers that I spoke with generally produced between 50 and 100 different varieties of vegetables and herbs. This results in a huge amount of time and paperwork spent tracking down organic seed. In addition, they are also faced with the burden of tracking down more obscure varieties of vegetables that consumers of farmers' markets and CSAs are more likely to seek out, such as Kohlrabi and Brandywine tomatoes.

Since the organic seed market is in its infancy, it is likely that the limited resources of organic seed developers will be focused on varieties that are sold in large quantities to commercial growers and are commonly sold in wholesale markets, further encouraging the development of organic monoculture over organic polyculture. For a growing seed market to be successful it is going to have to be profitable. Many of the farmers that I spoke with said that the organic seed rule is an example of how the NOP sees organic production more as a set of rules to follow rather than looking at how those rules shape on-farm production, farmer independence, sustainability, heterogeneity, and the development of alternative markets.

The tunnel vision on organic inputs disciplines producers to the logic of scientific, industrial production models. Farmers become linked into a "technology treadmill" as both producers and consumers of organic products. Farmers are no longer allowed to save seed to use for the next season without being certified as an organic seed producer, thereby reducing both farmer knowledge and use of on-farm inputs which are key components of the ecological, organic farm model. As production standards encourage producers to seek off farm inputs – such as seeds, sprays, compost, and fertilizers – integrated technology packages focused on

monoculture production are likely to become the norm as producers seek economies of scale in a competitive marketplace. This is especially true for producers that want to continue in or enter into wholesale organic markets. While the certification process structures producer's practices and encourages more conventionally oriented behavior, the USDA monopoly on the label "organic" means certification has become a necessary part of doing business in wholesale markets. And, as more conventionally minded producers enter into these high-value wholesale markets, competition will become more fierce encouraging a "get big or get out" social order.

Disciplining Consumers

If certification agencies and producers are disciplined through the mechanisms of accreditation and certification under the final rule, consumers become disciplined to the logic of the market through the USDA organic label. For consumers of organic products, the organic label represents the point at which meaning and value are associated with commodities and the practices that brought those commodities to consumers. The label becomes a proxy for the lack of knowledge that value-seeking consumers encounter in the global food system or as DeLind (2000: 200) argues "a surrogate for trust." As consumers accept the organic label as the indicator of a product's, a producer's, or a company's 'organic-value,' this value becomes embedded in the label and not the qualities of the product or the producer. The label, standards, and certification become more significant than the principles that they are designed to uphold, and a producer's access to the market is not based upon actual practices, but their ability and willingness to be certified organic, because this is the point at which value can be presented to the consumer. However, this is only necessary in a food system where there is a wide gulf between consumers and those who produce their food. The organic label does little to alter or challenge the singular, distant, and linear

relationship between producers and consumers or to provide consumers with greater knowledge about the food they eat and where it comes from.

Through the organic label, organic food is reduced to a scientifically singular dimension of percentages and inputs, and consumers are encouraged to think of organic food in these terms. As I discussed in Chapter Two, and presented in depth in Table 2, the USDA label has four categories of organic labels, based on the percentage of organic content: “100% organic,” “Organic,” “Made with Organic ____,” and labeling of specific organic ingredients in the ingredient panel. With this label hierarchy organic food becomes synonymous with inputs, approved substances, and processing. Therefore, if a jar of salsa contains 95% certifiable ingredients it can wear the organic label. This encourages consumers to think of organic products not in terms of non-market values such as seasonality, production processes, grower’s scale and location or outcomes such as soil health and sustainability, but to evaluate the organic value based on percentages and inputs. A food becomes organic by the list of organic ingredients used to make it, not by the process that brought that product to the consumer nor the overall place of that product in the food system. In other words, if a Twinkie is made with organic flour then we can label it an ‘organic Twinkie’. The organic label does not ask consumers to consider the irony of “organic” frozen pizza, “organic” Oreo cookies, or “organic” gummy bears, or as DeLind (2000: 203) says: “When seduced by the charms of convenience and commodification, the addition of an ubiquitous organic label certifying an organic product’s authenticity will absolve the consumer of any further need to think about the agrifood system.”

As consumers are disciplined to accept the label as a proxy for knowledge about the food they are consuming, they are not only encouraged to accept industrial ‘organic’ commodities, but also the practices that bring them these products. According to Allen and Kovach (2000: 226), “[b]ecause the social relationships are

invisible, consumers see value as something that inheres in the material commodities themselves, rather than something that is created by particular social relations.” Therefore, consumers are not encouraged by the organic label to think about what practices brought them organic cherries in January or organic tomatoes in December. The same trends in the conventional agro-food industry that brought consumers a plethora of year-round fresh produce, cheap dairy and meat products, and highly processed food stuffs, will begin to shape the organic marketplace as consumers expect and want the same products with the organic label. The organic label does not ask consumers to change their consumption patterns, but to demand and expect more organically labeled products to fit into these consumption patterns. For this to become possible – and any trip to Safeway, Whole Foods Market, or Trader Joes will reveal that it is well on its way • agro-industrial practices that can produce a fairly uniform, standard, stable, and high quantity supply of products (that by their very nature are anonymous to consumers) are required. The increase in organic produce in conventional retail channels is based, to a great degree, on sourcing products from major agribusiness firms (with little or no history of manufacturing organic food), foreign sources, and domestic industrial-scale farms (Sligh and Christman 2003). Consumers are, therefore, disciplined to see and understand these practices behind the label as “organic.”

The acceptance of industrial food products and practices is also supported through buying more organic products in conventional retail outlets. Today nearly every food category has an organic version, almost every food retailer has an organic section, and almost half of all organic food is purchased in conventional grocery stores like Wal-Mart, Safeway, Costco or Kroger’s (Sligh and Christman 2003). Consumers are no longer required to seek out farmers’ markets, Community Supported Agriculture, food cooperatives, and other venues where non-market values such as

locality, community, knowledge, and sustainability are expressed. In conventional markets the individual consumer is required to conform to the standards and organization of consumption imposed upon them by the food industry, and are therefore, encouraged to associate the organic label with a narrow range of market criteria such as price, quantity, and appearance. In addition, as consumers look to the organic label to tell them whether or not a product truly is organic, they may be more willing and more likely to seek out a 10 ounce package of lettuce mix with the organic label on it at a grocery store, than to trust the unadorned head of lettuce sitting at a certified organic stand in the farmers' market. As labels become more important as communicators of value today – organic, low-fat, low-carb, sugar-free • more food products that were once sold in bulk, like fruits and vegetables, have become packaged providing a vehicle for each individual product to reflect value. Consumers are disciplined to look no further than the label stamped on the packaging.

It is likely that the organic label will do little to alter the consumer-producer relationships that fueled the emergence of the organic movement almost half a century ago. While the goal of one universal, standard label under the NOP was to lessen consumer confusion about the practices that lay behind the label organic (and indeed it most likely has), this label has also further obscured the producer-consumer relationship, increased the anonymity of organic food products, and encouraged consumers to think of market values –cost, availability, convenience – over non-market values. As organic foods have entered the modern agro-food system, they have been constructed to fit into that food system. Just as consumers are required to conform to the modern system of consumption – “consumers of food are required to collect their own goods at supermarkets, stand in checkout lines, while grocery carts to their cars” (Busch 2000) – they will expect “USDA Organic” food to conform to this system also. As organic food moves into the social order of the food system that

consumers are already disciplined to, consumers are taught to think of “organic” as simply another value for the individual to maximize, much like convenience, price, personal taste, low-fat, low-carb, etc. Consumers are not encouraged to transcend or challenge the industrial food system to consume organic food, but to uphold it.

Conclusion: The Master’s Tools

In the current food system value-labeling and ‘value standards’ are becoming more critical to agribusiness organization of the food system and the organic label and organic certification are central to this emerging social order. As agro-food capital organizes around the points at which *value* is communicated in the marketplace, value-standards, such as the USDA national organic standards, play a central role in shaping the emerging corporate-environmental food regime (Friedmann 2005). The ‘green capitalism’ that characterizes this developing food regime seeks to integrate new structures of value into a capitalist framework through a focus on value-added and the differentiation of products in a retail-driven and food-centered food system. This ‘green capitalism’ is not a total reorganization of society or agricultural production, but a ‘greening’ of a capitalist food-system. In this way ‘corporate organics’ is more corporate than organic.

In this chapter I demonstrated that the NOP plays a significant role in pushing the organic marketplace toward conventionalization by constructing and interpreting organic standards in such a way that agribusiness and conventionally-minded producers are better positioned and marketing opportunities are expanded. While the growing conventionalization of the organic marketplace seems inevitable, the question arises whether this conventionalization will marginalize or otherwise negatively affect the small-scale producers that thrive in the ‘new agriculture’ market spaces I outlined in Chapter Five. In addition, the new moral economy of organic standards produces a

certified organic marketplace where corporate and conventionally-minded producers are dependent on organic certification both to legitimize their practices and to access markets in which the organic label communicates value. As Friedmann (2005: 254) reminds us, “[c]orporate supply chains, more than social movement supply chains they appropriated, depend on some kind of certification.” Therefore, a second question arises as to whether producers in ‘new agriculture’ market spaces are similarly dependent on organic certification for market access or whether they are able to communicate value through mechanisms other than certification and labeling.

To address these issues, in Chapter Seven I return to my interviews with small-scale organic producers in New York State to examine how these producers believed the NOP would affect the organic marketplace and their position in it, as well as the role organic certification plays in their access to the organic marketplace.

CHAPTER 7

ORGANIC AGRICULTURE AT A CROSSROADS

“If eating locally captures the national attention the way eating organic has, then the movement is poised to reinvent the model of industrial farming the way organic never could.”

• Brita Bella, E Magazine

Introduction

Historically the organization of the organic food sector is seen to reflect both structural and ideological obstacles to agri-business penetration. However, as I argued in Chapter Six, the structural barriers to large-scale, industrial farming practices are being broken down by a reorganization of organic production through the normative framework of the National Organic Program (NOP). What appears to be emerging is a ‘certified organic’ marketplace in which agro-industrial production will be able to dominate. However, not all organic production, distribution, and consumption will be appropriated, but only those that provide the most lucrative markets and fit most easily into a conventional model. Agribusiness will likely come to organize the most profitable segments of the organic marketplace, but, due to the politicization of agro-food movements and the inability of industrial-organic products to satisfy the demands of all consumers, it will be difficult for capitalist agriculture to penetrate the entire organic marketplace (Tovey 1997; Vos 2000; Coombes and Campbell 1998). Therefore, what is likely to emerge with the developing ‘green capitalism’ of the emerging third food regime is not the direct targeting of small producers by agro-food capital, but a reshaping of the organic marketplace in such a way that large-scale

industrial actors are able to dominate those market spaces requiring the ‘certified organic’ label, while small-scale locally-oriented producers are able to access alternative markets in which the ‘certified organic’ label is not likely to be necessary.

To investigate if these trends in the organic marketplace are emerging, I return to my case study of New York State organic producers. I begin this chapter by examining how small-scale producers believe they will be and are affected by the unfolding changes in the organic sector and what their plans are for certification. The pattern that emerges from my analysis is that the market position of producers – locally-oriented versus linked into commodity chains – determines farmers’ plans for certification and views on how the changes in the organic marketplace will affect small-scale producers. What becomes obvious from my research is that small-scale producers in regions with an agrarian footprint that supports small-scale production emerge are able to grow in ‘new agricultural’ market spaces where organic certification is only one of many characteristics sought by consumers and producers are rewarded for their philosophical commitment to alternative agricultural production.

The ‘new agricultural’ market spaces that support small-scale organic production are shaped by the politicization of food movements and an organic civil society. Therefore, I end this chapter with an examination of the changing food politics shaping ‘new agricultural’ market spaces that bolster the persistence and growth of small-scale organic production with or without the ‘certified organic’ label. Since the Organic Food Production Act of 1990 first put the USDA behind the driver’s wheel of a national organic program there has been an increasing politicization of the ‘certified organic’ label and a vigorous response by farmers, consumers, and activists. The fight to maintain the integrity of the organic label has reinvigorated the organic civil society and it has found new momentum in challenging the conventionalization

of the ‘certified organic’ marketplace and encouraging consumers to look beyond the organic label. With the increasing politicization of the ‘certified organic’ label and the trend towards localism in new food movements, it is likely that organic certification will become even less essential in these ‘new agricultural’ market spaces. By increasing the attention brought to organics and food production in general, these movements are growing new market spaces for producers that can communicate non-market values to consumers and are able to respond to growing niche markets organized by new food movements.

NYS Organic Farmers and the Changing Organic Marketplace

As I argued in the Chapter Five, due to the unique agrarian footprint in the region, most producers in New York State are small-scale and there is a limited presence of industrial-scale, conventionally-minded organic producers in the state. However, that does not mean that one can assume that the organic producers of New York State will not be affected by the national and global restructuring of the organic marketplace. To understand how small-scale organic producers will be affected, I return to my case study of organic producers in NYS to examine these issues. My analysis in this section is based on the major themes that emerged in my interviews with organic producers in 2003 and 2004, as well as, interviews with activists, certifying agents, and my own participation in organic/alternative agriculture workshops, meetings, and conferences. In my discussions with organic producers I asked them to reflect on the future of organic production under the NOP, their plans for organic certification, how important certification was to their operations, and how they think the NOP will affect their future as alternative producers. What emerges is a picture of small-scale producers’ resiliency, flexibility, and optimism in the context of significant changes in the organic movement and industry.

David vs. Goliath: Small Farmers, Big Agriculture, and the NOP

At the time I spoke with organic farmers in New York State the national guidelines had recently gone into affect and the majority of farmers were both curious and anxious to see how the NOP would change the organic sector. I asked farmers to predict both how they felt the implementation of the NOP would affect them directly and how it would affect the larger structure of organic production in the organic marketplace. In general I found that organic farmers expected both positive and negative changes to accompany the implementation of the NOP. Below I summarize four major themes that emerged from my discussion with producers, whereby we can see that producers' market position affects how they thought the NOP would affect them and their operations as well as organic agriculture as a whole.

(1) The NOP Will Facilitate a Restructuring of the Organic Marketplace

There was a general feeling among many organic farmers that the NOP will affect the structure of organic agriculture by encouraging the entry of large-scale, conventionally-minded producers into the marketplace. The organic producers I spoke with saw this change taking place through several interrelated trends. First of all, they believed that the "USDA Organic" label would have the intended affect of increasing consumer confidence in buying organic products by decreasing confusion over labels and therefore expanding the organic market into conventional retail sectors. And secondly, as consumer demand increases, more organic products will emerge in large retail chains like Wal-Mart, Safeway, and Costco, thereby increasing retailers demand for organic products that can be supplied in large quantities, predictable supplies, and controlled quality. And finally, with a text-based, codified, and centralized certification structure, agri-business firms will be more likely to enter the marketplace

to respond to these market demands. In addition, farmers felt that the NOP, through the national universalization of certification and the organic label, is likely to increase the ability of industrial-size organic farms to build economies of scale in the most lucrative organic products – fresh produce and dairy • through vertical and horizontal integration in the ‘certified organic’ marketplace. However, farmers did not think that these changes would affect all small-scale organic producers in the same way.

Many farmers believed that only small-scale producers operating in commodity and wholesale markets would be negatively impacted by the changing structure of the organic marketplace. Farmers selling vegetable crops in wholesale markets, while a minority in NYS, expressed the most concern about the increasing presence of agri-business in the organic marketplace. These producers said they feared that an influx of cheap organic products from firms in California will push them out of wholesale markets as buyers look for cheaper supply chains. If past trends are any indication, then the increasing presence of large-scale producers on the national market is likely to affect NYS organic producers operating in vegetable crop wholesale markets. In their study of California vegetable markets, Buck et al. (1997) and Guthman (2004), showed that the drive toward economies of scale for organic farms in California specializing in vegetable crops (Buck et al. 1997) is already driving down prices for these crops and increasing the competition in wholesale markets. It is important to note that one of the reasons these producers find themselves so vulnerable is that production for wholesale markets is generally focused a high volume supply of a few high-value crops, such as lettuce mix, broccoli, and other typical produce section vegetables. Wholesale commodity markets, therefore, tend to favor economies of scale and exert significant pressure on prices. And, at the same time, their only access to organic markets, and therefore the organic price premium, is

with organic certification, whereby all producers are equal expect for selling price, supply, volume, and quality.

However, not all commodity producers saw conventionalization of the ‘certified organic’ marketplace as a bad omen. Interestingly, dairy and field crop producers saw the conventionalization as a positive sign. These farmers felt that the NOP would facilitate a larger market for organic products creating a win-win situation for both producers and consumers. I think there are several reasons to explain dairy and field crops producers’ positive outlook. To begin with, as I discussed in Chapter Six, universal certification has made the linking of organic dairy producers and organic field crop producers significantly easier. With the NOP, organic dairy producers felt that not only would they have easier access to producers of organic feed, but that more producers of organic feed would enter the marketplace, thereby increasing access and decreasing the price. And with organic dairy consumption growing strong and steady (DuPuis 2002; Sligh and Christman 2003), field crop producers saw increasing markets for their products as they anticipated even more dairy producers converting to organic production. Therefore, the second reason I think the producers were optimistic is that they have been experiencing a significant boom in organic dairy in the last decade and anticipate that the market will only expand. Most of the dairy producers I spoke with were conventional dairymen that have converted to organics in an effort to save their farms financially and stay small-scale. They anticipate that it can only get better as organic products go mainstream.

Farmers who were focused on direct-marketing and diversified production believed that the organic marketplace was likely to move toward a conventional model, but they believed that it would have little negative effect on their markets. These producers saw the conventional ‘certified organic’ marketplace operating in different production-consumption spheres than the ones that they operated in.

Therefore, as these markets grow they did not see them as direct competition for their own direct-marketing venues. Many of these producers articulated the idea that the conventional ‘certified organic’ market and the direct-markets they sold in operated in different normative frameworks in which both producers’ and consumers’ actions are based on different values. For example, direct-market farmers said that their consumers were looking for not only organic food, but fresh, seasonal, local, diverse, cultural, and nutritious food. Therefore direct-markets, like farmers’ markets, CSAs, and farm stands, allowed consumers to access a wide variety of values in one venue. On the other hand, direct-market farmers said that consumers who looked for organic produce in conventional retail outlets were generally focused on values that those venues provided for consumers: price, availability (i.e. seasonless foods like organic cherries in December), predictability, and convenience.

Interestingly, some direct-market producers felt that the conventionalization of the organic marketplace would have the indirect positive effect of bringing more consumers into local, direct-market venues as organic products in conventional retail markets had the potential to encourage consumers to think about the social and environmental relationships behind their food. Much like Kovach and Allen (2000) argue, these farmers felt that the presence of the ‘certified organic’ label in conventional retail markets would have the effect of challenging consumers to think about the social and environmental relations behind the production of the food they are eating. They hoped that the ‘certified organic’ label adorning food on the shelves of conventional retailers like Wal-Mart and Costco, would act as “gateway” foods encouraging consumers to look beyond the supermarket shelves for foods that reflect non-market values and ultimately lead consumers to direct-marketing venues.

(2) The NOP Will Not Affect Individual Producers' Organic Sales

Focusing a little more specifically on how farmers felt that the NOP would impact their own sales, I found that, in general, organic producers in New York State did not think that the implementation of the NOP would significantly affect their annual organic sales. Again, direct-market producers saw themselves as operating in a separate marketplace than conventional producers and did not really anticipate any increase or decrease in sales or the price they can get for their organic products. In addition, organic certification for these producers does not provide the cornerstone of their operations, but is just one among many marketing tools they felt they were able to use in direct-markets. These producers' market success was based on being able to meet a diverse set of consumer values with their products for which the organic label only expressed a few.

However, producers for which the 'certified organic' label is their only or main mechanism to communicate value, such as commodity producers operating in wholesale markets, are more likely to believe that the NOP will have a positive affect on their sales. Dairy farmers were generally the most likely to believe that the NOP would have a positive effect on their sales. In general dairy farmers have seen an ongoing increase in their sales as the consumer demand for dairy has grown enormously in the last few years with the controversy surrounding the use of growth hormones in livestock production.⁴⁷ These producers felt that the NOP would increase consumer confidence in organics and continue to grow consumer demand and expand into conventional markets. Many field crop producers also anticipated a positive effect on sales, perhaps in part due to increased demand for organic livestock feed.

The only producers that expressed a possible decline in their organic sales were farmers focused on wholesale vegetable production. These farmers expressed

⁴⁷ For a thorough discussion of rBGH and consumer responses see Du Puis 2000.

concern that the NOP will increase the competition from large-scale California growers that dominate the market for fresh organic vegetables sold in conventional retail markets (Klonsky 1999; Buck et al. 1997; Guthman 2004). Some even feared that they may be forced to sell their organic produce in conventional markets in upcoming years. Wholesale organic vegetable producers are operating in markets that they believe are near supply saturation and therefore downward pressure on prices may become a reality, while wholesale dairy and field market producers appear to see their markets supporting significant growth for sometime as the supply of organic dairy tries to keep up with the demand.

(3) The NOP Will Change Organic Certification and Production Standards

Although all farmers believed that the NOP was going to significantly transform organic certification in the U.S., they were divided on whether this would bring about positive or negative changes for the organic marketplace, organic producers, and organic production. In general most farmers that anticipated negative changes to accompany the changing certification structure were those producers that had strong philosophical motivations for farming organically and saw certification as central to the organic movement and not just a labeling scheme provide to access to premium prices. Those producers with stronger financial motivations for farming organically tended to view the changes in certification in a positive light as they felt it created a more level playing field.

Farmers were almost evenly divided as to whether the federal government should be involved in setting guidelines for organic certification standards. Many farmers expressed little trust that the USDA would safeguard the organic standards and a feared that the organic standards and regulations would be open to increased political influence through legislation. Farmer distrust of the USDA in general is not a

new phenomenon and organic producers are more inclined to be suspicious of the USDA's actions considering the long history of the agency's denial that organic production was different and legitimate. Farmers believed that the USDA simply saw organics as a marketing tool and that without a belief in the philosophy behind organic production would either actively or passively allow organic standards to become watered down. However, dairy producers were unique in their high level of distrust for the USDA. Although they generally like the idea of universal certification and production standards they were distrustful of the USDA and did not think that the agency could be trusted in its oversight of the national program. I think this can be accounted for by the long history of USDA policy that has supported a consolidation and conventionalization of the dairy industry (Lyson and Geisler 1992; Lyson 2004) and pushed small producers out of the market, or in the case of most organic dairy producers I spoke with, into organic dairy production.

In addition, most farmers did not like the changing structure of organic certification under the NOP because they felt it challenged two core principles of the organic philosophy. One is the delocalization of organic certification. Farmers felt that certification should be regionally and locally based and although certification agencies can still remain embedded in the locales they served, farmers feared the national accreditation process weakens the locally-based relationship between producers and their certification agency. In addition, farmers expressed a fear that farmer knowledge would be lost in the bureaucratic complexity of the USDA. As I mentioned in Chapter Six, prior to the NOP many certification agencies had a close relationship with the producers they certified and ongoing exchange of knowledge between producers in the field and inspectors and staff at the certification agencies. This enabled the agencies to keep up with the evolving organic practices in the field and made the implementation of organic standards pragmatic and responsive to changing organic methods. With

limited funding and research at large agriculture universities into organic production, most of the advances took place in the trial and error of producers' fields and barns. Many organic farmers I spoke with feared that the disruption of knowledge exchange with the changing structure of certification would likely slow down research, development, and dissemination of new methods and strategies in organic production.

However, about a third of farmers felt that positive impacts of the NOP will be the creation of consistency, equality, and honesty in certification and labeling. Farmers felt that the program will significantly reduce the number of farmers that claim to produce according to organic standards to access the premium price by requiring certifiers follow the same standardized guidelines and requiring that producers be certified to use the word "organic" to label their products and their operation. While it is unknown how prevalent the mislabeling of products and misrepresentation of practices was prior to the NOP, the farmers I spoke with felt that it was fairly widespread. In large part they felt that this was not due to any malicious intent on the part of producers to fool consumers, but that a lot of producers who thought they were producing with organic methods were not. Several farmers I spoke with cited examples of farmers they knew who did not spray pesticides on their crops and felt these practices qualified as "organic."

The majority of farmers believe that the new national standards for organic production were rigorous enough to be considered organic, but many expressed concerns that ambiguous wording and loopholes might make it easier for producers who are less dedicated to the principles of organic production to follow the most minimum guidelines to become certified organic. One farmer said that the new national guidelines had become "a 'how to' manual for producing organically with as little effort as possible." Farmers expressed more concern about how the USDA was going to interpret and enforce the standards, than the actual textual definition of the

standards themselves. They believed that producers and certifiers who interpreted the standards as leniently as possible⁴⁸ would likely change the structure of the ‘certified organic’ marketplace and drive down prices for those in commodity and wholesale markets by keeping their costs low.

While farmers felt that the actual management of the standards might allow ‘less than’ organic producers to enter the market, they also expressed concern that several new standards under the NOP might be extremely burdensome for small-scale producers. Dairy producers were worried about several new standards that made it more difficult to transition new cows into their operations. For example, with the exception of the whole herd transition, which must be under organic management for at least one year prior to selling the milk as organic, all animals must be raised organically from the last third of gestation. This means that a cow from a conventional source must be managed organically for the last three months of their pregnancy if their calf is to be considered organic - the cow would not be considered organic, but the calf would. Therefore, farmers are expected to raise their own replacements organically or buy organic replacements. While dairy farmers believed that these were good standards and good organic practices, they felt that the organic market for replacement dairy cows was currently not large enough to make compliance easy. Some farmers said that it was likely to take five to ten years for an organic dairy replacement market to grow, since there were very few farmers nationally that specialized in organic replacement animals.

Small-scale, direct-market producers also felt an increasing burden from several other new standards - the composting rule and the organic seed rule - that they

⁴⁸ For example, as I explained in detail in Chapter Six, some organic dairies interpret “stage of production” to be the period of time that dairy cows are milking, therefore allowing them to ignore pasture requirements for dairy cattle and keeping prices artificially low.

considered to be extremely burdensome for small-scale diversified farmers that focused on reducing off-farm inputs. In Chapter Six I discussed the new seed rule under the NOP that requires all seed to be organic, even with an extremely small organic seed market. Direct-market producers, generally produce a large number and variety of crops for sale at farmers' markets, CSAs, and roadside stands. Variety and unique produce are one of the cornerstones of direct-marketers operations and the seed rule, which requires a significant amount paperwork, is an increasing burden for these producers. Many of these farmers also complained that it went against organic principles because it did not allow them to save seed for use during the next growing season without becoming a certified organic seed producer – something most farmers were not interested in. In addition to the seed rule, the compost rule required small-scale producers to rely on off farm inputs to be in compliance with the organic standards. The rule for on farm composting required the producer must use an in-vessel, static aerated pile, or windrow composting system, which is both expensive and labor intensive for small farms. For now, many producers were encouraged by the certification agencies to purchase certified organic compost or to use their existing composting practices and call their product 'manure' and not 'compost' in their paperwork to get around the compost rule.

In general, although farmers thought that the organic production standards under the NOP remained true to the principles of organic production, they were more nervous about the implementation, interpretation, and enforcement of the standards under the USDA. The ambiguous and vague wording of some of the NOP standards made some farmers fear that large-scale producers who were more concerned with accessing a lucrative market than supporting alternative methods of production, would enter the market with negative effects. They also felt that the inflexibility of standards like those regarding replacement cows and the seed rule showed that the USDA was

out of touch with the current organic marketplace and the real issues facing organic producers like themselves. They felt that the USDA should allow some flexibility in these rules until there was a realistic source for organic inputs into production required by the NOP guidelines.

(4) The NOP Will Affect the Organic Label and Consumer Perception

Several of the farmers I spoke with said that in the beginning the NOP was likely to increase consumer confidence in the organic label by decreasing the confusion about the label ‘certified organic’. They felt that the growth in the consumer market was hindered by the large number of ‘certified organic’ labels on market and that one label – “USDA certified organic” – would encourage more consumers to try organic products. A few farmers also felt that a USDA national program legitimized for consumers and the public an argument the organic movement had been making for over thirty years • that organic agriculture is different than conventional agriculture. However, almost every organic farmer expressed concern over the possibility that the NOP will hurt the organic movement and how organic production is understood by the public, by undermining the integrity of the word “organic,” weakening the organic standards, and losing sight of the philosophy of the organic movement. Overall, farmers worried that while it took over thirty years of grassroots activism and the hard work of small-scale producers like themselves to educate the consuming public about the values and principles that underlie the term organic, it could be quickly dismantled with the NOP.

Around the time I spoke with organic farmers, several major controversies had emerged surrounding the NOP. The one that was brought up the most in my interviews was the rider that was placed on the 2003 Omnibus Appropriations bill allowing livestock producers to use non-organic feed when organic feed was twice the price of

conventional. Although a rapid response by consumers, producers, and activists introduced legislation that annulled the change it worried many of the producers I spoke with. To begin with they felt that the NOP would turn organics into a political arena in which lobbying groups and those with money (such as agri-business firms) will have more power to initiate changes that weaken the organic standards. In addition, even though the widespread media attention to the bill was partly responsible for the consumer response that helped change it, public doubt about the organic certification under the NOP made the farmers I spoke with concerned that consumers would begin to lose faith in the 'certified organic' label and growth in the organic marketplace would stagnate.

However, while almost all farmers expressed concern that the organic label was going to lose at some of its meaning under the management of the USDA, how they felt this would affect their operations depended on their market position. Commodity producers, and those lined with wholesale markets, said that if consumers lost confidence in the 'certified organic' label it would be hard on their operations. They expressed concerns that consumers might not be willing to pay higher prices for organic products if they did not have faith in the label or that they would choose not to buy organic products at all, thereby shrinking the organic marketplace. Most of the producers said that if the organic label lost its meaning in the marketplace then they would either leave or be forced out of organic farming. The majority of dairy producers said that they could not and did not want to go back to conventional production and that direct-marketing was not a realistic option for them. Many commodity vegetable producers said that their scale was too large to consider realistically selling in direct-markets and that they would most likely try to sell in the conventional wholesale markets.

On the other hand, locally-oriented, direct-market producers, such as those that sold at farmers' markets and through CSAs, said that if the organic label lost its meaning that it would not have a significant impact on their market access or farm sales. These farmers have direct contact with their customers and are able to explain their growing practices, discuss the new organic standards and changes in certification, and let their customers know how they fit into the new context of organic certification. In addition, they reiterated that the 'certified organic' label and even the word "organic" represents only one value in a set of values that they offered their customers and that their customers looked for. And some producers in this market position believed that a positive (but perhaps latent) effect of the NOP would be that it will encourage consumers to start a new alternative agriculture grassroots movement focused on scale of production, fostering local production-consumption relationships, and healthier less processed food. These producers, although a small minority, welcomed the increasing politicization of the 'certified organic' label because they thought it would strengthen the markets they operated in and the kind of organic production that they wanted to see progress.

When I spoke with organic farmers in New York State in 2003 and 2004, just a few years after the implementation of the NOP, they predicted that significant changes would accompany the NOP, some positive and some negative. However, what is obvious, is that the producers' market position affects whether they view these changes in a positive or negative light as well as how they believe these changes will affect them. However different their interpretation and experiences are, most producers did not think that a conventionalization of the 'certified organic' marketplace was likely to have a negative effect on their operations. And given that most farmers believed there would be a conventionalization of the certified organic

marketplace, I was curious to see what their plans were for certification in the coming years. In the following section, I look at their certification plans in depth.

To Certify or Not to Certify? That is the Question.

According to Barham (2002) and Raynolds (2000) labeling and certification programs are the interface between social movements and the market. Labels, like “USDA certified organic,” act as a proxy for communicating value to consumers in the marketplace. However, the need for labels is necessitated by the delocalization of production and consumption and the inability for direct communication between buyers and sellers. Although in the last decade organic certification has become synonymous with organic production, consumers are beginning to look beyond the ‘certified organic’ label for ways to relocalize agriculture and facilitate consumer-producer communication. Therefore, while certification has become essential to participation in the certified organic marketplace, it is only one factor that enables participation in the ‘new agricultural’ markets. In this section I will look at how organic farmers in New York State viewed the role of organic certification under the NOP in their operations.

Plans for Certification

In 2001 New York State ranked seventh among states for the most certified organic operations (264) and the number of active certifiers in the state has been rising over the past few years from four in 1997 to nine in 2001 (Dimitri and Greene 2002). The organic farmers I spoke with in 2003 and 2004 were certified with seven different certifiers operating in the state. The most common agency to certify producers was the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York (NOFA-NY), certifying over two-thirds of farmers interviewed. At the time I spoke with organic farmers in the state

the national guidelines had recently gone into affect and I wanted to know the role that certification in general played in their operations. I asked organic farmers to tell me what their plans for certification in the coming years were, what was likely to affect their decisions to become certified organic, what role certification played in the access to markets, and how important certification was to their enterprise.

My conversations with organic producers in NYS in 2003 revealed a long history of both farming organically and certifying organic, but in general organic farmers entered organic production in the last six years. This growth in organic producers is most likely in response to the growing market for organic products both through direct retailing and mass markets. While some farmers had been certified for over twenty years (and one for 27), most of the farmers who were certified organic in 2002 had been certified 6 years or less (63%), with the highest number of farmers being certified for 3 years (18%). Over 90% of the farmers I spoke with were certified in 2002 and planned continuing certification with the same certifier in 2003, generally NOFA-NY. In the case of NOFA-NY, producers said that the reasons they will continue to work with the agency is due to their long-term commitment to the organic agriculture movement, historical role in the development of the organic sector in the Northeast, and focus on local production and marketing. Table 9 summarizes NYS organic farmers' plans for certification in 2003.

When asked their reasons for certifying, organic producers reported a variety of reasons, but the most common among them was that certification gave them access to organic markets. The majority of producers reported that they believed certification was important to their ability to sell in the organic market, assure customers or buyers that the product is organic, or to get a premium price. While market access was an important motivation for certification, producers cited many non-market reasons for certification. For some producers (about 20%) their main reason for continuing

Table 9.
NYS Organic Farmers' Plans for Certification in 2003

	Reason for decision about certification	Farmers certified in 2002 (N=159)		Farmers not certified in 2002 (N=18)	
		Number of Farmers	Percent of Farmers	Number of Farmers	Percent of Farmers
Plan to Certify in 2003		149	93.7 (N=159)	2	11.1 (N=18)
	<i>Market reasons</i>	115	76.2 (N=149)	2	100.0 (N=2)
	<i>Support organic farming</i>	31	20.5 (N=149)	0	0
	<i>Not sure/Don't like NOP</i>	5	3.3 (N=149)	0	0
Not sure about certifying for 2003		3	0.6 (N=159)	0	0
Do not plan to certify for 2003		7	5.0 (N=159)	16	88.9 (N=18)
	<i>Certification too aggravating</i>	4	57.1 (N=7)	6	37.5 (N=16)
	<i>Don't like NOP</i>	3	42.9 (N=7)	6	37.5 (N=16)
	<i>Customers know how I produce</i>	0	0	3	18.8 (N=16)
	<i>Not enough inputs available</i>	0	0	1	6.3 (N=16)

certification was because they agree with goals of certification, wanted to support organic agriculture, and thought that certification would strengthen the organic movement. At the same time, the majority of farmers that were not required under NOP rules to certify in order to label their products “organic” • those selling less than \$5,000 worth of organic products annually (88% of 25 farmers) • planned on continuing with organic certification for 2003.

A third of these farmers (36%) said their reason for continuing with certification is to support the goals of certification and because they are happy with the process, while another third (36%) said their reason to continue with certification was to be able to call their product organic and have access to the market. Therefore, although producers felt organic certification gave them greater legitimization among consumers and access to high value markets, a large number of farmers were willing to pay a significant amount of money (usually a percent of annual sales) and spend a significant amount of time filling out paperwork to support the non-market values of the organic movement.

This mixture of market and non-market motivations for certifying organic reveals how producers in NYS see organic production as both an economic activity and an expression of their values as organic producers and members of the organic movement. Therefore, these farmers generally expressed concerns that the NOP would alter the original goals of certification, especially if used simply as a value-added label to access a lucrative market and higher price premium. In addition, many producers said that they could forgo certification if it no longer reflected their values and practices, became too expensive or cumbersome, or if it lost its saliency with consumers. In fact several producers I spoke with in 2003 did not plan on continuing with certification. Twenty-three (13%) of the farmers I spoke with did not plan on continuing with certification under the NOP. Seven farmers that were certified in 2002

were dropping certification: four because they found certification too aggravating and three because they did not like the NOP. Ten (43%) of all the farmers who chose not to become certified in 2003 said it was because certification cost too much or was too aggravating, nine (39%) of the farmers did not like the NOP or government involvement in deciding standards, three (13%) farmers said they did not need the certification because their customers knew how they produced, and one farmer said that there were not enough organic inputs for him. Most of these farmers (61%) felt that it was unlikely that they would become certified in the future, only one (4%) said it was likely that he would certify in the future, and a good percentage of farmers (35%) wanted to see how things evolved with the new national standards and were not sure whether or not they would become certified in the future.

A few of the farmers I spoke with mentioned that they had dropped out of certification in 2002 in anticipation of the NOP guidelines being enacted. These were farmers who generally had strong ideological and philosophical oppositions to the NOP and did not want to support certification under the NOP. These producers operated Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms and did not need the label to communicate their production practices to consumers. Their direct relationship with consumers and highly localized production allowed them to take an ideological stance against the NOP. However, not all producers were in such a position. Two farmers who were not certified in 2002 planned to become certified in the next year because they wanted to assure their customers that they are producing organically. These farmers felt that with all the publicity that the new national guidelines were receiving, people who wanted to buy organic products would be looking only for a certification label. While these farmers also operated in direct-markets, they felt that they had not established enough trust and relationships with their consumer base to be able to access organically-minded consumers without the certified organic label. However,

these farmers and several others I spoke with agreed that once they were well established in their markets they would not be so reliant on the ‘certified organic’ label.

Certification and Market Position

My interviews with organic farmers in 2003 reveal that, in general, producers believed that organic certification brought them greater social legitimization among consumers and therefore increased the profitability of their operation and access to high value/high profit markets. However, while almost all of the organic producers in New York State that I spoke with in 2003 planned on continuing with organic certification under the NOP, what became obvious was that their market position determined how central organic certification was to their operation. Therefore in my 2004 interviews I asked farmers to go into more detail about the role that organic certification plays in their operation and how central it was to their market access. What I found is that almost all the small-scale organic produces in New York State saw the organic label as a marketing tool that added value to their operations. However, how essential that tool was to their operation differed by the role that organic certification played in the markets they sold in and how intimate their relationship was with their consumers. Therefore, commodity producers selling in wholesale markets viewed certification as more central to their operations, while diversified producers that mostly served direct-markets saw certification as a benefit, but not mandatory part of producing organically.

Highly diversified producers – generally producing between 25 and 100 fruit, vegetable, and herb crops – who were oriented toward local markets viewed organic certification as one of the many marketing tools available to them. Through their direct, frequent, and on-going contact with consumers in local venues such as

farmers' markets, CSAs, and farm stands these producers have various methods and options for communicating their production methods and the characteristics of their products – the 'certified organic' label being one of them. For these producers, their ability to quickly respond to consumer desires in the marketplace was their greatest asset and the organic label represented only one of these responses. In these markets the 'certified organic' label therefore was equally positioned among other values that these producers felt consumers were looking for – local, small-scale, high quality, seasonal, variety, and fresh. Producers that sold in local markets, with direct consumer contact, and were more diversified in their production strategies said that they felt they could forgo certification because as one farmer put it “my customers know me and don't need to see a piece of paper.” Since certification was not essential to their operations, farmers operating in this market position expressed much more flexibility in their plans to certify organic. If certification paperwork or cost became too cumbersome, if the standards behind the label no longer reflected their practices, or if consumers started to lose their confidence in the organic label, these producers believed that dropping certification would not hurt them. Producers affiliated with CSAs reported being the most flexible in their choice to undertake certification, most likely because of the close relationship between producers and consumers in these marketing strategies.

However, for some locally-oriented, diversified producers organic certification plays a more important role in their operations, especially those just entering the organic marketplace. Farmers who had just recently entered into organic production said that they found the 'certified organic' label helpful in gaining access to new markets and new customers. As these producers were working to build a consumer base, the 'certified organic' label operated as a surrogate for trust that often takes several years to build between local producers and consumers. Many of these

producers saw the organic certification as something that they would be able to forgo once they had established their place within the local food-system and gained trust among local consumers. However, since these producers had just entered into the marketplace they expressed the most reservations and anxiety about the how the national standards would affect the organic label and the structure of certification.

While diversified, direct-market producers found some flexibility in the need for organic certification, for the majority of commodity producers the ‘certified organic’ label is more than just a boon to their operation or a way to establish their operation in local markets, it is an essential component of their operation. In this category were dairy producers that sold raw milk to processors, vegetable and fruit producers that sold to local retail stores, wholesalers, or processors, and those producing field crops often used as inputs into livestock production or processing. For these producers access to the organic market and therefore the premium price is almost entirely dependent upon the certified organic label. The greater distance between producer and consumer in commodity wholesale markets makes certification a necessity and, in most cases, a requirement because commodity products tend to be sold in bulk to buyers that require certification as part of the purchasing contract. It is not a surprise then to see that both commodity producers and those marketing to wholesalers and processors feel that certification is an important, if not necessary, aspect in marketing their products, especially under the NOP. For these producers, doing businesses in wholesale markets generally requires certification due to the lack of direct contact with the consumer. For example, almost every organic dairy producer I spoke with said that their farm would not be financially viable without organic certification because they would not longer be able to sell to organic processors. Similar sentiments were echoed by many fruit and vegetable producers that sold to wholesale buyers and retail stores.

The NOP rules create an increased demand for certification in wholesale markets since producers can no longer label products organic that are not certified and because grocery stores and other outlets are required to follow strict rules for separating organically labeled products from other products. This not only creates a greater demand from produce managers in retail stores for ‘certified organic’ products but it negates the ability of non-certified organic products to differentiate themselves from conventional products (something that is easier to do in direct-marketing retail sales). Therefore, producers who sell to both retail stores and in direct-marketing outlets find organic certification necessary for the viability of their enterprise.

Organic certification remains critical for producers that are tightly linked into commodity chains and wholesale markets. For these producers certification is the cornerstone of their farm’s business model since they would likely be denied access to these markets without certification. As the ‘certified organic’ market becomes more conventional in nature and integrated into circuits of agro-capital, these producers are likely to feel market pressure from firms that are able to achieve economies of scale, increase market competition, and drive down prices. In fact, a few organic dairy producers I spoke with in 2004 said that they were already under pressure from the processor they sold their raw milk to • Horizon Organic – to increase the size of their dairy herd.

On the other hand, farmers who sold in direct-markets, were more diversified, and had closer contact with consumers felt that certification was beneficial, but not necessary. These producers did not need the organic label as a surrogate for trust because of their ability to communicate directly with consumers and build lasting relationships in local markets. These producers also saw “organic” as simply one of the values that their consumers were seeking in the markets that they participated in and this meant that organic certification was not the only link they had to their market,

but one among many. These producers felt that they were able to respond more quickly to consumer preferences and if organic certification began to lose its salience they would most likely abandon the label but maintain the same practices.

Alternative Labels

One way that consumers, alternative agriculture organizations, and activists have responded to a disconnect between the ‘certified organic’ label and the non-market values is with the development of alternative-labels. While value-labels facilitate the increasing distance between producer and consumer, they have also come to be seen as one of many ways to inform consumers of the values and philosophy behind the production and processing of products. The number of value-labels in the alternative agriculture sector has grown significantly in the last decade (Barham, 2000) and taken a variety of forms from certification labels like ‘organic’ to place-based and geographic labels (Torres, 2002). Since the USDA organic label was to become the only organic label on the market, several producers, certification agencies, and organic advocates developed alternative labels that they felt would better represent the wide range of values embodied in the organic movement (a testament to the grassroots and entrepreneurial spirit of organic farmers). Some of these labels were developed to be used in addition to organic certification and some as an alternative. The most notable ones in NYS are NOFA-NY’s Farmer’s Pledge⁴⁹ and a peer certifying program called Certified Naturally Grown.⁵⁰ Therefore in addition to examining farmers’ plans for certification under NOP in 2003, I was also curious if

⁴⁹ NOFA-NY’s Farmer’s Pledge is a program in which farmers pledge to follow 18 guidelines for responsible organic production that go beyond the NOP guidelines and address labor issues, community values and marketing. The Farmer’s Pledge costs \$50 a year per operation.

⁵⁰ Certified Naturally Grown is a peer-certifying program that requires farmers to adhere to the same guidelines as the NOP. Farms are inspected on a yearly basis by other farmers in the program. The program recommends a donation of \$20-\$100 a year.

farmers, both those who plan on becoming certified and those who do not, had considered using another label for their products.

While the majority of farmers planned on continuing with organic certification and using the organic label, some farmers reported that they considered labeling their products with their own farm labels and/or words other than “organic,” such as “natural” or “m-organic.” Table 10 shows that over one-third of all farmers I interviewed in 2003 said they have considered an alternative label, among these most (74%) did not plan on certifying in 2003, but a little under a third (31%) did. Half

Table 10.

Farmers’ consideration of another label

	Farmers that plan to certify in 2003 (N=151)		Farmers that do not plan to certify in 2003 (N=23)		Total Farmers (n=177)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Considered another label	47	31	17	74	64	36
<i>In addition to certification</i>	32	68	0	0	32	18
<i>In place of certification</i>	11	23	17	100	28	16
Not sure	3	6	0	0	3	2
Not considered another label	104	68.9	6	26.1	110	62.1

(50%) of those considering another label were considering it in addition to certification, and a little under half (44%) were considering it in place of certification. Eleven of the farmers that were planning on becoming certified in 2003 (7%) were considering another label in place of certification. These farmers were worried about

how the NOP would impact consumer perception of the values embodied in certification and the organic label.

The most commonly considered label – both as an alternative and as an additional label • was NOFA-NY’s Farmer’s Pledge. With the Farmer’s Pledge labeling program producers agree to adhere to eighteen pledges and are presented with a signed affidavit which they display for customers and neighbors to view. This labeling program is not a certification program and instead is based on the integrity and self monitoring of the farmer. Those who sign this pledge agree that consumers may inspect, by appointment, their farm to judge the truthfulness of this statement. NOFA-NY does not investigate or make any guarantee that the individual farmer is complying with the Farmer’s Pledge.

Most of these eighteen pledges go above and beyond the USDA’s organic standards to include things like social justice issues. According to NOFA-NY, “This pledge arises from the expressed need of growers who have a fundamental disagreement with the usurpation and control of the word “organic” by the USDA, and those farmers who want to pledge to an additional philosophical statement about their growing practices.” (NOFA-NY 2004) Among the eighteen pledges are:

- treat livestock humanely by providing pasture for ruminants, access to outdoors and fresh air for all livestock, banning cruel alterations, and using no hormones, GMOs or antibiotics in feed;
- support agricultural markets and infrastructures that enable small farms to thrive;
- pay a living wage to all farm workers and acknowledge their freedom of association and their right to collective bargaining;

- treat family members and farm workers with respect, and ensure their safety on the farm;
- work in cooperation with other farmers and with the neighboring community to create a more sustainable way of life;

Many farmers I interviewed, as well as those I had discussions with at organic and sustainable agriculture conferences, reported considering the Farmer's Pledge label or similar labels because they felt that the USDA organic label did not fully reflect their production practices and value-orientation, or the values of the consumers they served. While, the Farmer's Pledge is negligible in cost (an annual fee of \$50) in comparison with organic certification, their consideration of the label appears to be based less on market access than the desire for organic producers to express a broader set of values and goals behind their production practices than the USDA organic label reflects. Using alternative labels, either in addition to or as an alternative to the organic label, is another way for organic producers to set themselves apart from conventional and corporate organic operations following the minimum set of guidelines⁵¹ to utilize the organic label (Guthman 2004). These alternative labels reflect that the production and marketing practices of many organic farmers are often based on social, moral, and ecological values and not simply profit maximization.

Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, the farmers that considered using alternative labels either to supplement their organic certification or in place of organic certification were producers engaged in direct-marketing. For producers that have direct contact with their consumers, alternative labels provide an easy and generally

⁵¹ For example at an agricultural economics conference in 2003 that I attended, Gene Kahn – the founder of Cascadian Farms and now a vice president of General Mills, which acquired Cascadian Farms in 1999 - gave a speech indicating that by including production guidelines that take into consideration labor standards and other social justice issues would mean the “end of the organic label and the organic industry.”

inexpensive way for them to communicate the values and philosophy behind their production. At the same time because these labels are new and generally regional in nature, like NOFA-NY's Farmer's Pledge, they are able to explain the program to customers. Small-scale organic producers oriented toward direct-marketing are able to use alternative labels to their advantage with the increasing politicization of organics and the 'certified organic' label among consumers (Coombes and Campbell 1998). For producers who sell in direct-markets both organic certification and alternative labels provide the function of communicating values, practices, and philosophy to consumers, as well as providing a way to support the organic movement and alternative agriculture.

However, for producers who are linked into organic commodity chains and have little, if any, contact with the consumers of their products there is little, if any, incentive to consider alternative labels. Because these producers sell in organic commodity markets that require organic certification, many said that they would only consider additional labels if they were required to use them by the wholesalers/processors or if the labels increased the price premium they already enjoyed with the organic label. Although these producers (in general) were not engaged in organic production simply to access lucrative markets, how they viewed the role of organic certification and labeling was different than organic producers oriented toward direct-marketing. Organic commodity producers generally saw the organic label as a necessary component of business in organic markets, while direct-market producers saw the organic label as an outward indication of their values, practices, and principles.

Market Position Matters

What is obvious from my conversations with organic producers in NYS is that their market position is correlated with their decisions about certification, how they think changes in certification under the NOP and changes in the market structure will impact them, and in general what the future holds for organic agriculture in the U.S.. However, what also becomes obvious is that the position of producers in the organic marketplace is likely to play a significant role in how they are affected by the structural changes in the certified organic marketplace. For example, commodity producers who are linked into wholesale markets experiencing conventionalization and dependent on organic certification, such as dairy producers, are more likely to see increasing competition and pressure to grow in scale with restructuring of the certified organic marketplace facilitated by the NOP. On the other hand producers selling in direct-markets and who are diversified in production, see themselves as operating in separate market spaces than the large-scale conventionally-minded producers. While direct-market producers plan to continue with certification, they did not feel locked into certification, expressed flexibility in their future plans and consideration of alternative labels, and were primarily guided by how certification reflected on their own practices.

In general the organic farmers I spoke with in NYS believe that the NOP will facilitate a conventionalization of the certified organic marketplace, but they do not see organic agribusiness firms as their “natural enemy” (Coombes and Campbell 1998:141). While the changing structure of production and marketing in the certified organic marketplace is likely to affect all organic producers across the country in some way, NYS organic producers show little concern that these changes will negatively impact them. Small-scale, commodity producers selling in wholesale markets believe that the expanding certified organic marketplace has enough room for large-scale and

small-scale producers to exist side by side, while direct-market producers see themselves as operating in markets that do not directly compete with markets dependent on the ‘certified organic’ label. I interpret their optimism as further indication that the agrarian footprint of NYS supports ‘new agricultural’ spaces that enable small-scale producers to thrive even as the organic marketplace grows and changes. These ‘new agricultural’ spaces are likely to grow as ‘certified organic’ products begin to lose their distinction from conventional products and consumers begin to look for other values in the marketplace. In the following section I examine some of the ways that consumers, activists, and communities are trying to recapture non-market values and grow new market spaces for producers that respond to these values.

Recapturing Non-market Values: Politicization of New Food Movements & New Market Spaces for Organic Agriculture

According to McMichael (2000:22) the reductionist tendencies of globalization have produced a “counter-movement towards community agriculture and fresh and organic food that corresponds to the excesses of industrialism.” This counter-movement represents an increasing politicization of the issues of food production and consumption that began first with the organic and alternative movements of the 1970’s and today articulates in new agricultural movements defined by localism, food citizenship, civic agriculture, and culinary culture. The contradiction of agro-industrialization itself created the need for a distinction between organic and industrial foods and the increasing conventionalization of the certified organic marketplace will call for a distinction between ‘industrial-organic’ foods and organic foods that satisfy the values of organic consumers. Since the implementation of the NOP, consumers, producers, communities, and activists have begun to organize around issues that will

strengthen the ‘new agricultural’ market spaces that support small-scale producers. As Coombes and Campbell (1998) show in their study of the New Zealand organic marketplace, the inability of organic agri-business to provide food of sufficient quality and value to satisfy all consumers will open new markets and agricultural spaces for producers who can respond to consumers’ demands.

New Organic Civil Society

While the NOP standards create an organic marketplace where corporate actors are privileged, it also amplifies the “industrial” qualities of ‘certified organic’ production and brings these characteristics to the attention of consumers and activists as corporate supply chains appropriate social movement supply chains through certification. As Vos (2000) and DeLind (2000) note in their early investigation of the NOP, the controversies surrounding the first proposed Final Rule increased the public discussion of organic production standards and the vigilance and activism around protecting the values and meaning embodied in the movement. Current conflicts over the NOP standards reveal that the organic movement is responding to the countermobilization of agro-food capital, consumers are beginning to question their faith in the organic label and look for alternatives, and organic producers are looking for new and alternative ways to market their products without depending on the USDA organic label.

With the momentum created through the ten years of grassroots organizing during the process of deciding the Final Rule, several new alternative agriculture organizations emerged and several found renewed vitality. The central goal of these organizations has been to protect the organic standards and organic label and educate consumers. In Table 11 I present the most prominent and vocal organizations reshaping the new organic civil society and highlight their major efforts. These

organizations represent a new direction for mobilization around organic agriculture. Early organizations in the organic movement, such as the Rodale Institute,⁵² were focused on building up the organic marketplace, legitimizing ecological and sustainable production practices, and developing a bank of knowledge for organic production. However, the organizations of the new organic civil society have focused their energy and momentum on protecting the integrity of the organic label, monitoring the interpretations of standards and corporate-organic practices, and educating consumers.

Constructing, codifying, and institutionalizing national organic production standards through the NOP stifles the organic critique as organic products move with ease into sectors of the agro-food marketplace long dominated by agri-business. However, it is unlikely that the organic critique of industrial agriculture will be diminished and in all likelihood it will be strengthened, insuring that the conventionalization of organics will not be linear or complete. The tensions between *meaning* and *profit* are revealed in the modern agro-food system as the organic community struggles over the disconnect between the values and practices behind the ‘certified organic’ label. The ongoing efforts of organic activists and farmers to protect organic standards highlights the transformative power of organics and further politicizes organic agriculture as the inherent organic critique of agro-industrialization is highlighted through attempts to standardize, and therefore industrialize, the values of the organic movement.

With renewed vigor over the national organic standards, the organic movement has the social function of encouraging consumers to think about all the social and

⁵² The Rodale Institute started in the early 1930’s as an experimental organic farm and brainchild of J.I. Rodale who was concerned with finding organic alternatives to industrial production. In 1947 he started Soil and Health Foundation, which was a forerunner to the Rodale Institute.

Table 11.
Growing organic civil society organizations

Organic Consumers Association

Mission

An online and grassroots non-profit public interest organization founded in 1998 to campaign for the issues of food safety, sustainable agriculture, and corporate accountability. Focused exclusively on promoting the views and interests of the nation's estimated 50 million organic and socially responsible consumers.

Projects and Campaigns

Safeguard Organic Standards (SOS): An online campaign to maintain the integrity of the organic label from “corporations, aided and abetted by the USDA and members of Congress” focused on newsletters, fact sheets, petitions, letter writing, and other activities.”

Boycott of Industrial-scale Organic Dairy: Consumer boycott of the “Shameless Seven” Organic Dairies: Horizon, Aurora, and five private-label brands supplied by them.

Breaking the Chain Campaign: Encouraging consumer to break the chains of corporate control in their own lives, by supporting organic, Fair Made, and locally produced products and businesses.

Food Agenda 2010 Petition: A general consumer petition for: 1) Global Moratorium on Genetically Engineered Foods & Crops; 2) Stop Factory Farming and Phase-Out Industrial Agriculture; and 3) Convert U.S. Agriculture to at least 30% Organic by 2010

Cornucopia Institute

Mission

Founded in 2002, the Institute is focused on economic justice for the family-scale farming community. Through research, advocacy, and economic development their goal is to empower farmers both politically and through marketplace initiatives.

Table 11. (Continued)
Projects and Campaigns

The Organic Integrity Project: Corporate watchdog actively resisting regulatory rollbacks, the weakening of organic standards, and industrial practices in organic production. Recently published two research reports on organic marketplace:

1. Dairy Report and Scorecard: Maintain the Integrity of Organic Milk
2. Wal-Mart the Nations Largest Grocer Rolls Out Organic Products: Market expansion or Market Delusion?

The National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture
Mission

The Campaign was founded in 1994 as a national forum in which to develop and promote federal sustainable agriculture policy. It is a working alliance of partner organizations ranging from grassroots organizations to large national groups and consumers, environmentalists, community food security groups, and rural community groups.

Projects and Campaigns

National Campaign Organic Committee: Focused on legislative, legal, a policy work regarding the national organic standards. Committee members attend NOSB meetings.

National Organic Action Plan: Ongoing national dialogue with consumers, producers, and activists in 2007/2008 to examine national priorities for organic agriculture and develop an Action Plan

Other organizations with ongoing research, commentary, campaigns, and news directed at ‘safeguarding’ organic standards and the organic marketplace

- Beyond Pesticides
 - Center for Food Safety
 - Rural Advancement Foundation International
 - Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance
 - Consumers Union
-

environmental relations behind the production of food. The strengthening of a new organic civil society will likely prove to be a formidable challenge to the countermobilization of agro-food capital and the developing ‘green capitalism’ by increasing the politicization of food production and consumption in general. As Kovach and Allen (2000) argue, the increasing politicization of the ‘certified organic’ label will encourage consumers to think about the social and environmental relations behind the production of *all* food. As more organic foods hit the shelves of conventional retailer, like Wal-Mart and Costco, consumers are more likely to question the standards behind organic label if the label supports production that provides an alternative to the industrial food-system. In this way, the organic movement reaches beyond the USDA’s narrow view of organics as simply an organic marketplace. Therefore, as the presence of organically certified operations increases, the organic movement is likely to affect the market relations around food and recreate a market space for producers more in tune with the values and practices of the organic movement, such as small-scale production and direct-marketing.

Fighting Agribusiness at the Ballot Box

As the new organic civil society brings the contradictions of the growing certified organic marketplace to the attention of value-oriented consumers, many consumers have begun to fight agro-industrialization not only with their pocketbooks, but also as citizens. Individuals are beginning to see themselves as more than simply food consumers, but as “food citizens” (Polson Institute for Global Development 2003; Jennifer Wilkins 2005) who relate their food choices to the rights and obligations associated with living in a particular place and demand that their relationship to food goes beyond the marketplace. Food consumers become food

citizens when they not only make a commitment to purchasing locally grown and sustainable foods, but begin to work at the political level to promote policy that brings decisions about the organization of the food system to the local citizenry. According to Jennifer Wilkins (2005:271), “[f]ood citizenship...is the practice of engaging in food-related behaviors that support, rather than threaten, the development of a democratic, socially and economically just, and environmentally sustainable food system.”

A good example of growing food citizenship movements is the growing mobilization around the issues of genetically modified organisms (GMO). Many areas of the U.S., where large-scale agriculture limits the decision making power of citizens in their local food systems, are experiencing a significant political response to the use of GMO agriculture in their communities. Since 2002, towns, cities, and counties across the U.S. have passed resolutions seeking to control the use of GMOs within their jurisdictions. Close to one hundred New England towns have passed resolutions opposing the unregulated use of GMOs; nearly a quarter of these have called for local moratoria on the planting of GMO seeds. In 2004, three California counties, Mendocino, Trinity and Marin, passed ordinances banning the raising of genetically engineered (GE) crops and livestock. And more recently a bill was introduced in California, The Food and Farm Protection Act, to establish California's only state laws related to genetic engineering in agriculture and to protect California farmers, consumers, and the food supply. However, the highly centralized control over the food system will not be easily dismantled. As of April 12th 2007, legislators in twelve states have introduced bills that would override local and county measures relating to the registration, labeling, sale, storage, transportation, distribution, or use of agricultural seeds.

In states, like California, that are dominated by corporate agriculture (both conventional and organic), people are seeking more local means to take control of the

food system and protect public health, the environment, and family farms. They have come to view local political action as a necessary antidote to inaction at the federal and state levels. As people look for a broader engagement with the food system that goes beyond shopping, they will look to local and regional marketing venues, food that reflects and supports locality, and food producers that support the same non-market values that food citizens are fighting for. New food demands are being made that will open and expand market spaces that large-scale, industrially organized producers will not be able to (and generally not want to) participate in.

“Local Has Become the New Organic”

The agro-food movements of the last thirty years organized around the cause of organic agriculture because it embodied many of the principles and values that consumers, farmers, communities, and organizations were pushing for: sustainability, rural culture, ecological management, socially just labor practices, high quality, fresh and nutritious food, and a reduction in the amount of chemicals required in industrial agriculture. Organic agriculture was the foundation on which consumers, producers, and activists challenged the delocalization of the industrial, corporate food system. However, while the relationships in the industrial food system that foster a delocalization of food production and consumption were once antithetical to the tenets of organic agriculture, these same relationships have come to characterize the growing certified organic marketplace. As such, since organics has begun to resemble that which it once opposed, the momentum of agricultural social movements, consumers, and communities have begun to rearticulate their goals in more local terms.

The organic farmers in NYS have already seen these changes in their own marketplaces. For example, one farmer I spoke with in 2003 said: “Organic is no longer the buzz word. Sustainable, local, and fresh are the good marketing tools now.”

As the consuming public becomes more aware of the debates surrounding the ‘certified organic’ label, they are becoming increasingly aware that ‘certified organic’ does not necessarily reflect all (or most) of the values consumers are seeking in the marketplace. Many of the farmers I spoke with said that their customers were looking for more information about food than what is provided by the ‘certified organic’ label. Consumers are increasingly concerned about the scale of farm production and survival of family farms, locality of production, seasonality, sustainability, quality/freshness, and local culinary culture and cuisine.

According to Fred Kirschenmann, a farmer, rural advocate, and one of the founders of the Association of Family Farms (AFF),⁵³ new consumer demands for food can be summed up in three things the food must convey: memory, story and relationship. People want food that carries the land's qualities and nutrients to their tables, they want to know where their food came from and follow it to its source, and they want to enjoy a trusting relationship through real communication with the producer. These consumer demands cannot be met by large-scale, conventionally organized, ‘certified organic’ producers and operations because they continue to facilitate the delocalization of production and consumption. Therefore, according to Kirschenmann (Mammoser 2007:1):

New markets are opening, [and] in many cases, these are markets for organic foods, but they really take organic to another level. These markets demand

⁵³ AFF is a new organization that is developing a label and a certification program to support small-scale family farming by linking producers and consumers through a ‘value chain.’ According to AFF, with value chains “the producers, processors, distributors, and retailers are partners bound by pledges and contracts that reflect shared core values: sustainability, transparency, fair distribution of profit, high quality product, and relationship with the consumer. Value chains render highly differentiated products tied to point of origin, sustainable production practices, prohibition of industrial methodologies that rely on genetic engineering, antibiotics and steroids.” (www.familyfood.net)

food products that independent family farmers can, by their very nature, best provide.

For many, the move toward relocalizing food systems is not just about consumption, but about linking agricultural production and consumption with large goals of community and economic development. Food, as a symbolic and biological life force, has become the focus of social organization around the disharmonies and discontents of globalization. As the processes of globalization seeps down into the daily lives of individuals, they are organizing at the community and local levels to generate change, and one mechanism to generate change is to re-embed local food systems in the community. According to Tom Lyson (2005:98), activists, consumers, producers, and communities are working to rebuild non-market relationships in their local food systems:

Civic engagement with the food system is taking place throughout the country as citizens and organizations grapple with providing food for the hungry, establishing community-based food businesses, developing community and school gardens, organizing food policy councils, and linking “consumers” to “producers” through farmers’ markets, u-pick operations, and the like. While diverse, these efforts have one thing in common: they are local problem solving activities, organized around agriculture and food.

Much like food citizenship, civic engagement with the food system works to relocalize the relationships between food production and consumption to generate not only changes in the food system but larger social and economic changes within communities.

Civic agriculture, as an analytical concept, brings together the new politics of food at the local level, by identifying production-consumption relationships that go beyond the marketplace, to build extra-market connections between individuals, communities, and the food-system to support non-market values. Farmers that are engaged in civic agriculture are oriented toward local markets, focused on direct relationships with consumers, concerned with meeting demand for local varieties and tastes, and are focused on craft-production. According to Lyson (2005:96): “Civic agriculture takes up social, economic, and geographic spaces not filled (or passed over) by conventional agriculture.”

Conclusion: Beyond “Certified Organic”

The rules that constitute the conventional and organic food systems are inherently incompatible (Clunies-Ross and Cox 1994), and the environmental and social problems that the organic movement addresses cannot be easily reduced to market principles and consumer demand. Therefore, the very alternative agriculture movements that the emerging third food regime draws upon, are already beginning to contest the emerging social (re)organization of the organic marketplace. With the NOP, a newly reinvigorated organic civil society has emerged with a focus on fighting for the integrity of the organic label and a rearticulation of movement goals around the concepts of locality, seasonality, community, and quality. Since the first release of the National Organic Program Proposed Rule in 1997, a dedicated constituency of organic activists, producers, and consumers have challenged the normative and pragmatic transformation of organic agriculture. The ongoing politicization of ‘certified organic’ agriculture has begun to manifest in new food movements that attempt to capture what was lost in translation with the transition from an organic movement to an ‘certified organic’ industry via the national organic standards. These efforts amplify the

“industrial” qualities of the certified organic marketplace and bring these characteristics to the attention of consumers, producers, and activists

It is through this politicization of the organic label, and the inability of industrial organics to produce all types and qualities of organic products demanded in the marketplace, that ‘new agriculture’ market spaces are reproduced for small-scale organic producers, and they are organized around a different logic of production. What I have demonstrated in this chapter is that these market spaces are less likely to be dependent upon organic certification than the growing conventional organic marketplace where participation and dominance in that market is dependent on certification and the label “USDA certified organic.” According to the small-scale, locally organized producers in my study, they are able to communicate value through mechanisms other than certification and labeling, and are, therefore, much less dependent on the organic label and certification for their market access.

The marketplace is where consumers express their preferences. and consumer practices construct a normative framework for the type of food system they want to build. Accordingly, consumers and activists have already begun to look beyond the ‘certified organic label’ to build the kind of food system and society they desire. As the certified organic marketplace grows with an orientation toward the market values of mass production, mass consumption, durability, and distance, the ‘certified organic’ label will lose its legitimacy with a growing number of consumers looking for alternatives to the industrial food-system. Therefore, it is likely that the ‘new agriculture’ market spaces will continue to grow with the increasing politicization of producer-consumer relationships in organic agriculture. Consumers are increasingly being encouraged to exercise a new set of values at the marketplace, such as localism, community, democracy, quality, and social justice.

The growing politicization of the ‘certified organic’ label does not necessarily mean that the label will lose its usefulness in the marketplace, but for consumers guided by non-market values it will be only *one* among many qualities they are looking for in the food they eat and the farmers that produce it. Therefore, producers, such as small-scale locally-oriented farmers, who operate outside the organic commodity chains of the global organic marketplace, will be able to respond to the ideological and philosophical motivations of consumers who feel isolated by the developing corporatization of organic agriculture. Small-scale producers are likely to flourish in ‘new agriculture’ market spaces under the growing conventionalization of organic agriculture, because the characteristics (and contradictions) of the organic marketplace reproduce a social and economic space for producers who are able to respond to the demands of consumers. Therefore, what this study has shown is that while the certified organic marketplace is likely to become structured around market values, a separate market space will be reproduced for organic production that responds to non-market values. As this polarization of the organic marketplace matures, two parallel organic marketplaces operating within different normative frameworks are likely to emerge, what I call “Organic-Industrial” and “Organic-Local.” This last point is the focus of the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION: BEYOND THE ORGANIC-INDUSTRIAL DIVIDE

“(A)s organic agriculture becomes more commercialized, more specialized, concentrated and segmented, and as it comes to focus on relatively more on profits and market share, and relatively less on its philosophical roots, it will be increasingly difficult to sustain the level of communication, understanding and trust sufficient to maintain organic agriculture’s social capital: and to create a collective vision for the future. To meet this challenge we must find ways to engage and sustain the process of “deliberate democracy” in which vision and policy emerge from civic conversation. We need to think about ways to increase “league bowling” in the organic community.”

- Garth Youngberg, *Keynote Address Organic Farming Research Foundation*

The National Organic Program and the Persistence of Small-scale Organic Farmers

In the last thirty years, as the agro-food movements began to draw attention to food corporations and challenge the practices and products of a corporately controlled agro-industrialization, ‘green capitalism’ began to emerge (Friedmann 2005). This ‘green capitalism’ represents a set of new capital relations responding to the demands of value-seeking consumers, in which the construction and communication of *value* have become fundamental to the organization of the agro-food system. In the context of these new production-consumption relations, organic certification and value-labels have become central to the mobilization of agro-food capital as it appropriates the demands of social movements that best fit with expanding market opportunities and profit generation. The argument presented here begins with the understanding that the

National Organic Program (NOP) needs to be examined within the context of this ‘green capitalism’ and the trends of the emerging corporate-environmental food regime (Friedmann 2005). The NOP reflects a new set of relationships in the emerging food regime and a new era of organic regulation, thereby altering the social organization of the organic marketplace. Taking this larger context into account, this study arrives at two main conclusions: (1) The National Organic Program, as it is currently managed through the USDA, will facilitate the increasing conventionalization of the organic marketplace; (2) however, this conventionalization will not be linear, and small-scale organic producers will persist, and most likely grow in ‘new agricultural’ spaces encouraged in part by the conventionalization of the certified organic marketplace.

In Chapter Three I argued that, by placing organic agriculture more centrally in the emerging trends of the global food system, organic standards can be analyzed in a normative framework by which it can be seen that standards are not simply an outcome of the organic structure, but a process by which multiple actors interact to define and codify organic practices and ideals. Understanding the moral economy is critical in the current food system where value-labeling and “value standards” (Friedmann 2005) have become more central to agribusiness organization of the food system, as well as the focus of food-centered social movements. By analyzing organic standards in this way we are able to see the NOP as part of an *organic agricultural moral economy* (Busch 2000), in which the normative conceptions that define and redefine ‘good’ farmers, ‘good’ practices, and ‘good’ products are codified and institutionalized, thereby privileging certain actors in the organic marketplace.

Building off of this theoretical framework in Chapter Six I examined the NOP as a vehicle for the countermobilization of agro-food capital through which the process of standardization, codification, and institutionalization provides a platform

for the interests of profit to displace the meaning embodied in organic practices and further discipline actors (producers, organizations, and consumers) to the interests of the market. Looking at the NOP as a *disciplinary institution* (Foucault 1977, 1990), I analyzed the NOP standards with a focus on three areas: discourse, normalization/uniformity, and discipline. By examining the discursive field of organic standards we are able to see how power is linked to the (re)construction of organic standards through the way we think about organics, talk about organics, and how we define what *good* organic food, practices, and producers are. Bringing organics into the scientific discourse of standardization enables the social reordering of the organic food system, whereby normalization and uniformity are created to facilitate expansion of the organic market and deepen commodity relationships within. In addition, through the USDA's management of the national program the process of organic certification disciplines producers, organizations, and consumers to the interests of the market. Under the NOP, the national organic standards are central to the construction of a normative framework for organic production, whereby organic agriculture becomes "legible from above" (Scott 1998) facilitating the development and expansion of a 'certified' organic market and reorganizing how power is distributed in this market.

While several scholars (Buck et al. 1997; Guthman 2004) have predicted this reorganization of the marketplace, they have done so based solely on structural dynamics, seeing the organic standards as simply a reflection of conventional practices in the marketplace, instead of enabling those practices in the marketplace. A purely structural analysis leads to the conclusion that as the corporate-environmental food regime emerges through the appropriation of social movement demands and value-labels, "the standards applied by corporate supply chains...[will] press against the small producers and trade organizations still adhering to those principles" (Friedmann 2005: 254), and result in the marginalization of small-scale producers that embody the

original values and principles of the organic movement. However as I concluded in Chapter Six, by focusing on the reshaping of the normative framework of production we are able to account for the apparent anomaly of organic standards in which regulation both encourages agribusiness appropriation of organic sector, but at the same time enables and supports the transformative potential of organic agriculture, thereby making space for organic producers that adhere to non-market values.

To ground my analysis in the empirical experience of small-scale organic producers, I turned to a case study of New York State organic producers in Chapters Five and Seven with an investigation of how the changes in organic production standards, organic certification, and the organic label will affect small-scale producers. In Chapter Five I argued that small-scale organic producers can and will co-exist with the growth in industrial organics, but that their persistence is not a universal experience and will differ regionally. How organic agriculture develops and the social organization it takes on will be affected by the same process of structural and regional variation that affects conventional agriculture, but also by the existing structure of agriculture on which organics emerges. Therefore the ‘agrarian footprint’ on which organic agriculture grows has a significant impact on the characteristics that define the development of organic agriculture in that region. As Guthman (2004, 2004 [July]) points out, in the case of California, agriculture was capitalist from the beginning, lacking a transition from peasant or family farming that has been present in other regions of the U.S., and therefore Californian organics inherited an agrarian footprint shaped by the capitalist logic. On the other hand, as I demonstrate in Chapter Five, the agrarian footprint in New York State created a space for small-scale, locally-oriented organic producers to thrive based on both economic and non-economic factors.

The unique ‘agrarian footprint’ that developed in New York State today nurtures a market space for ‘new agriculture’ (Lyson and Green 1999; Lyson 1999)

and enables small-scale producers that engage in direct-marketing to thrive. My interviews with organic farmers in New York State revealed that the small-scale organic producers in New York State persist due to a complex pattern of economic and non-economic factors that foster the stability and growth of an organic sector organized around small, locally oriented production. Interviews with organic producers shows that this market space limits the effects of conventionalization on small-scale organic producers who are firmly embedded in the growing ‘new agricultural’ market spaces (Lyson and Green 1999) and in which organic certification is only one of many characteristics sought by consumers. With the increasing politicization of the ‘certified organic’ label and the trend towards localism in new food movements, small-scale organic producers in the New York State said that organic certification is likely to become even less essential in these ‘new agriculture’ market spaces. Small-scale producers in regions with an agrarian footprint that supports small-scale production will be able to thrive in markets where they are rewarded for their philosophical commitment to alternative agricultural production. These ‘new agricultural’ spaces are likely to grow as the organic civil society has been reinvigorated with the drive toward conventionalization in the certified organic marketplace. The increasing attention brought to organics and food production in general by the new organic civil society organizations I presented in Chapter Seven, is helping to grow new market spaces for producers that can communicate non-market values to consumers and are able to respond to growing niche markets organized by new food movements.

Through an examination of the moral economy of organic standards we are better able to see how the tensions between *meaning* and *profit* are played out and reproduced in the national regulation of organic agriculture. What we see is that the process of conventionalization in the organic sector will bring increasing politicization

to the organic sector as the contradictions in the certified organic marketplace become apparent. Therefore, not all organic production, distribution, and consumption will be appropriated, but only those that provide the most lucrative markets and fit most easily into a conventional model. Through organic certification, agribusiness will most likely come to organize large segments of the marketplace for organic goods, but because of the politicization of agro-food movements and the inability of industrial-organic products to satisfy the demands of all consumers, it will be difficult for capitalist agriculture to penetrate the entire organic marketplace (Tovey 1997; Vos 2000; Coombes and Campbell 1998). Therefore, with the developing 'green capitalism' of the emerging third food regime, there is not a direct targeting of small producers by agro-food capital, but a reshaping organic marketplace in such a way that large-scale industrial actors are able to dominate those market spaces requiring the 'certified organic' label, while small-scale locally-oriented producers are able to access alternative markets in which the 'certified organic' label is not likely to be necessary.

Blurring the Organic-Industrial Divide: Two Organic Agricultures

The case study of the NOP and New York State organic producers shows us that in order to gain a more complete picture of the future of the organic sector in the U.S. (and globally) we have to consider both the economic and normative spaces of organic agriculture and how they come together in the organic marketplace. Examining how the moral economy of the *certified organic* marketplace has been structured in such a way as to privilege corporate actors and to allow organic value to be attached to industrial practices, it is tempting to predict a reorganization of the agro-food system in the emerging third food regime that will make the terms 'conventional' and 'alternative' redundant (Friedmann 2005). For example, Friedmann (2005) argues that consolidation of the organic sector in the emerging third food

regime will result in a “standoff” between conventional and alternative food systems and Lang and Heasman (2004) say that the Productionist Paradigm of the second food regime will give way to *either* the Life Sciences Paradigm⁵⁴ or the Ecologically Integrated Paradigm⁵⁵. For these scholars, only one system of production and consumption organized by one normative framework will dominate, thereby placing alternative agricultures, once again, on the margins of the food system.

However, we have to take into account that the discursive dynamic of these two streams of contention –conventional and alternative – are what give life and shape to the emerging food regime. Through the appropriation of the oppositional discourse, ‘green capitalism’ sustains the credibility of the problems generated by agro-industrialization, thereby reinvigorating the need for the distinction between conventional (organic or otherwise) and alternative food. As Polanyi’s (1957) analysis of market societies shows us, the prevailing organization of market societies is built on the dynamics of competing interests and institutions. According to McMichael (2000:29), we can extend this to the globalization of the food-system, which brings both the ‘danger’ of social and environmental disembedding, as the food-system becomes organized around corporate activity, as well as, the ‘opportunity’ for significant change as the antisocial tendencies of this system are revealed. While the global expansion of corporate agricultural production brings with it its own normative framework, thereby reframing moral concerns such as food security in market terms (McMichael 2005), at the same time it reproduces a space for alternative normative frameworks to emerge and thrive. In this sense, “[c]ounter-movements are not simply coincidental alternatives to the corporate regime, but they constitute it because they

⁵⁴ The Life Sciences Paradigm focuses on a science-led integration of the food-system through an industrial scale application of biotechnology in agricultural production.

⁵⁵ The Ecologically Integrated Paradigm also incorporates the biological sciences, but it focuses on ecological diversity, agroecology and symbiotic relationships.

express the material and discursive conditions that that the corporate agents actively seek to appropriate.” (McMichael 2005: 28).

Therefore, I argue that what we see emerging in the organic sector of the U.S. is two organic agricultures based on different systems of production and consumption and organized around different normative frameworks. In Table 11 I call these “Organic-Industrial” and “Organic-Local” and lay out their basic characteristics. “Organic-Industrial” represents the certified organic marketplace that is integrated into circuits of agro-food capital and organized by the same food corporations that dominate the conventional food system. This sector is focused on globally managed production, creating ‘agriculture from nowhere’ (McMichael 2005) that is disembedded from place and organized around market values to supply the powerful retail markets in the Global North. Due to the distance between producers and consumers in this sector and the mass production of industrial organic products, organic certification is central to the participation in the marketplace, whereby it enables actors to attach organic value to their products. The “Organic-Local” sector, on the other hand, is not dependent on organic certification, but upon the development of producer-consumer relationships through which value is communicated. While organic certification continues to play a role in this sector, it is minimal, as production is organized around non-market values, local consumption, and community development.

Although these normative frameworks will compete and challenge each other, at the same time they operate in relation to each other. As the organic sector becomes integrated into corporate food chains and organized around non-market values through the organic standards and regulation of the NOP, the contradictions of mass-produced, mass-marketed organic products become more apparent. The abstraction of universal

Table 12.
Selected elements of organic-industrial and organic-local normative frameworks

Organic-Industrial

Agriculture from Above

- Agriculture from ‘nowhere’
- Concentrated, regionally specific production
- Small number of farmers; low ‘eye-to-crop’ ratio
- Globally managed production, processing, and sourcing
- Marketing by Big Food and major retail chains
- Centralized, market-based decision making
- Mass consumption of standardized foods
- Organic certification determines market participation

Quantitative

- Input based production
- Specialized, expert knowledge that is scientifically based
- Farming as business
- Standardization
- Monoculture

Market Values

- Competition
- Consumerism and market dependence
- Individuality
- Domination over nature
- Profit/price
- Value communicated through labeling

Organic-Local

Agriculture from Below

- Agriculture from ‘here’
- Dispersed, locally based production
- Large number of farmers; high ‘eye-to-crop’ ratio
- Locally managed production, processing, and sourcing
- Direct –marketing in local communities
- Decentralized, place/context specific decision making and action
- Local, seasonal consumption of diverse foods
- Consumer-producer relationships determine market participation

Qualitative

- Production focused on processes and outcomes
- Local, practical knowledge that is culturally based
- Farming as a way of life
- Diversity
- Polyculture

Non-Market Values

- Community
 - Personal and community self-sufficiency
 - Social Relationships
 - Harmony with nature
 - Meaning/principles
 - Value communicated through relationships
-

organic standards and the standardization of organic production through mechanisms like the NOP, leads to a fetishization of organic products (Allen and Kovach 2000), thereby negating one of the central goals of the organic movement – to reveal the social and environmental relationships behind their production. The growing disconnect between organic products and organic meaning results in efforts to defetishize organic products and relocalize the food system, revitalizing organic civil society and opening ‘new agriculture’ spaces for producers. Therefore, while scholars lament the commercialization of the ‘certified organic’ label and discuss ways to save the “O-word” (Lipson 1997), as I demonstrated in Chapter Seven, grassroots organizations, producers, and consumers are busy building new alternatives to the conventional food system and organizing alternative ways to support local production-consumption linkages. In addition to discussing ways to wrestle back the “O-word” from agribusiness and salvage its integrity, the new organic civil society is organizing around new value-points, such as *local*, that better represent their practices and the kind of food system they want to create.

While many of the farmers I spoke with predicted that the “L-word” will become the new “O-word” and generate the same transformative potential that the organic label once possessed, the story of organic agriculture in the emerging third food regime leaves us with an open question. Does “local” have the same potential for appropriation by agribusiness and conventionally-minded firms as has been observed with “organic”? If the term local captures the public’s attention the way that the term organic has in the last decade, it is likely that, as a tool of discourse, “local” will go the same path as “organic. As Friedmann (2005:251) points out, “[i]n the wings, capital is ever ready to appropriate what works.” This study demonstrates that, through the institutionalized structures of regulation and certification, the term organic was abstracted from the principles and philosophy considered antithetical to industrial

production. And while the principles behind the term local, such as seasonality, the close geographical linking of production and consumption, and locally situated varieties, appear to be antithetical to industrial production, the term “local” could experience a similar fate as “organic, if it is transformed into a marketing label and subject to the same regulatory structures as “organic.”

However, while “local” may be appropriated as “organic” has been, the extraction of the term from the principles and values of these relations of production does not mean the disappearance of market spaces that support the principles behind these terms and the production-consumption relationships that they support. The polarization of organic agriculture into two sectors organized structurally and normatively along different poles demonstrates that the relationships and non-market values that are central to alternative agriculture movements remain viable and sustainable in ‘new agriculture’ market spaces. Whether these are labeled “organic,” “local,” or another term, as long as the alternative agriculture movements maintain legitimacy with their social and ecological critique of the industrial food system, the market spaces that provide a true alternative to an industrially organized food system are likely to remain strong. And the social legitimacy of alternative agriculture movements is likely to grow as consumers are finding it hard to ignore the growing ecological crises and food safety issues linked to a global, industrial, and corporately organized food system (Campbell 2007). However, whether these alternative agriculture movements can strive to be more than the political arm of alternative market spaces and help to generate global and systematic change in the modern system remains to be seen.

The Emerging Third Food Regime: Profit *through* Meaning

It is tempting to see the changes in the organic sector as something that exists on the periphery of the modern agro-food system, operating simply as a thorn in the side of agribusiness. However, as I argued in Chapter Three, changes in the organic sector are important because they are central to, and reflect, the emerging trends in an agro-food system that is corporately organized, retail-driven, and food-centered. The growth of the “Organic-Industrial” marketplace through the universalization of organic certification enables the integration of organic production into global circuits of agro-food capital. ‘Certified organic’ food chains are becoming organized in the same manner as conventional food chains with agribusiness firms searching out the cheapest global sources to serve growing organic markets of the Global North (Sligh and Christman 2003; Friedmann 2005).

The example of organics signals a key trend in the dynamics of the emerging third food regime, as conventional food chains are increasingly becoming organized around the communication of value in the marketplace. This is evident not only in the mobilization of agro-food capital around “certified organic” and other value labels, but also in the growth of retail private labels (Dixon 2003, Burch and Lawrence 2005) that allow for the constant revaluation of food products as consumer tastes and demands change. Thus, while in Chapter One I argued that the current changes in the organic marketplace reflect the tensions between *meaning* and *profit* in the modern food system, this dichotomy appears to be breaking down in current agro-food relations, and, as I demonstrated in Chapter Six, profit is increasingly being achieved and organized *through* meaning in the high-value sectors of the agro-food system. Therefore, the food/value relationship is a pivotal point in the agro-food relations of the emerging third food regime.

The food/value relationship is not a new concept for social scientists, as food has always been seen as central to the social and cultural relationships of human life. Food is never 'just food.' Its meaning goes far beyond its role in sustaining us as organisms and the food/value relationship plays a central role in the organization of the agro-food system. Food is part of our social environment, and as such, it has historical dimensions whereby it is bound up with power, social relations, and culture. Sidney Mintz's (1986) study of the role of sugar in the Industrial Revolution, demonstrated that, from the early stages of industrialization, the social value and meaning embedded in food plays a central role in the organization of food production and therefore the organization of society. According to Mintz, the role of sugar in the Industrial Revolution indicated that food commodities become incredibly powerful when the meaning embodied in their consumption becomes intertwined with the mechanisms that generate profit. In other words, individuals will consume in ways that benefit the generation of profit if what they consume takes on certain meanings/values. Therefore, the changing dynamics of the food/value relationship, and how food and value become related for the individual consumer, has taken on critical significance in the emerging third food regime where consumers' relationship to food is almost entirely mediated by actors in the marketplace that organize the distribution and exchange of food.

Historically, the analysis of the food/value relationship has focused on how this relationship forms after food passes through the market, with a focus on tradition, culture, and primary group relationships such as family. However, more recently, scholars such as Jane Dixon (2002, 2003) have begun to focus on how the food/value relationship is built through the marketplace. Dixon's analysis of the Australian chicken meat commodity complex, demonstrates the "use of cultural power by producer groups, transnational corporations, retailers, and governments" in the

restructuring of the modern industrial food system. According to Dixon, actors that play a mediator role in the spheres of distribution and exchange have begun to mobilize around value communication in the marketplace, set cultural standards, and (re)construct the food/value relationships. The actors that mediate the relationship between producer and consumer in the marketplace are becoming powerful cultural forces in the modern era of the “prepackaged diet” (Sobal 1999).

In modern society, the marketplace is where food consumers express their preferences and their practices reflect the good life and great society. Increasingly, for the modern food consumer, meaning and value are communicated and achieved through the marketplace. In this way, consumers are beginning to demand that the food they buy have clearly communicated values associated with it.⁵⁶ Therefore, according to Campbell (2007), the food regime we see emerging can be labeled the “food from somewhere” regime, whereby consumers demand that food comes from “somewhere,” as indicated by labels and other forms of auditing, certification, and traceability. However, whether this emerging food regime is labeled ‘corporate-environmental’ (Friedmann 2005), ‘corporate-food’ (McMichael 2005), or the ‘food from somewhere’ (Campbell 2007), the key trend emerging is that agro-food profit is becoming, not only organized around, but achieved through, meaning and value communicated in the marketplace. The key, therefore, for agribusiness and Big Food companies in the emerging third food regime, has been to find ways to connect the meaning/value desired by consumers in food products with a food system organized around profit. This study’s examination of organic agriculture shows how this has been widely achieved in at least one sector of the food system – the certified organic marketplace.

⁵⁶ This, arguably, is partly a product of agro-food movements, such as organics, that sought to challenge the industrial food system by focusing on the symbolic power of food and encouraging consumers to look for the value of food through labels and third party verification.

Future Directions for Research, Policy, and Activism

This work focused on how small-scale organic producers are affected by the changes taking place in the organic sector and the role of the National Organic Program in these changes. While this study has shed light on the changing social relations of the organic food production, more research needs to be done to address the questions that this study could not, and to explore some new questions that this study has brought about. To conclude I will address some areas for future research, policy, and activism.

To begin with, further research into the social organization of organic production is needed as the organic sector rapidly changes. In Chapter Five I demonstrated, with a case study of organic production in New York State, that the existing agro-infrastructure of a region sets the stage for how organic agriculture will be organized in that region. This study, and the extensive research on California completed by Guthman (2004), have been the only in depth studies of regional organic production in the U.S. More research focusing on specific regions of organic production in the U.S. are needed to get a complete picture of what the organic sector looks like, where variations in the organization of production exist, such as labor, ownership, pluriactivity, practices, and market position, as well as why these variations exist. Such studies would provide a better understanding of the non-linear development of the organic sector. In addition, comparative research is needed to examine the relationship between regional organic agricultures, and between regional and national, and the global organic agricultural sectors. This type of research will not only contribute to the agrarian political economy literature, but inform national, state, and regional agricultural policy, which historically has a significant impact on the social organization of production.

According to the quote at the beginning of this chapter, a civically engaged community is central to the sustainability of the alternative agriculture movement and the production-consumption relations that these movements support. In Chapter Five I demonstrated that in New York State the economic and non-economic characteristics of organic producers and the ‘agrarian footprint’ of that region nurtures ‘new agriculture’ (Lyson and Green 1999; Lyson 1999) market spaces that support small-scale, specialized production and direct-marketing venues. However, as Goldschmidt’s (1978) well known study of community wellbeing and the structure of agriculture production has shown us, we need to fully understand the connections and relationships between the social organization of the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors of communities. Therefore, more research is needed into the ways in which ‘new agricultural’ spaces are linked to the social structure of communities that support them. If we want to find ways to support alternative food production and empower local producers and consumers, a greater understanding is needed of the ways that the social fabric of communities supports alternative relations of production, and vice versa. Such studies will help with the development of initiatives that support and grown ‘new agriculture’ market spaces, as well as find ways to link community development with these market spaces.

In the previous section I made the argument that the relations of production and consumption, as well as distribution and exchange, in the emerging third food regime are likely to be organized around the food-value relationship. While, in the conventional and “certified organic” marketplace the communication of the food-value relationship is dependent upon new forms of regulation and auditing, such as certification, labeling, and traceability, in ‘new agriculture’ market spaces the food-value relationship is communicated through the producer-consumer relationship. These two, very different, avenues for meaningful consumption are likely to

characterize the tensions that give shape to the emerging third food regime. While there is currently an increasing body of research on regulation, certification, and standards related to agro-food production, more research is needed to understand the role that these forms of social auditing play in organizing the producer-consumer relationships and constructing the moral economy of a conventional agro-food sector that is corporately organized and retail-driven. In addition, comparative research on how ‘good food’ is constructed in conventional and ‘new agriculture’ marketplaces would contribute to the growing moral economy literature and place agro-food relations more prominently in contemporary economic sociology literature.

As value-labels, such as ‘certified organic,’ become more central to the organization of the modern food system, more new labels are emerging on the marketplace. In depth studies of the various labels and certification programs emerging on the market and their success or failure will provide insight into the values that modern consumers desire and expect in the production, processing, and distribution of their food. At the same time, we need to ask if consumers are at risk of getting ‘label fatigue,’ thereby increasing their confusion and frustration and reducing the transformative potential of more progressive value-labels. Research on consumer shopping and decision making would shed some light on the longevity of the role of value-labels in the modern agro-food system. In fact, what we may see is that consumers are beginning to ignore labels and instead are turning to, what Dixon (2003) calls, “food-authorities.” For example, Whole Foods Market, in becoming the first food retailer to become certified organic, presents an a “food authority” corporate persona that tells its shoppers that they do not have to shop for labels or worry where their meat and produce has come from, because Whole Foods Market has already made those decisions for them. The largest retailers in the country are pursuing the corporate persona of “food authority,” with new marketing methods, such as weekly

newsletters with recipes and health information, private labels, and offering more in-store prepared foods under the corporate name.

However, the growth in value-labels also indicates that consumers are increasingly looking to the market, and not the state, to address social and ecological problems. A case study of value-labels, and the social and ecological problems they promise to address, would shed light on the increasing privatization of social problem solving in modern, market societies. In addition, many studies have already shown the connections between income, poor diet and access to nutritious food, and growing health problems, such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, and therefore research is also needed on the social inequalities of a food system in which value is privatized and problem solving is organized thru the marketplace. When access to “valuable” food that is healthy for people, the planet and society is not considered the right of all citizens, but dependent upon purchasing power, we need a greater understanding of the role of value-labels in the growing inequalities of the modern food-system.

While this work encourages us to look at regional variations in organic production and shows how universal processes can have different implications and outcomes for different regions, it fails to address the role of the growing global organic marketplace in these processes. As the demand for organic food products grows in the Global North, organic agri-business is increasingly looking abroad to supply the demand. Countries such as Mexico and China now play a significant role in the growing global organic marketplace. Research examining the dynamics and organization of the global organic market place is needed to gain a greater understanding of how these global processes affect national, regional, and local organic agricultures. The growing international organic marketplace also has implications for organic certification and a global regulation of organic agriculture. As the global organic market grows it is likely that organic agri-business will lobby for

universal global organic production standards that will ease the production, processing and exchange of organic products on the global market. This could have serious implications for the organization of organic production globally. As I demonstrated in this study, the national universalization of organic production standards has the effect of standardizing certified organic practices across regions that are diverse socially, economically, and in their climate and topography. In the case of the USDA's National Organic Program this resulted, as I demonstrated in Chapter Six, in production standards that favor conventionally-minded producers. Activists and analysts will need to keep a close watch on organic regulation and certification as the global organic market continues to expand.

In Chapter Seven I argued that an organic civil society in the U.S. is strong and growing. While most organic agriculture movements have been nationally or regionally based, research into the potential for international mobilization is needed. Under the current restructuring of the world food system, both high-value (organic) and low-value production-consumption relations are organized by transnational food companies integrating local and regional agricultures around the world. Therefore, while organic production and consumption is often presented as an issue that is only relevant for the wealthiest consumers in the Global North who can “vote with the forks” (i.e. dollars), the old divisions and relationships between food systems in the Global North and those in the Global South have given way to peripheralization in all regions of the world, as agriculture has become less the anchor of nations and societies (McMichael 2000) than sources of cheap inputs for transnational agribusiness. The expansion of agro-food capital and corporate logic exhibits the universal tendencies of reductionism and unsustainability, yet as I demonstrated in Chapter Five, their effects are not universally experienced. While there is an increasing body of research into how local communities and agricultures are shaped by the expanding global food

system, more research is needed to identify the common linkages among the various local experiences, both with national agricultures and across national boundaries.

What is at stake in the emerging global food regime is the agency that producers and consumers, in local, regional, and national agricultures around the world, have in shaping the agro-food systems in which they participate. Social movements in the Global North and the Global South are organizing around common issues and common understandings, such as the patenting of life, local and regional sovereignty, and land rights, as they increasingly become linked through the global food system. The new food movements in the Global North, which focus on biological, cultural, and social diversity, as well as strengthening local democracy and decision making, have increasing resonance with movements of the Global South, such as Via Campesina,⁵⁷ that have been successfully organized around similar principles for some time. Counter-movements around the world have common ground in their efforts to try to reverse the extreme commodification of food and to reembed agriculture socially and environmentally. The threats posed by corporate, industrial farming as it spreads around the globe creates inter-connections between various regions generating the potential for international organizing, which has been evident in recent gatherings such as the World Social Forum⁵⁸.

Organic agriculture once represented for its supporters the potential revolutionary overthrow of the conventional agro-food economy. However, as the

⁵⁷ Via Campesina is an international movement which coordinates peasant organizations of small and middle-scale producers, agricultural workers, rural women, and indigenous communities from Asia, Africa, America, and Europe. They are a coalition of over 100 organizations, advocating family-farm-based sustainable agriculture. One of their main organizing issues is "food sovereignty," which refers to the right to produce food on one's own territory.

⁵⁸ The World Social Forum is "...an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and inter-linking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a society centered on the human person". (<http://www.wsfindia.org>)

certified organic marketplace comes to resemble the conventional marketplace more and more everyday, research into this transformation will help inform future agro-food countermovements that will continue to challenge the status-quo of the modern food system. By more fully exploring all the facets of the organic agriculture marketplace, we may come to understand the current trajectory of modern agro-food system and the key agro-food relations that will shape the emerging third food regime.

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