## Summary

# SERC 2: Natural Resources, Local Development, Local and Organic Food Systems in Alberta and a Case Study-of Farmer Direct Co-operative Ltd.

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Given continually increasing energy prices and limited fossil fuel reserves (Heinberg 2003), emerging interest in bio-regionalism, and concerns about health and safety of food products from an increasingly industrialized and globalized food system, there is growing interest in the development of local food systems (production, processing, marketing, distribution, and retailing). Within SERC 2 the research goal was to determine if SEE existed within local and organic food systems in Alberta and if additional opportunities existed to support capacity for SEE (Miewald et al. 2003). Moreover, do the practices of a social enterprise offer a special opportunity in this situation for local food systems for long-term food security? Here the research in the other two SERCs can be relevant as we ask how the social economy can be led, organized, networked, and structured to take advantage of such opportunities. In general, can social enterprise contribute to greater local self-sufficiency and effective action on market changes with regard to source and quality of products derived from natural resources?

In Alberta there are examples of traditional agricultural cooperatives and associations[1] as well as new generation cooperatives that have formed to provide more cost effective processing, land and forage management and distribution mechanisms.[2] However, new generation cooperatives are emerging and require more primary research to determine the research interests of SERC 2.

Food security does have a voice in Alberta[3] and a number of examples of community support agriculture initiatives were also identified.[4] Outlets and points of distribution are largely through

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[1] Profile of Canadian Agriculture Co-operatives (1986-2000) *Heather McNeill and Albert Daoust Co-operatives Secretariat, Government of Canada March 2003* http://coop.gc.ca/index_e.php?s1=pub&page=coop_86-00

[2] Government of Canada. Cooperative Secretariate. Co-operatives and the Social Economy *Prepared by The Co-operatives Secretariat Government of Canada March 2004* http://coop.gc.ca/index_e.php?s1=pub&page=soc

[3] Growing Food Security Alberta http://www.foodsecurityalberta.ca/content.asp?RootID=2&CatID=2

[4] See Detailed Information -Environmental Research and Study Centre http://www.ualberta.ca/ERSC/Handbook/section4/purchase.htm

- Organic Consumers http://www.organicconsumers.org/linkpage.cfm?memid=16196
- Blue Mountain BioDynamics http://members.shaw.ca/bluemtnbio-dynamics/csainfo.htm
- Sparrow's Nest Organics http://www.organicconsumers.org/linkpage.cfm?memid=5818

farmers markets, at the farm gate and some specialty organic health food stores. These arrangements appear to be more structured as direct sales or marketing strategies rather than as SEE that represent the SERC 2 definition.[5] For a more detailed explanation of direct marketing strategies considered under the terms cooperative marketing, market stands, agri-tourism, farmer's markets, community supported agriculture, restaurant sales, and e-commerce see the case study work completed on 13 farms across Canada (Herbert 2007).[6] It should be noted that the study did not include any organic farms from Alberta but five farms were represented from British Columbia.

This is not to say that the potential for SEE within the local and organic food systems does not exist within alternative agricultural markets in Alberta. Consumption of organic products in Alberta outstrips production three to one indicating there is significant opportunity for expansion in the organic farming sector in this province.[7] Many other studies indicate similarities towards a growing demand for organic products.[8] Organic farms are viewed as a good fit with emerging consumers food values. In 2006, 6.8% of farms in Canada reported that they were producing uncertified, transitional or certified organic products. In CMAs, the proportion was 8.3%.[9] The Federal Government recently announced a 1.3 million investment in the Canadian organic market. [10] An Alberta study questioned consumers' attitudes in British Columbia and Alberta to natural, organic and free range pork and chicken. Research revealed a "high level of interest" in organic product, with nearly 70% of consumers wanting to purchase natural, organic or free

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- City Farm-Edmonton http://www.city-farm.org/
- Voices of the Soil http://www.voicesofthesoil.org/page3.htmlDine Alberta: Savour Regional Flavour
- Dine Alberta Consumer Information http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/apa10857
- Alberta Regional Cuisine Sourcing Directory http://www.agric.gov.ab.ca/app68/dinealberta http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$Department/deptdocs.nsf/All/apa8941?opendocument

[5] Alberta Farm Direct Marketing http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/apa549

[6] See of the Case Study work completed on 13 farms across Canada. Yuille Herbert. Discussion Paper Series, Number 1 (June 2007). Direct Marketing in Canada http://www.crcresearch.org/files-crcresearch/File/Discussion_Paper-1_Organic_Farming_April-26.pdf

[7] Alberta's organic sector rises to the challenge of meeting demand at Going Organic conference Camrose, Alberta March 4 and 5, 2008. http://www.goingorganic.ca/organics_in_the_news.htm

[8] Alberta Organic Statistics 2005 http://www.cog.ca/documents/certifiedorganicproduction05E-SUMMARYAB_000.pdf

- Government of Saskatchewan Agriculture, Organic Overview 2005 http://www.agriculture.gov.sk.ca/Default.aspx?DN=d4fd4bd5-1811-44b9-a39b-dc8def18c8b2
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- By Anne Macey (August 2006). http://www4.agr.gc.ca/resources/prod/doc/misb/hort/org-bio/pdf/certifiedorganicproduction05_e.pdf
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[9] Statistics Canada. 2006 Census of Agriculture: Farm operations and operators. The Daily. (Wednesday, May 16, 2007). http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/070516/d070516a.htm

[10] Agriculture and Agri Food Canada (December 3, 2007) Government of Canada Invests Nearly $1.3 Million in Canadian Organic Industry. http://www.marketwire.com/mw/release.do?id=798822

range chicken and nearly 60% of consumers wanting natural, organic or free range pork.[11] The highest demand for organically produced food comes from urban areas. Of the 3.3 million people who regularly or occasionally buy organic food, over half come from Vancouver and Calgary[12]. In 2004, the Ag-Entrepreneurship Division undertook a study that qualified the value and determined the potential growth, of Farmers' Markets, Farm Direct Marketing, Ag Tourism and Regional Cuisine markets in Alberta. The value of all four of these alternative markets in 2004 were $964 million annually with Farmers' Markets being valued at $232 million annually. It was suggested that these alternative agriculture markets have the potential to nearly double in value by 2010 to $1.7 billion. In addition to determining consumer expenditures in 2004 and market potential by 2010, the study also provided market profiles, market penetration and consumer awareness information.[13] The June 2007 research *Farm to Fork; Organics in Alberta*[14] also provides the most recent and comprehensive data available comparing Alberta's organic industry with the rest of Canada within three areas – producers and processors, the Canadian organic consumer, and a snapshot of the Canadian retail grocery industry. In 2006, the value of organic food products through Alberta grocery stores was $48 million. Alberta also enjoys the highest growth rate in Canada at 44 percent but has the least number of certified food items (1,491).

It should be noted that the potential for local and organic food systems to develop as viable SEE and to contribute to food security is more about access to sustainable farm labour[15] and successional planning and retention of farming and ranching families.[16] Rather than whether or not consumers and market can be created to increase economic opportunities. Other factors

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[11] Brenda Frick, Ph.D., P.Ag. (November 2006). Organic Livestock Producers Cooperate to Access Growing Markets. Organic Agricultural Centre of Canada. For additional information about the marketing study done by Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, contact Bert Dening at 780-674-8247. http://www.organicagcentre.ca/NewspaperArticles/na_livestock_markets.asp

[12] Cooney,Ann (2003).Who are organic consumers? Presentation at Saskatchewan Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalisation Seminar. http://www.organicagcentre.ca/DOCs/AnnCooney_Feb03.pdf

[13] In Fact Research Consulting Inc. Alternative Agricultural Market Quantification Study Report Ag-Entrepreneurship Division Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (October 2004). http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/apa547/$FILE/m_q_report_final.pdf

- Alberta Agriculture and Food http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$Department/deptdocs.nsf/All/apa6620?opendocument

[14] Cunningham, Rosalie (June 2007). Farm to Fork: Organics in Alberta. Market and Consumer Analysis Unit Economics and Competitiveness Division Alberta Agriculture and Food. http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/sis11562/$FILE/Farm_to_fork.pdf

[15] Henry, Tom (May/June 2007). Who Weeds? Canada SmallFarm Magazine Editorial Archives http://www.smallfarmcanada.ca/editorial.html

[16]Canadian Association of Cooperatives http://www.coopscanada.coop/newsletter/InterSector/Spring2003/index.html

- Intersector Newsletter Spring 2003 (Volume 7, Number 1) Revitalizing Canada's Co-ops

Revitalizing Canada's Co-ops: Where have all the farmers gone? Bridging the Generational Divide.

- Christianson, Russ. (April 2007) Co-operative Development in a Competitive World. http://www.wind-works.org/coopwind/Co-operative%20Development%20in%20Competitive%20World%20Christianson.pdf (n.d./2007) [WWW document]. URL (http://www.wind-works.org/).

include the ongoing and steady decline of farms in Canada[17] and access to and retention of affordable agricultural lands within Alberta growth management pressures. In response to SERC 2 research questions and general inquiries about self-sufficiency, sustainability, reducing impacts on the natural resources like COs emmissions by purchasing local organic products, researchers have calculated the annual environmental costs for a city the size of Edmonton were $135,000 to $183,000 (5,492-7,426 tonnes CO2) for conventional produce, and $156,000 to $175,000 (6,348-7,124 tonnes CO2) for organic produce. Many of the organic products are travelling further than conventional foods. This is because Edmonton stores analyzed in the research typically receive organic products by truck as oppose to more energy efficient train or ship. It appears the efficiency and convenience of trucking grocery store products which increased since the 1970s has also increased environmental costs when it replaced more energy-efficient rail and water transport.[18] Interestingly, mangoes and green peppers, were shipped much further than their conventional counterparts (4,217 and 1,476 kilometres, respectively). The mangoes were shipped from Ecuador and Peru as opposed to Mexico, and the peppers came from Mexico as opposed to Canada or the United States.

## Case Study-Farmer Direct C-operative Ltd.

Farmer Direct Cooperative Ltd. was founded in 2001. The Mission of the Co-operative focuses on developing producer-driven business links within the organic farming sectors of meats and grains that provides the world with ethically grown and traded foods. The co-operative works with 70 organic farmers in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba to produce high quality 100% Certified Organic fairDeal[19] oilseeds and pulses for food manufacturer's distributors, and food service providers worldwide. Buyers can choose from Farmer Direct's three supply options:

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[17] Statistics Canada. 2006 Census of Agriculture: Farm operations and operators. The Daily. (Wednesday, May 16, 2007). http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/070516/d070516a.htm

[18] Science Daily. *Science News* Organic Food Miles Take Toll On Environment. (June. 7, 2007) http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/06/070606113311.htm

[19] **fairDeal** is an initiative created by the coop farmers that ensures consumers are purchasing food products that have been properly grown and fairly traded. The fairDeal approach of Farmer Direct and affiliated coops addresses rising consumer knowledge of food ethics, food safety and increasing food quality expectations. The ABC's of the **fairDeal** are: 1) **Certification -** 100% Certified Organic farms, facilities and products; Creating a Fair Trade program for farmers in developed countries in cooperation with Fair Trade bodies worldwide. 2) **Transparency –** Tracing food to the farm where it was grown; by entering the lot#, found on the front of the packaging , to the website www.farmerdirect.coop/thefairdeal.html**,** Tracing the consumer dollars spent on products: everyone is able to sees what everyone makes, and 3) **Stewardship -** Improving on current organic farming practices to increased soil fertility (which leads to higher quality and more nutritious food) and environmental farmland management such as preserving wetlands. Developing strategies to offset our green house gas emissions. Working with government and industry to develop renewable energies such as wind power and energy crops. Holistic farming approaches which reduces the dependency on non-renewable resources. (Farmer Direct Cooperative Ltd.) http://www.farmerdirect.ca/HtmlPages/FairDeal.html

bulk packaged & processed goods, or private labelling. Approximately 100,000 acres of crops are farmed by family-owned members. The Coop sells 100% Certified Organic grain (oilseeds, pulses, cereals, and specialty products) as well as offers 100% Certified Organic beef and bison: free range, grass fed and free of hormones, stimulants and antibiotics.

The more sophisticated consumer drives the Co-op's efforts to create direct farmer and consumer marketing relationships providing transparency in the food chain between the "pasture to plate" process of where food is grown and raised. Including, where animals lived, what it ate, who raised it and who killed it. Food safety and the rise in consumer demand for organic products has created the latest trend of "locavores" who seek out their food from local sources and are conscious about the environmental and social aspects of their food.[20] On farm efforts towards the development of "eco-acres" aimed at protecting wildlife habitat and promoting the use of biodiesel is an important part of the organic certification standards promoted by the Farm Direct Cooperative. These eco-practices help market the products of the Co-op attracting higher fair prices. By undertaking these kinds of farmer and consumer direct opportunities, and adding domestic fair-trade labels to their products, the Farm Direct Cooperatives seeks to address the on-going income crisis in Canada associated with family-operated farms. Most of the farm labour is provided by the families themselves, however, when farm labour is hired they have access to representation and collective bargaining. Prices for products as determined through an open exchange between the farmer and the buyer through the co-op. Next steps of the Farmer Direct Cooperative include incorporating biodynamics into the on farm practices to increase the self-sustaining opportunities.

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***Abstract*****:** The organic industry in Canada is growing and Alberta organic grain producers have expressed a concern that the marketing system for organic grains in Alberta is poorly organized. This poorly organized system may hinder producers from optimizing market potential. This paper assesses different organizational structures that might assist Alberta organic grain producers in optimizing market potential. The authors identified five marketing strategies for review including two individual strategies - private company and sole proprietorship, and three collective strategies - new generation cooperative, association and private company. Producers, industry and government representatives identified the primary obstacles to marketing organic grain in Alberta as a lack of price and market information, poor communication, lack of government involvement, constraining regulatory bodies, lack of consensus on standards, and lack of local marketing infrastructure. Primary opportunities were identified as growing demand in the industry, the organic premium obtained from this high income niche market and the potential to work collectively. Focus group discussions showed a lack of cooperation in the market, which appears to stem from a lack of trust between participants in the market. The implications are that producers appear to want the benefits of working collectively, but unless they are willing to work together, an individual strategy may be the only option. All producers are currently using the individual strategy and appear to favor it because it involves no delivery commitment or financial investment. However for producers who are wiling to operate in a collective fashion, the discussion results suggest that organic grain producers can best address the critical success factors with a marketing association. Although the association appears to be the choice of each of the focus groups, it is still constrained by a perceived lack of willingness to develop a more formal structure. (abstract written by S. McKinnon).

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