FMs as Social and Economic Drivers of Local Food Systems

BALTA Symposium, Vancouver Nov. 13, 2008

Goal

Examine and compare the current and potential role of farmers' markets in BC and AB as social economy drivers for local food systems.

Why?

- Successful examples of social enterprise activity
- Size and number growing rapidly
- Visible sign of local food
- Role as an incubator, innovation, urban-rural interface, social capital
- Can these roles be enhanced?

Preliminary Case Studies

- Management/Decision making
- Regulatory framework
- Issues of resale
- Training and business development
- Role of infrastructure
- Parallel structure – warehousing, distribution, RSAs

Research Workplan

Sept – Dec 2008

- Literature review: FMs using SE lens
  - Origin and role of FMs in food systems, historically, contemporary, international and national contexts, BC, AB
  - Factors influencing FM: public and private investment, public policy, organizational structure, infrastructure
  - Themes emerging: successes and challenges

Workplan

Dec – June 2009

- Delphi method of inquiry: engage a group of experts in:
  - assessing prospects for, and conditions affecting, FMs as drivers of local food systems
  - proposing criteria for the success of FMs in this role in BC and AB

Workplan

Jan – June 2009

- Case profiles of FMs clustered within a regional setting
  - shortened version of BALTA CS protocol
  - Network analysis
  - Cluster analysis

Themes/Gaps in Literature

"it is **difficult to estimate the impact of farmers' markets** and direct marketing even when geographic area and time frame are strictly limited. It remains **difficult to calculate net returns** to specialty farming. Information on cost of production or wholesale prices for niche crops is often unavailable or suspect. Estimating savings to consumers from farmers' market patronage is best by **the problem of non-equivalency of products and of assigning value to quality factors"**

- Brown, 2002 p 171

GENERAL THEMES IN LITERATURE

- FM as historic sites of economic and social exchange
  - sometimes necessity, sometimes alternative
  - market "culture" historical phenomenon
- re-emergence of FM's within alternative food systems
- community, social networks, and cultural values (e.g. locavores)
- consumer preferences, marketing,
- benefits to consumers (social relations, quality, access to organic)

General Themes

- benefits to producers (direct sales, knowledge, social relations)
- business incubators/product testing/innovation
- classification of markets w/in local economies
- uses of market (marginality vs. functionality)

KEY RESEARCH GAPS

- Investment – almost no research
  - food system infrastructure –
    - physical capital
    - Organizations, enterprises administration (structure and governance)
    - individual skills and knowledge (human capital)
    - social relations and networks (social capital)

Research Gaps

- state support vs. regulatory challenges (BC provincial regs, health, zoning)
- public/private partnerships (formal/informal)
- role of farmers/vendors, mkt managers, and the demanding consumer… (who's running the show)

Market Failures

- Market failure
- 'voice in the dark' studies
  - small market size
  - lack of farmer vendors
  - little administrative revenue
  - low-paid or volunteer managers, high manager turnover
- Key: balance between production and consumption…
  - some markets get too big and suffer as well (too crowded)
  - production base vs. consumer base
  - cooperatives/re-sellers, mixed messages on "authentic" market experience

Differences between AB and BC

- land base/diversification of production
- size of farms (smaller in BC)
- more markets in Alberta
- size of markets
- consumer awareness, economic capacity
- level of government support/control
- role of the associations
- connection with other ced/se organizations

Research Methodologies and Data Sources

- Ag Census and economic surveys: vendors, customers, market managers – FM, Assoc., Prov; Fed Ag Census
  - Economic/ag analysis: vendor income, customer spending, employment, production base, supply chain, multiplier effect
  - Socio-economic impacts: entrepreneurial opportunities, business management skill development, product and knowledge exchange, property values
- Social science research: qualitative, quantitative, mixed
  - Socio-cultural impacts: market as a social commons for relationships/community building, knowledge exchange, community revitalization, urban-rural linkages, multicultural, food quality, food safety, food security
- Environmental research: quantitative
  - Food miles, waste management

Relevant Integrative Studies currently underway

- Farmers' Markets of Canada – national economic survey – Feb 2009
- PFRA Agricultural Profiling of Edmonton Capital Region – mapping out the regional food system

Cluster Hypothesis

- , "…we can see that the farm-based and local impacts of short food supply chain developments may be positive in terms of value-added, what is less clear is the degree to which such rural development initiatives can be *sustained and developed both over time and space*."

  "we need to progress theoretically the concept of *rural development clustering*; that is, the degree to which [local] initiatives…can be built upon through the growth of farmers' capacity to interface with other supply chain agents over time and space."

  (Marsden, Banks and Bristow state 2000: 456).

Cluster Models – Defining & Measuring

- "A geographically proximate group of interconnected companies and associated institutions in a particular field, linked by commonalities and complementarities" (Porter 1998: 199)
- Characterized by collaboration between companies, services, suppliers, customers, manufacturers and governmental and other institutions that can support a given industry
- Can be vertically or horizontally integrated
- Size, contribution to the economy, strategic importance, and the range of goods and services used and shared are also useful factors by which to characterize the cluster

Cluster Models: Gaps in Knowledge

- Although we recognize that they are "geographically bounded", there is no quantitative standard to the size of a cluster
- We also need to know which industries are necessary for a local food cluster to be sustained, and to thrive.

Source: www.growingalberta.com

Cluster Models – Theory & Methodology

- We know that local food provides benefits to consumers, producers, and local economies
- What is less clear is the degree to which local food initiatives can be sustained and developed over time and space
- The concept of clustering is a fruitful avenue to explore this question (Marsden, Banks & Bristow 2000: 456)

Source: www.growingalberta.com

Actor Network Theory EHK

- Research questions regarding clustering have often been addressed using Actor Network Theory
- Helping to "guide us as to what to study and how to study it" (Marsden 2000: 24).
- For instance, "we need to look at how different balances and value constructions are built up around social, political, and natural practices amongst key sectors and actors in the food networks" (Marsden 2000: 26).

Actor Network Theory cont…

- Material-semiotic method:
  - Maps relations between tangible (material) and intangible entities
  - Assumes that relations include both material and semiotic
- Involves identification of a research problem and of relevant actors
- Actors' roles must be qualified

* 'Actants' can be human or non-human

Delphi Inquiry

What is it? How does it work?

- Group of experts jointly define and analyze issues where information is fragmentary or inaccessible, by contributing their knowledge and expertise in successive rounds of information gathering, thereby refining the information gathering process in each round (3 the norm)
- First round covers broad issue(s) and asks open ended questions, to which participants can answer at length. Answers are thematically analyzed and a summary report is prepared, from which the questions for round 2 will be derived.
- Report and final version of the second round of questions are sent to participants – they can modify original response. And so on….

Delphi Inquiry

Why use it?

- Well suited to situations where stakeholder perspectives may differ significantly
- May not yield a unified consensus at the end of the process, but yields awareness of the issue and the breadth of views
- serves to inform and build connections between stakeholders
- Can help to advance development of solutions in a timely manner

Delphi Inquiry

Why use the Delphi Method in this Project?

- Assess the prospects for, and conditions affecting, FMs becoming drivers of local food systems in BC and AB

- Propose criteria for the success of FMs in this role in the 2 provinces.